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## Australian Studies in Journalism

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According to academics in the field of cultural studies, the belief that journalism can report the world truthfully and objectively is not only wrong but naïve. However, they claim that the incorporation of cultural studies into academic teaching allows journalists to be trained to overcome illusions of this kind and to see behind the superficialities of traditional professional practice. This paper is a critique of these claims and a response to those academics who have disputed the author’s previous work on this issue. It examines eight claims about journalism made by cultural studies academics and shows them all to be seriously flawed. They are either logically incoherent, ignorant of the nature of journalism, or seek to impose a political agenda onto the curriculum.

Over the last two years, the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission has investigated the nature of apartheid in that country. One thing that emerged clearly from the Commission’s hearings was the failure of many white South African journalists to report accurately on the events of the apartheid era. Several journalists themselves acknowledged during questioning that their reporting had long been complicit with the political agenda of the white supremacist government and had been neither truthful nor objective. They emphasised that this had not been forced upon them by any apartheid legislation. Instead, they
had shared the ideology of the regime and had needed no prompting by the law, by the state, or even by their employers, to take the line they did.

When my paper “The poverty of media theory”, a critique of cultural studies and its influence on media education, was published in *Ecquid Novi*, the academic journal for journalism in South Africa, (Windschuttle 1997) it attracted much the same response there as it did when published in Australia. (Windschuttle 1998a, 1998b, 1998c, 1998d). Four South African academics from the field of cultural studies wrote replies to the journal, all displaying varying degrees of outrage (Tomaselli & Shepperson 1998; Strelitz & Steenveld 1998). Each used the confessions of the journalists before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as evidence that, in itself, journalism is an inadequate practice that conceals more than it reveals. Here is clear evidence, they said, that journalism does little more than recover “the superficial, the literal” and the preferred meanings manufactured via the “mundaneness” of professional practice. Moreover, the faults of these journalists were not simply mistakes but necessary consequences of the same professional practice which, they claimed, concealed the “deeper meanings” and the “symbolic associations” that lurked beneath the surface of society at the time. Hence, all four argued that my view that it is possible for journalism to report the world accurately must not only be wrong but naïve in the extreme. However, they claimed that, thanks to the “new insights” provided by cultural studies, journalists of the future can be trained to overcome the old deficiencies and ensure that the failures of the apartheid era do not recur.

Now, this was all a great revelation to me. I had been under the impression that the information I had received from the news media about the South African regime from the 1960s to the 1980s had been reasonably accurate. Indeed, so convinced had I become of the veracity of these reports and the injustices they portrayed that I spent some considerable time in my youth doing what was
possible in Australia to oppose apartheid, especially helping to disrupt the visits of the Springbok rugby team and other sporting bodies. Moreover, there must have been millions of people in the world who gained the same picture as me, else how could the political pressure that caused the international boycott of the South African economy have ever emerged, let alone been as successful as it eventually proved? Obviously, we could not have got our information from the “new insights” of cultural studies, since for most of the above period only a small number of academics had ever heard of the subject.

The truth is we were told what was happening by the news media. We saw television reports of the massacre at Sharpeville, and of dogs, truncheons and guns being used by white police against black demonstrators. Newspapers told us how the legal system in the country operated and showed us photographs of swimming beaches labelled “whites only”. We saw television interviews with liberal dissidents who denounced the regime, and we found them more credible than the interviews with its defenders. It is true that we saw very few members of the African National Congress interviewed, and to this extent the coverage was biased, but nonetheless the essential story still came through loud and clear.

All of this, I should emphasise, is quite consistent with journalists’ confessions of guilt to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The claim that journalism is a pursuit of truth and an attempt to report what really happens is not refuted by the fact that many journalists often fail to achieve these goals. It is obvious that there are good and bad journalists just as there are good and bad scientists, doctors and builders. One of the most common fallacies made by contemporary media criticism is to draw from the premise that some reporting is misleading and inadequate, the conclusion that all reporting is misleading and inadequate, or even more fallaciously, that news reporting is inherently misleading and inadequate.
I was more than a little surprised at the invitation to speak at the “Media Wars” conference. After Graeme Turner, Professor of Cultural Studies at the University of Queensland, had declared my original paper on this subject a “paranoid fantasy” (Turner 1998), I imagined that he might be arranging for a squad of psychiatric warders to meet me at the border. In that paper, I said there were three fundamental differences between journalism and cultural studies, which rendered them educationally incompatible: 1. journalism has an empirical methodology and has a realist view of the world, whereas cultural studies is a form of linguistic idealism whose principal methodology is textual analysis; 2. journalists respect their audiences, whereas cultural studies is contemptuous of media audiences; and 3. journalism is committed to clear writing and concrete prose style, whereas cultural studies is notable for its arcane abstractions and wilful obscurantism. Thanks to this conference, I have been forced to think a little more about the issue and, in the process, I have expanded the original three objections to a total of eight. If you will bear with me, I will discuss them one at a time.

1. Cultural studies claims that the pursuit of truth and objectivity is impossible

One of the replies to my paper was by Julia Ravell, a lecturer in journalism at Curtin University of Technology in Perth. She said:

Journalists (and journalism educators) who still believe that their writing represents an objective “reality” are deluding themselves . . . Claims to objectivity on behalf of specific ways of seeing the world are always going to be bogus; there are no absolutely true ways of representing reality, only more or less powerful ones.

All is not lost, however, because she explains that the powerful analytical tools of cultural studies can help us see through the fog:

If future media practitioners learn the conventions of narrative and begin to ask questions about the construction of meaning in news and fic-
tion (and news as fiction) they'll never be sucked into the illusion that they are seeing "the facts as they happened" represented in the evening news. (Ravell 1998, p.2)

If you think Ms Ravell might be a lone voice from Western Australia, let me cite an east coast version of the same argument. When Professor Ann Curthoys wrote the following statement, she was head of the University of Technology, Sydney’s B.A. Communications program, which is the degree under which journalism is taught there. She claims there is an “epistemological gap between many academics and many journalists”:

Most academics in the humanities and social sciences, and as far as I know in the physical and natural sciences as well, now reject positivist concepts of knowledge, the notion that one can objectively know the facts. The processes of knowing, and the production of an object that is known, are seen as intertwined. Many take this even further, and argue that knowledge is entirely an effect of power, that we can no longer have any concept of truth at all. Most journalists, meanwhile, continue to talk as if none of this twentieth century philosophic critique has happened. Their mission is justified in terms of uncovering the truths that governments wish to conceal, presenting themselves as truly objective, as against the claims of others . . . It’s probably good politics to see everything in black and white, and good journalism to have a strong story and to dramatise conflict, but it’s not necessarily good scholarship. (Curthoys 1991, p.391)

I don’t know which is the more objectionable aspect of this passage: the smug put-down of journalists as mere black and white dramatists who are embarrassingly ignorant of so-called advances in “scholarship”; or the pretentious claim to speak for the whole of twentieth century philosophy, a claim which completely ignores the mainstream of Anglo-American analytic philosophy this century, which has long regarded the view about truth expressed by Professor Curthoys as a simple fallacy, indeed, an obvious self-contradiction. If there are no truths, then the statement “There are no truths” cannot itself be true. Moreover, the claim that journalists cannot report the truth is patently absurd. In political reporting, for instance, there is plainly a great deal of opinionated
comment and rhetoric that often supports various ideological ends, but there is also a great deal of reporting of facts, that is, of objective truths which no one in his or her right mind would question, such as the fact that the Coalition won the 1998 federal election. Most people know this result only because they saw it on television or read it in the press, thanks to reports by journalists. Does anyone doubt this is an objective truth? Or maybe there are some true believers among cultural studies exponents who think Kim Beazley won, or perhaps there are some who think Gough Whitlam is still sitting in his office in old Parliament House running the country. If you deny the existence of all facts and truths then you become a genuine paranoid fantasist because you can’t be certain of such well-known facts as Hitler lost the Second World War or Elvis is really dead. Even though news making is a highly selective, socially constructed and often politically biased process, the events it describes occur in a real world that is itself independent of the news making process. Journalists certainly construct news bulletins but they don’t usually construct the events they write or broadcast about. These events, like who wins and loses elections, or wars, or the Melbourne Cup, are facts and truths about the world. Every day, there are countless examples of news reports that demonstrate that journalists can and do get them right.

If we are to have a sensible debate about bias and the lack of objectivity in news reporting, we first have to admit that these are deviations from the norm. Once this is acknowledged, then it may be possible to discuss how much deviation is acceptable before it becomes unprofessional or corrupt. But to be a participant in such a debate, you first have to drop the absurd notion that journalism can never tell the truth and can never be objective.
2. Cultural studies theorists are demonstrably ignorant about journalism

Very few theorists of cultural studies have ever been employed in the media. Most of them have direct experience of the industry only through its external appearances, what they see on the screen, what they read in print, and so on. This, however, has not stopped them from becoming heads of the departments or faculties within which many journalism programs in Australia are taught. In any other professional education, this would be an anomaly. It would be extraordinary to have, say, a medical sociologist who has no formal medical qualification and who has never practised medicine, appointed head of a medical school. In media education, however, it is different. For instance, the host of the “Media Wars” conference, Queensland University of Technology, has appointed Professor Stuart Cunningham, who has never had a career in the media, as head of its school of media and journalism.

One of the reasons other professional schools avoid this practice is because they have found that there is no substitute for on-the-job experience. On the job, you not only pick up things very quickly but you absorb the most elementary assumptions of the business, assumptions that are often so basic that they rarely make it into the literature about the profession because everyone in it takes them for granted. On the other hand, if what you know about an industry is largely confined to your reading about it, especially if your reading is mostly theory and academic research, there’s a good chance you’ll never get to know these basic assumptions and, as a result, you’ll make some elementary blunders.

Let me illustrate this thesis in the recent writings of John Hartley, former Professor of Media Studies at Edith Cowan University, Perth, and currently head of journalism and cultural studies at the University of Wales at Cardiff. His paper “Journalism and modernity”, which is extracted from his book Popular Reality: Jour-
nalism, Modernity, Popular Culture, offers several examples of such blunders to choose from, but I will confine myself to just two.

The first occurs when Hartley says journalism renders the world into a “corporate narrative” (Hartley 1995, p.27). The term “corporate” as used here can either mean “produced by a corporation or an organisation”, in which case it is only stating the obvious, or else it could mean “reflecting the views of the corporation, or of the corporate world”, in which case it is simply an inaccurate and gratuitous sneer. However, what I want to focus on is his use of the term “narrative”. This is a description also used by Julia Ravell who assures us that “news is similar to other forms of realist narrative” and that news is a “conservative form of narrative” (Ravell 1998, p.1, p.2). Now, a narrative is a story you tell from beginning to end. Its structure is chronological, and can be rendered in a diagram something like this:

Not all narratives, of course, are as linear as this. Some have several parallel stories, some of which eventually converge. But what they all have in common is an underlying chronological structure.

However, as any first year cadet journalist could tell you, and as all the elementary textbooks of news reporting have insisted for at least 50 years, the structure of a news story is anything but a narrative. The structure is normally expressed in a diagram by an inverted triangle.

<table>
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<th>1st Event</th>
<th>2nd Event</th>
<th>3rd Event</th>
<th>4th Event</th>
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1. Most important or interesting event
2. Supporting/explanatory info
3. Rest of story in descending order of interest
A news story begins not with the event that happened first but with the most important or interesting event, no matter when it occurred in the overall sequence of events. In many cases, the lead sentence is not confined to one event but is a summary of all that the story is about. It is followed by two or three sentences filling out or explaining the detail of the lead, and then the rest of the story follows, not in any narrative sequence but in descending order of importance or interest. Sometimes there might be a brief chronological sequence reported down in the tail of the story but, just as often, not even this minimalist kind of narrative gets used. It is true that some feature stories in print journalism begin with a little anecdote that might have a narrative structure, but it is rare for the rest of the story to follow suit. In other words, to say that journalism has a narrative structure is to display one’s ignorance of what journalists actually do.

Where, then, does Hartley’s idea come from? He doesn’t cite any reference about the use of the term, so we will have to guess. The most likely source is the claim by French literary theorists that the writing of the modernist period, that is, the novels and other forms of prose written since the eighteenth century, constitute a form of realist narrative (Gennette 1980; Rimmon-Kenan 1983; Prince 1988). While this theory might have some relevance to the novels of Charles Dickens, Joseph Conrad and their peers, who certainly wrote narratives, it is a mistake to generalise it to all modern writing. This is the mistake that Hartley has made. He has deferred to French theorists rather than investigate the subject matter for himself.

A similar kind of problem in the same article occurs when Hartley describes the profession of journalism in the following terms: “It aspires to the professional status of architects while actually turning out real estate agents — petty-bourgeois, self-employed, white collar workers with no commitment to professionalisation.” Again, the notion that journalists are mostly self-employed indi-
icates someone with very little grasp of the profession he so confidently disparages. The great majority of journalists in Australia are not self-employed but are employees of corporations. Some 66 per cent are employed by publishers, 17 per cent by television stations, and 12 per cent by radio stations (Henningham 1998; Australian Journalists’ Association 1991). It is true that the 1990s saw the emergence of a sizeable group of freelancers, who are paid on a piecework basis, according to the number of words that they get published, but they remain a small minority of those who earn their living from the business.

So where could Hartley’s idea that journalists are a group of self-employees come from? Again, despite his imperious assertion in the same article that “academics must always cite their sources; journalists never do”, (Hartley 1995, p.26) this particular piece of misinformation is not given any source at all, so we’ll have to guess again. The giveaway lies in the first adjective in the description “petty-bourgeois, self-employed white collar workers”. The first person to describe journalists as petty-bourgeois was the Marxist theorist, Nicos Poulantzas, one of the acolytes of the French Communist Party guru, Louis Althusser. In his book *Political Power and Social Classes* (1973), Poulantzas regurgitated Althusser’s claim that the press, radio and television are ideological apparatuses of the capitalist state and that those who work for the media are therefore members of the class that supports this state. This meant that journalists couldn’t be classified as workers or proletarians, so Poulantzas declared them to be petty-bourgeois, a term previously reserved for shopkeepers and self-employed tradesmen. Of course, this was all theoretical nonsense when Poulantzas wrote it in the 1970s and, in the hands of Hartley in the 1990s, it hasn’t improved with age. What it again demonstrates is his deference to the dictates of French theory instead of an examination of the empirical research.
3. Most cultural studies academics are graduates in English literature and don’t understand research

Hartley’s penchant for theory over investigation is an occupational characteristic shared by most academics in cultural studies. Part of the reason for this is that most of them have trained in English literary criticism and have a very low level of research skills.

While journalism is admittedly a very broad church that includes essays, thought pieces, columns and commentaries that can be produced without straying very far from a computer screen, the great volume of journalism, especially daily reporting for print and broadcasting, involves research. Journalists go places, witness events, listen to speeches, conduct interviews and discover documents. English literary criticism rarely gets involved with any of these things, as some critics themselves have at times been candid enough to admit. For instance, the Sydney critic John Docker has recorded how, after newly qualifying with a BA Honours and an MA in English Literature, he realised how ill-equipped he was to pursue his interests in cultural history because he lacked the one thing his English professors had neglected to teach, “that is, methods of research”. He had to rely on his girlfriend.

As an historian, she was puzzled and pained by my lack of even the most rudimentary skills at research, and had almost to take me by the hand and show me around Mitchell Library (Docker 1984, p.13).

After paring away all the literary theory that is so fashionable today and trying to see what skills a degree in English literature actually provides, you find they come down to (a) philology and hermeneutics, that is, the close scrutiny and analysis of texts, and (b) literary aesthetics, the assessment of the artistic value of the work at hand. This is all a long way not only from journalism but also from almost every other occupation in the information industries, which also have a substantial research component. In terms of vocational usefulness for media employment, English literary skills
may come in handy for book reviews, film and drama reviews and some commentaries in the arts pages. But this material constitutes only a very small proportion of the mainstream content of contemporary newspapers, magazines, television and radio news, current affairs and infotainment programs, not to mention documentary film-making, public relations, advertising and all the other information providing and manipulating businesses in the contemporary economy, almost all of which require research as well as writing and production skills.

This is another reason why the current dominance of media education by people whose backgrounds are in literary criticism and cultural studies should be a matter of concern. Until I read his reply to my original article, I did not know that Graeme Turner has been the author of that section of the Australian Research Council and Academy of the Humanities Discipline Review which dealt with Media and Communication Studies. We really should be asking questions about how people, whose own academic background is of such marginal relevance, come to occupy positions of this kind. Because media and communication studies have a strong vocational component, because Turner’s own academic background is applicable to such a very small area of employment in the media and communication industries, because he has never himself had a career in any of these industries, and because his own field has such a poor track record in training people for one of the mainstream industry requirements, that of research, the fact that he had this job might be his gain but, to most educators in the field, it is their loss.

4. Cultural studies fosters bad writing and unintelligible expression

Anyone who wants to make their career in the media and information industries has to be a good communicator. Given that the secondary education system now does such a poor job of teaching
English expression and correct usage, it is incumbent on the tertiary system to engage in remedial work if it is to do a proper job of making its graduates employable. But what do we find characterises cultural studies? The very opposite. My original paper gave an example of the turgid, unintelligible and ungrammatical prose of Stuart Hall, one of the gurus of the English cultural studies movement. This time let me offer a contender from Australia:

If cultural studies is to avoid becoming just another type of fetishised scholarship about fetishised differences among things, then it has to trace the connections between the experiences it finds in everyday life, in popular culture, in the rhythm of events as they appear in experience, back to fresh imagining of process, becoming, totality. The discovery, forced into critical consciousness by Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard, and Gilles Deleuze, that totality is invariably bad totality, that historicism is invariably false historicism, does not give us licence to abandon imagining the whole and speculating on its future tendencies. It enjoins us rather to attempt to create a fresh art of writing speculatively about what lies beyond the routine boundaries forced upon us by the academic division of labour, by the self-evident correctness of uncritical moralisms, by the banality of the relentless accumulation in our archives of the reified facticity of difference.

This is from the preface of a book by an author who lectures in media studies at an Australian university and is from the section trying to explain to the uninitiated reader what cultural studies is all about. I realise I’m not a reliable guide to the impact it is likely to have on your average undergraduate but, for me, this combination of neologisms, name dropping, and meaningless abstractions piled upon one another to form equally meaningless sentences, helps glide the mind towards oblivion, and before long induces a cataleptic stupor. It is from *Virtual Geography: Living with Global Media Events* (1994), by McKenzie Wark of Macquarie University, Sydney.
5. Cultural studies politicises media education

Although by now you might think that I am rather down on cultural studies, let me offer a little praise. Academics in cultural studies were some of the first to take popular culture seriously. Actually the musicologists and anthropologists who studied folk culture beat them to it by about a century, but, nonetheless, ever since Richard Hoggart’s book *The Uses of Literacy* in 1958, they have put the study of the content of the popular print and broadcast media onto the academic agenda. This was at a time when traditional English criticism had an elitist attitude to this material and dismissed it as low-grade trash unworthy of scholarly attention. However, the motive for studying media content has never been disinterested scholarship. It has always had just as much a political as an academic agenda. In the 1970s and early 1980s, the agenda was to convert students to one of the varieties of Marxism that were then in vogue: either the German Marxism of the Frankfurt School, the Italian Marxism of Antonio Gramsci, the French Marxism of Louis Althusser, or, most commonly, a barely digestible goulash of all three. At the same time, the various identity group liberation movements of feminists, gays, indigenes and ethnics arose on campus, and cultural studies became a prominent ally of these as well. Marxism went somewhat out of favour in cultural studies and the academic world at large after 1989, but identity group politics has continued loud and strong.

There are at least four distinct kinds of political roles that adherents of cultural studies attempt to play. The first is to take examples of media content, deconstruct them for their ideological messages, and thus show how the media have various political influences. For a long time, this approach painted the media in almost uniformly black terms: the news trivialised women, was biased against trade unions, disliked homosexuals, was prejudiced against ethnics, and supported the police instead of those innocent gangs of youths who hang out at shopping malls. In some cases, the media are ac-
cused of generating social divisions. According to Philip Bell, the foundation Professor of Communications at the University of New South Wales,

> What ethnic labels do in the media is logically identical to their role as pseudo-scientific explanations: they postulate ethnicity as a cause of real or expected inter-group conflict . . . Thus “race” seems always, inevitably, to have been a problem, a threat, or a natural cause of social conflict. In these ways the “commonsense” about race/ethnicity which the media circulate can be deeply ideological. (Bell 1987, p.35)

In other cases, the media are accused of being agents of social control that define the boundaries between acceptable and deviant behaviour. In 1994 when he was head of the media school at the University of Technology, Sydney, Professor Andrew Jakubowicz wrote:

> The most significant use of non-Anglo Australians (in the media) was to mark boundaries. Non Anglo Australians were included as contrast with the “normal” . . . these “non-normals” were included (in media texts) either as exotic accessories to the physical backdrop, for example in food advertisements, as tourist attractions, or as threats to boundaries . . . boat people, for example . . . While the litany of class, gender, race and ethnicity may sound out of date to some proponents of the post-modern age, we conclude that these elements remain central to the issue of inequality. (Jakubowicz et al 1994, p.54, p.196)

Jakubowicz is quite right on two counts here. These critiques of class, gender, race and ethnicity, upon which he has built his career, certainly amount to a litany — they are much more like a prayer of supplication than disinterested scholarship — and they are certainly out of date. One of the most overt interventions by the media in the political process of recent years has been in the debate over Pauline Hanson, and the Mabo and Wik judgements of the High Court. However, instead of supporting racist attitudes, as they should have done were the theses of Bell and Jakubowicz at all accurate, some of the most influential of the media — notably, the broadsheet press and the ABC — were conspicuous for their condemnation of Hanson and their support for the Aborigines. In
other words, those academics who have complained most about the media’s creation of ethnic stereotypes are themselves guilty of labelling all the media with the one, inaccurate anti-ethnic stereotype.

The methodology used by cultural studies theorists to reach conclusions like this is best described as self-fulfilling. To study the media this way, all you need do is select a few choice examples that confirm your thesis, subject them to close textual analysis, draw the obvious political conclusions and then sprinkle the whole effort with a French theoretical gloss. Not all analyses of this kind, it should be emphasised, are negative about the media. Some argue that different audiences engage in “negotiated and oppositional readings of media texts”. Hence, there are some analyses that claim that television crime dramas support working class and youth values (Fiske & Hartley 1978), and others that reckon they “empower” working women (Brown 1990; Clarke 1990). I even read a recent analysis of Broadway musical comedies which claims that, instead of endorsing, as they appear to do, the most romantic kind of heterosexuality, they actually have a gay subtext which is profoundly subversive of the values at the surface level of the text (Trask 1998; Miller 1998). Frankly, using a cultural studies analysis, you can draw any conclusion that takes your fancy. There are no standards, no tests for accuracy, no means of deciding whether the analysis is right or wrong, or whether it is good, bad or indifferent.

The second political role that cultural studies academics want to play is that of policy formation. While the Labor Party was in power in Canberra, they thought that they could develop communications policies that a social democratic government would be willing to introduce. They set up a journal called Culture and Policy and three Brisbane universities got funding to establish the Australian Key Centre for Cultural and Media Policy. In 1992 Stuart Cunningham wrote the book Framing Culture: Criticism and Policy in Australia, which, the cover blurb tells us, “brings together cultural
studies and policy studies in a lively and innovative way”. Let us look at an example. In his discussion of advertising, Cunningham argues the industry needs to be reformed. He dutifully toes the feminist line by saying that sexism in advertising still needs to be critiqued. He then tells us who is most likely to accomplish these reforms:

The best model of practical reformism in relation to advertising is the modern consumer movement (which gives a quite different, empowering meaning to the term consumerism), represented in Australia by the longstanding work of the Australian Consumers’ Association. (Cunningham 1992, p.102)

In other words, the sexism and the other imagined sins of the advertising industry are most likely to succumb, not to legislation like trade practices acts or anti-competition laws, but to the reforming might of the publishers of Choice magazine.

This level of innocence is bad enough, but the main problem with Cunningham’s attempt to use cultural studies to generate policy is this: if the leading academic authorities of cultural studies are as remote from the industry as they demonstrate in the statements I have quoted above, if their attitude towards the industry is such an ill-gotten combination of ignorance about its functions and arrogance towards those who produce and consume its services, then the prospect of deducing useful government policy from their theories is less than zero.

The third political role in which cultural studies is currently involved is the revival of Marxism. In the university environment, Marxism is a lot like Rasputin. They shot him but he walked away. They tried to drown him in a frozen lake but his head popped up through the ice. They fed him arsenic and he asked for a second helping. No matter how much its reputation sinks, no matter that it stands exposed as having the worst record for mass homicide in human history, Marxism still attracts adherents among intellectually-inclined adolescents and their teachers. In particular, the ideas of the Frankfurt School Marxist, Jurgen Habermas, are currently
being taught in media theory and cultural studies courses. His notion of “the public sphere” has inspired a book of essays by academics from the University of Technology, Sydney (Wilson, 1989), and the latest edition of the Australian media theory journal, *Media International Australia*, has devoted a symposium to the concept. Here is a summary of Habermas’s views from the UTS volume.

The mass media, it is claimed,

have increasingly given up even the pretence of providing the information and discussion necessary for an informed readership. Where the role of the media is determined by the requirements of advertising, as became increasingly the case in the nineteenth century, its concerns became consumption not discourse, and manipulation rather than free discussion between equals . . . The concern of the major bourgeois media became not only that of profit maximisation, but also that of excluding or subordinating voices. The competition between political ideas is won or lost through the exercise of power, concealment and subterfuge, not rational debate. (Poole 1989, pp.15-16)

I should emphasise that the author of this summary does not entirely agree with all the views of Habermas expressed here, nor do several other of the book’s contributors, who prefer a more postmodernist analysis. But the question worth asking is why anyone at the end of the twentieth century would bother discussing the Habermas version of Marxism at all? His critique is barely more sophisticated than the kind of doctrinaire denunciation of the evil capitalist media made by Humphrey McQueen in *Australia’s Media Monopolies*, a Maoist variety of Marxist media analysis, published in the 1970s. Why are academic media theorists still subjecting their students to such an intellectually and politically discredited theory, which sheds absolutely no light on the way the media operate? The only possible answer is that they must think there is still something in it. Otherwise, why discuss the “public sphere” with reference to Habermas at all? They must still believe at least part of his story: either that the media are “bourgeois” institutions, or that they exclude oppositional voices, or that they are against rational debate, or that their modus operandi is concealment and subterfuge, or that
they commit some other dreadful offence against the workers of the world.

The fourth political role for cultural studies academics is to quite openly advocate the use of the education system for the political indoctrination of students. They believe that all institutions and relationships are already politicised and so this gives them the right to inject their own politics into the education process. The politics they support, it should be noted, are all on the Left. They range from the Australian Labor Party brand of social democracy to the hairiest kind of fantasies about overthrowing the current forces of “social domination”. The first kind is represented by Professor Stuart Cunningham:

Those who contribute to the education of tomorrow’s journalists, media commentators, public relations consultants, film and media production personnel, educators, policy analysts and public servants have a significant opportunity to participate in the formation of grounded social democratic ideals and practices. (Cunningham 1992, pp.173-4)

Not liberal ideals, mind you, not conservative ideals, nor the ideals and practices of any other political position — only those of social democrats. At the farthest end of the political spectrum are cultural studies theorists who believe that most of the media should be treated as a political enemy and that their job in the university is to turn out people who, if they get employed, will become subversives who can challenge the values of the present repressive regime. If you think I’m exaggerating, let me quote once more the always candid Julia Ravell:

Cultural studies theories offer future journalists alternative models of conceptualising the media which go beyond unreflexive notions of truth and objectivity to understandings of more complex networks of capital, power and information. This historically based knowledge encourages them to contest from within those structures of social domination which determine the “real”, the “natural” and the “normal”. Critical teaching informed by cross-disciplinary cultural studies theories enables students to analyse how the media produces identities, role models and ideals . . . how it defines situations, sets agendas and filters out oppositional ideas; and
how it sets limits and boundaries beyond which discussion is discour-
egaged. (Ravell 1998: 2, my emphases)

Call me old fashioned, but I think it is unethical for teachers to use the education system to try to force their political views onto students, especially in a system funded by a public that does not share those teachers’ radicalism.

6. Cultural studies is idealist and anti-humanist

The idealism and anti-humanism of cultural studies were two of its aspects I discussed in my original paper and I’m raising them again because both were rather vehemently denied by Graeme Turner. When I said that cultural studies believes that “the world should be conceived as a ‘text’” and that “individual human beings are unimportant in shaping the world” (1998a, p.13), Turner replied that “nobody believes anything as crude and stupid as this” (Turner 1998). Well, unfortunately, this is not true. Apart from the leading figures of the French structuralist and poststructuralist movement, French historians such as Fernand Braudel and the entire Annales school, the Professor of Modern History at Cambridge University Quentin Skinner, the German hermeneutic theorist Hans-George Gadamer, not to mention the German philosopher Martin Heidegger and all the post-war French Heideggerians including Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, there are at least two people giving papers at the “Media Wars” conference whose recent writings quite clearly endorse one or other of them.

The first is John Hartley who has written that “journalism is the poor relation of discourse in theoretical writing” because “it has attracted no Foucault to analyse its power relations” (Hartley 1995, p.29). Now, if someone wants to endorse Foucault’s notion of power/knowledge, that is, the claim that all forms of systematic knowledge, such as academic disciplines, are political, then there is a certain amount of essential baggage that comes in its train. In par-
ticular, you have to accept Foucault's anti-humanism, because it constitutes the intellectual framework within which the notion of power/knowledge was conceived. In the same way, you can't endorse Marx's concept of revolution without accepting that it was conceived within a framework which held that class struggle was the dynamic of history. Foucault's anti-humanism maintains that the individual is not a free agent who has a free will driven by his conscious mind. Instead, the individual is an instrument of “discourse”, that is, someone shaped by the prevailing language, ideology and culture, which determine the content of his unconscious mind and frame his actions. So the notion of power/knowledge, which Hartley says is needed to analyse journalism, is committed to the view that it is language and culture, not the conscious free will of individual human beings, that shape the social world.

The second person whose writings support one of these crude and stupid beliefs is Graeme Turner himself. If you write, as he does in his textbook *The Media in Australia*, that “language does not describe reality, it actually constitutes it” (Turner 1993, p.219; Turner 1997, p.311, his italics), or as he wrote in another work “what language does is to construct, not label, reality for us” (Turner 1988, p.43), you commit yourself to certain logical conclusions that you cannot avoid. One of these is the ontology known as idealism, the view that things exist only as objects of perception, or, in the cultural studies version, as objects of conceptual and linguistic lenses of our own making. Within this linguistic idealism, the proposition that “the world should be conceived as a ‘text’” logically follows, whether Turner wants it to or not. The only way he can avoid being committed to it is to drop the claim that language constitutes reality. So far, he appears most reluctant to do this. The original statement appeared in his book in 1993 and was repeated verbatim in the second edition, as recently as 1997. If he really believes it is crude and stupid to say that the world should be conceived as a text, why does he keep repeating its essential premise, that language
constitutes reality? Until he renounces this proposition, no one should take his denials seriously.

While I’m on this point, I might mention another part of Turner’s reply. Against my claim that textual analysis had become the principal methodology of media analysis under the cultural studies regime, he replied: “Despite what Windschuttle says, the dominant mode of media studies in Australia is media history, not textual analysis.” (Turner 1998) This came as rather a surprise so I thought I’d better check it out in Turner and Cunningham’s own book. I looked up the table of contents in both editions of *The Media in Australia* but couldn’t find any chapter on media history. Meanwhile, Part Four of both editions, which takes up one sixth of the whole book, is devoted to “Media Texts and Messages” and is entirely about textual analysis. I then looked up the index of the first edition under “H”, but could find no entry for “history”. The only index entry to even mention the word was “media analysis, history of”, that is, a history of the *textual analysis* of the media. The 1997 edition, similarly, has no index entry for “history”. Under “media”, one of the sub-categories is “history”, which refers to only one paragraph on one page in the whole book. There are a few more paragraphs related to each entry of “advertising, history”, “film, history” and “radio, history”. Meanwhile, “media analysis” and “text analysis, media” refer to a total of 52 pages in the same edition. In other words, media history is such a “dominant mode” within media studies that Turner’s own textbook, published only last year, barely touches upon it.

7. **Journalism exists to serve its audiences; cultural studies is contemptuous of media audiences**

I don’t at this stage have anything to add to what I said on this topic in the first paper. Journalists, I noted, are beholden primarily
to their audiences. Their ethical obligations are to their readers, listeners and viewers rather than to employers, advertisers or the state. Journalists cannot function properly without considering the needs of the “readers over their shoulder” in terms of the kind of stories their audiences want to see and in terms of the information their audiences need to make stories intelligible and interesting. On the other hand, cultural studies academics argue that audiences are either (a) mindless robots, or (b) fictional constructs that exist solely in discourse. In all the replies to my original paper, no respondent disputed any of my claims about the contempt in which media audiences are held by cultural studies academics.

8. Cultural studies theorists think anyone can do journalism

To most consumers of the media, journalism seems easy. Print journalism is a no-frills kind of prose that makes a virtue of being uncomplicated. Broadcast journalism often seems no more difficult than having a personal conversation. Because they are unaware how much skill and technique goes into making journalism seem easy, industry outsiders often think anyone can do it, without any experience or training at all. It is true that, until some time in the 1980s, the majority of journalists employed in Australia never received any formal training. They learned on the job. Nonetheless, there was a lot of learning to do and, if my own experience is any guide, for the first two years of their career, most cadet journalists were not much good for anything but the simplest tasks.

Cultural studies theorists are among those industry outsiders who believe journalism is easy and that anyone can do it. John Hartley claims that media employers “can and do hire people with no training at all and put them straight into the most prominent positions”. He adds:
In a market where years of experience can be outbid by a squirt of hairspray, it is not learning but looks, not the cerebral but celebrity, that mark the winners, and celebrity smiling is not something that can easily be taught in universities or be regulated by professional associations; journalism is one of the “smiling professions”, whose aspirants may be better advised to spend more on orthodontics than on books. (Hartley 1995, p.24)

Of course, had Hartley ever been employed on a newspaper or a television station, he would never have entertained any of this. He would have known that much of what appears to be the work of celebrities, such as actors and sports stars, is actually done behind the scenes by journalists. He would have witnessed the fact that most newspaper columns attributed to sporting celebrities are actually written by the sub-editors either from rough notes supplied by the columnist or a telephone call. He would have seen the producers of television programs writing the stand-up and voice-over scripts to be read aloud by celebrity presenters. In other words, without the fundamentals being handled by the real professionals, non-journalists, no matter how broad their smiles, would never get into print or onto the air.

**Journalism and cultural studies: terms for a compromise**

At this stage, I should make some distinctions within media education so that it is clear what are the objects of my criticisms and what are not. Most of the practical training of journalists that goes on in higher education is done by former practitioners. The curriculum is well-developed and most of the teaching in this country is of a high standard. It is well attuned to industry needs and its graduates have a good success rate in gaining employment. Some practical journalism courses are independent of any other courses but most are taught within degrees where up to half the course can comprise media theory. Not all media theory derives from cultural
studies. There is a body of literature on the political economy of the media, on the occupational sociology of media organisations and on various types of analysis of media content. The quality of these three kinds of material is uneven but, for the most part, they provide a useful adjunct to the teaching of journalism. For example, there is a newly-published book, edited by Myles Breen, called *Journalism: Theory and Practice* (1998), which is a collection of essays written largely by members of the Journalism Education Association. Most of these articles throw genuine light onto aspects of the profession and either inform, or are constructively critical of, journalistic practice. This is what good academic work related to a profession should be.

Cultural studies is different. It engages in media theory but, as I have indicated above, it is diametrically opposed to journalism and to similar forms of media practice in terms of its methodology, its understanding, its language and its operating assumptions. This puts constructive or useful criticism of media practice somewhat beyond its reach.

Now, although there is some support for the views expressed in this paper among those academics teaching journalism practice, their acceptance is certainly not universal. The most common attitude is probably that of tolerance. Cultural studies exists, so most journalism educators think they should engage in some form of compromise. In fact, one of the respondents to my original paper, Stuart Cunningham, described not what exists now but what the majority of journalism educators would prefer the position to be when he said:

> Just as there is no singular focus of media studies on textual analysis, there is also no single methodology. Political economy, institutional analysis and policy studies have all coexisted with semiotics, structuralism and ideology theories . . . Journalism educators . . . often strongly endorse the need for their students to be exposed to the broad range of ideas and concepts found in liberal arts education. (Cunningham 1998)
With this in mind, let me propose the terms of a compromise. One thing that all reasonable people should agree on is that, if you are engaging in professional and vocational education, you should not have a body of theory commenting on that profession that contradicts it in both content and in method, and which at the same time takes the lion’s share of senior academic appointments. So, I would propose that journalism education seriously thinks about coming to terms with cultural studies and regarding it as an acceptable theoretical adjunct, on the condition that cultural studies makes some reciprocal compromises itself. From the evidence presented in this paper, there would appear to be seven of these compromises that are the most pressing:

1. Cultural studies should drop all reliance on French structuralist and poststructuralist theory, and give up Frankfurt Marxism as well.

2. It should acknowledge that it is possible for journalists to report objective truths and facts.

3. It should stop trying to use media education as a political crusade on behalf of feminists, gays, indigenes and ethnics, or as a recruiting ground for any political party.

4. It should express itself in intelligible English prose.

5. It should adopt a policy of constructive criticism of media practice and drop its attempts at deconstructivist exposés.

6. It should prefer academic appointments, especially of chairs and heads of schools, to go to people who have industry experience rather than to theorists who have none.

7. It should reduce the influence of literary critics on the curriculum and elevate that of people with genuine research skills.

These terms, it would seem to me, are the minimum necessary if cultural studies is to acknowledge and support the integrity of journalism education. So, what are the chances that these recommendations might be adopted? Given the mindset of those theorists now
entrenched within media studies, I’d say they are rather slim. In fact, to be realistic, they are sheer wishful thinking, a set of proposals that have no hope of being realised, either now or in the foreseeable future, under the prevailing academic hierarchy.

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Mr Windschuttle is a former journalism educator (NSW Institute of Technology 1977-81; Macleay College 1989-97) and author of *The Media* (Penguin Books, 3rd. ed. 1988) who is currently publisher at Macleay Press, Sydney.

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The politics of spin

Michelle Grattan

Although lagging behind the excesses of current US and British spin doctors, Australia's spin industry is growing rapidly, raising questions about the impact of media management on effective scrutiny by journalists of political processes and issues. Political leaders can appear more visible but in fact be less accessible to detailed questioning by informed interviewers, and election campaigns are now dominated by sophisticated levels of media management by governments and oppositions. The rise of spin has had a negative impact on journalism, distorting news processes and encouraging more passive forms of journalism.

Being a good spinner can get you a very long way. In Tony Blair’s mid-1998 reshuffle, Peter Mandelson was elevated from Minister without Portfolio to Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and put into Cabinet. Mandelson was head of the publicity machine that was a key in the highly successful Blair campaign. A confidant to Blair, he used news management ruthlessly for purposes within and outside the party.

One account of the rise of Blair and New Labour reported that Mandelson “had no hesitation in making use of his many contacts among political journalists to generate unfavourable coverage for anyone who sought to impede the path of Blair’s supporters or was critical of the direction being taken by those who regarded themselves as Labour’s modernisers.” (Jones, 1997, p.15) An article in
the Spectator in 1998 claimed Mandelson was “almost certainly the brains behind” the rescinding of one appointment to the job of political editor at the Express — although Mandelson subsequently denied the claim. (Glover, 1998, p.28)

In the US, Howard Kurtz in his book on spin gives this description of Bill Clinton’s former spokesman:

One thing about Mike McCurry, he knew how to play the game. He understood the ebb and flow of the fungible commodity called news . . . McCurry was a spinmeister extraordinaire, deflecting questions with practised ease, sugar-coating the ugly messes into which the Clintonites seemed repeatedly to stumble. He would mislead reporters on occasion, or try to pass them off to one of the damage-control lawyers who infested the public payroll. He would yell at offending correspondents, denounce their stories as inaccurate, denigrate them to their colleagues and their bosses. He would work the clock to keep damaging stories off the evening news, with its huge national audience. Yet with his considerable charm and quick wit, McCurry somehow managed to maintain friendly relations with most of the reporters who worked the White House beat. He would go to dinner with reporters, share a beer, give them a wink and a nod as he faithfully delivered the administration’s line. He was walking the tightrope, struggling to maintain credibility with both the press and the president, to serve as an honest broker between the antagonists. (Kurtz, 1998, p.14)

McCurry must be a role model for the spin trade. Despite this, President Clinton’s troubles seemed to defy the efforts at containment. No wonder that, soon after bowing out in October 1998, when McCurry was asked how he felt about leaving the president’s side, he jumped in the air shouting “Free at last!”

In Australia, our spin merchants look tame beside the likes of the Mandelsons and McCurrys. Tony O’Leary, John Howard’s chief media man, gets into the back of some of the TV shots, certainly not to stand in front of the microphone saying what the PM thinks on this or that. He is not a public figure in his own right as was McCurry. And there is just no Mandelson equivalent on the scene.
But, like the US and Britain, we have our local and expanding spin industry, and that has significant ramifications for journalists and the political process. Talk of leaders as “products” and of the “spin” that helps sell them reflects the modern convergence of the world of politics, entertainment and advertising. As the extensive writings on spin tell us, today’s leaders are not only spoken of as if they were “goods”; they are treated like them, with “packaging” all important.

Image has been elevated, although I must say Australian federal politics is a bit out of sync with the trend at the moment. You only have to look at and listen to Clinton and Blair to see the modern image-conscious politician. But no spin expert could turn John Howard and Kim Beazley into glamour figures (despite periodic efforts to spruce them up — a trim of the Howard eyebrows, a diet for Beazley). They share in common their separate brands of old-fashionedness.

In the era of spin, symbols and style become more important in the presentation of the political message.

Spin is equally about defining and getting out the message — whether it’s how good your team is or how bad the others are — and keeping the politicians, as the jargon goes, “on message”. It is about trying to influence how the media records and reacts to that message. Although spin concentrates a lot on form, it hasn’t, from the politicians’ point of view, meant the abandonment of policy. If it had, John Howard would not have presented the electorate with a GST which, however sugared, was a hard swallow. There is periodic talk about political parties backtracking on various policies. But the issue there is reaction to public opinion. To the extent that spin comes in, it’s when the politicians cast their reaction as being more of a response than it in fact is.

If spin — that is, the highly professional selling of the political message that involves maximum management and manipulation of the media — is at the heart of modern politics, one of its key fea-
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The modern media seems much closer to the action but actually is more at arm’s length. Gatekeepers are everywhere. One reason for this is that ministers’ staffs have expanded enormously in the last two or three decades, as have their workloads and the amount of travel they can do in a given week. The numbers of Canberra-based journalists have also vastly grown.

I am always struck by the contrast between now and the Curtin government, when the then handful of senior Canberra journalists had twice daily briefings from the PM, often containing highly confidential information about the progress of the war. Of course there was control in those days too — most dramatically, censorship, as well as the understanding that much of the information being given to the newspapers was not for publication. But a lot more of the “spin” was done by the politicians themselves, although Curtin did have a long-standing and influential pioneer press secretary.

Even if he/she wanted to, the modern minister could not satisfy individually all the demands made for comments, interviews, “grabs”. To do so would be to forego doing much else. Some senior politicians, having reached a position where they can get someone to help them with media work, are relieved to lean on that person to a huge degree, because they feel protected that way. The media adviser becomes a security blanket. Or to change the metaphor, the politician ends up like a caged animal, fearful of the jungle out there.

So modern “spin” is partly a function of everything, including the political job and the media, becoming bigger and more demanding. And also more sophisticated and complex. This is double sided. There are more opportunities for promoting political mes-
sages (the growth of the electronic media, and political advertising). And the media itself has become a technological world that makes special logistical demands on politicians, so that they in turn require around them those who understand the world of television in particular.

Brian McNair, in a contribution to the book *Media Ethics*, describes the interactions of the players in the modern political process in terms of three groups competing in a game:

The politicians and the journalists compete to set the news agenda . . . The spin-doctors act as coaches and managers on behalf of the politicians, and as technical assistants in realising the desired communicative effects. We, the voters, are positioned as spectators, with occasional walk-on parts. At the end of each electoral cycle we are asked to choose whom we think has performed best during the preceding period, and who is likely to perform best in the forthcoming one. (McNair, 1998, p.62)

McNair takes a benign view. He acknowledges the excesses: politicians lie, journalists can be too confrontational, spin-doctors “overdo it with threatening faxes and bullying phone calls”. But he argues people should remember, if they think we overdose on politics now, that a century ago women did not have the vote and politics was a more elite, unscrutinised sport. And if the spin doctors are sometimes over the top it is encouraging “how often we come to know about these abuses of the political communication machinery”. (McNair, 1998, p.63)

The late Henry Mayer, addressing advertising executives after the 1980 election, had the message that what we would now talk about as one aspect of spin is inextricably bound up with what politics is. And Mayer had his own “spin” on the politics-as-product idea. He said:

[Political advertising is necessarily full of deception, half-truths, exaggerations and falsities. It is that way because all forms of politics are that way, but political lies are not like lies about soap or cornflakes. Politics does not deal with “products” which can be checked and evaluated in the way a car can be ... If worried enough to care, you can compare brands of
soap or toothpaste in terms of some hard criteria. But there is no possible way you can compare soft appeals which rely on fantasy, pride, ego-boosting, fear or alienation. (Mayer, 1994, p.119)

Mayer argued that the idea of political deception is much less simple than that of deception in many other fields. “If you found a way to make all political advertising rational and accurate, or even if you improved its rationality and accuracy greatly, what would you have to do? . . . You would have to eliminate politics as we know it. (Mayer, 1994, p.116)

These are useful reminders not to get too carried away by the evils of spin, although of course Mayer was speaking before the spin doctors had taken the equivalent of PhDs in the tricks of their trade. In a study of political communication in Britain, Bob Franklin observed that in the ’80s, “politicians became increasingly enthusiastic about the possibilities of using media as vehicles for presenting themselves and their policies . . .” Indeed, this enthusiasm ‘became obsession as politicians tried to influence and regulate the flow of political information and messages’ and politicians and policies became “packaged”. (Franklin, 1994, p.4)

I think there is a considerable risk in the fact that the spin process is often accompanied by a high degree of cynicism. The trouble is that the “spin cycle” can produce a “circle of cynics.”

Cynical spin merchants, working for cynical politicians, give a line to cynical journalists. The public decide if all these players treat them with such disdain, they will return the compliment, and become alienated from the political process. Why did the punters leap to Pauline Hanson’s defence when she was attacked by journalists, or given a hard time by interviewers, even though she might be inarticulate and perform badly? In part because, I think, she was seen as somehow outside the “spin” game, the amateur in the world of hard-bitten and cynical professionals.

Both politicians and journalists rate near the bottom in public opinion polls. In addition, the trust that people feel for government
is very low. Politicians’ breaking of promises, and journalists’ concentration on the cut and thrust, often awarding marks for a clever and successful try-on, have added to the distrust and the disgust.

So spin is an artform for the players, but increasingly a problem for the system. What are some of the manifestations and consequences of spin?

Spin means that leaders’ exposure to the media (and indeed the exposure of ministers and the Opposition leader) is staged-managed to a high degree. John Howard holds few news conferences. He appears instead in television and radio interviews. Much of the press writing about political leaders is based on the transcript, rather than on face-to-face questioning.

Howard is simultaneously over-exposed and under-available. He is all over the media, but that doesn’t mean he is accessible to answer media questions from other than those on whose programs he has decided to appear. What sections of the media can get to him depends on where the spin operators think the advantage lies. It might be an application of the free market, but there is certainly no journalistic level playing field when it comes to prime ministerial access. This approach (adopted by Keating as well) tends to devalue the policy content, or at least subject the content to less rigorous or intellectual analysis. It can means issues fail to get teased out and the debate can proceed in an unsatisfactory series of half-bites.

Politics is pushed more to theatre and the journalists to theatre critics (or more precisely, television critics). Of course Parliament has always been theatre, but there was more non-theatre politics. Television has extended the politics of theatre and indeed made Parliament the side-stage on which the actors are briefly seen during the nightly news bulletins.

The effect of excessive spin is to have everyone — the politicians, the staff, and the media — concentrate heavily on the straight politics, the tactics, rather than the substance of policies,
especially in the public presentation. This means journalists may of-
ten assess parties, governments, oppositions, on whether some-
thing is politically street smart, rather than sound policy. 
(Sometimes, it must be said the journalists go to the other extreme;
they judge against some impossible ideal, expecting from politicians
herculean feats. This sort of unreality can also give the political pro-
cess a credibility gap.)

Emphasis on tactics can mean the journalists worry less and less
about getting across the policy detail: they concentrate on the sur-
face, on how this or that policy will ‘play’. And this becomes
self-reinforcing. If a journalist gets into the habit of writing analysis
mainly in terms of the votes in it, he/she is unlikely to suddenly
move into looking at the issues from a more substantive stand-
point.

As in so many areas, what’s happening in Australia follows the
US trend. In “Spiral of Cynicism” Cappella and Jamieson highlight
studies showing how coverage has moved from issue-based stories
“to ones that emphasise who is ahead and who is behind, and the
strategies and tactics of campaigning necessary to position a candi-
date to get ahead or stay ahead.” They conclude that:

strategy coverage is not just an aspect of media coverage of politics but is
becoming its dominant mode. From 1988-92, horse-race coverage of
election events on the nightly news rose by 8 per cent from 27 per cent…
Tracking polls accounted for another 33 per cent. Policy coverage was
down from 40 per cent in 1988 to 33 per cent in 1992.” (Cappella and
Jamieson, 1997, p.33)

One of the most noticeable areas in which spin has increased in
recent years is in the parties’ handling of election campaigns. A
quarter of a century ago, news organisations would have a couple of
senior people travelling with the leaders; they’d swap caravans once
or perhaps twice in the campaign. The leaders would, besides their
speeches and appearances at functions, have one or sometimes two
press conferences a day. Issues would bat back and forth from day
to day. It was hard for a leader to escape fairly forensic interroga-

tion.

Now the campaign days are staged like musicals, with plenty of sound, pictures and distractions. The doorstep format of the mod-
ern campaign press conference can make for instant escape if nec-
essary. The sit-down news conferences are the exception, and only come when the leader wants to make an announcement or feels he can score best by having one. The journalists jump on and off a car-
avan and so often are not following for an extended period what the leader has said on a particular matter.

The way a leader and his team play the spin game can vary be-
tween campaigns. For example, in 1987 Labor’s strategy was to get Hawke each day against a good background for the evening news. He was very inaccessible for questioners. In 1990 when Hawke was trying to prove he had more substance than Peacock, the “spin” ap-
proach actually included lots of full news conferences. In the 1998 campaign, both John Howard and Kim Beazley mostly had daily doorstops, in an election program that featured heavily talkback ra-
dio programs. The usefulness of the doorstops were, however, re-
duced by the increasing tendency of senior journalists not to follow the travelling caravan. In particular, the senior television correspon-
dents now stay in Canberra, feeding questions to their more junior reporters on the road. This can sometimes lead to a sort of compe-
tition in “spin” as the political spinners and the TV correspondents put their respective glosses on the news.

Spin has always been there in modern politics to a degree but one of the features of the ’90s game is how fast it is played, espe-
ially in election campaigns. The coming of the mobile phone and fax (and now E mail) has transformed campaigning, and will con-
tinue to do so. It is a game of action and reaction. A politician is loose-tongued; strategists on the opposing side remember a contra-
diction; they rush to the files and dig out the relevant quote; jour-
nalists on the campaign trail are rung and faxed.
Spin, you see, requires a very good filing system, and a very good monitoring procedure. Under Labor the so-called “aNiMaLS” (National Media Liaison Service) became notorious. Everything said by the Coalition was monitored over all the country. Government representatives provided a constant stream of transcript to the press gallery. The Coalition, in Opposition, attacked the “aNiMaLS” and promised to abolish it. The service they have introduced in government is rather more discreet in its public face — there are some but many fewer transcripts delivered to journalists — but an extensive “listening” and propaganda machine remains.

Successive governments complain how their predecessor has used public money and staff to “spin” their case, whether it is flooding the market with the message, or discrediting their opponents. But, whatever changes are made when a new administration gets power, each abuses the system. A recent example was the Howard government’s $17 million advertising to sell the tax package, which clearly did not fall within normal definition for advertising information about government programs.

One of the manifestations of spin is the leak. Leaks can be divided into at least two categories: material that gets out in spite of the desire to keep it secret, and material that is put out with a specific purpose.

The same “leak” can fall into both categories — depending on where you’re coming from: for example, the Opposition gets hold of a secret document and secretly gives it to one journalist to launder it. This is a double leak, both a leak from the government and then a leak from the Opposition.

Labor played this game when in 1997 it leaked material on travel rorts involving a Howard government minister, John Sharp, to journalist Laurie Oakes, partly for impact, but probably particularly to protect sources. Somebody in the bureaucracy leaked the information to Labor in the first place.
John Howard and Peter Costello and their offices have over the last few years, in opposition and government, periodically leaked material to a certain Canberra-based columnist.

In leaking, the leaker can hope to get a certain ”spin” on a story, to get heightened exposure for it, and perhaps to make the journalist somewhat obligated to the leaker. A leadership aspirant sometimes seeks to build a useful future relationship with a significant journalist by providing that journalist with “leaks”

Spin can encourage lazy journalism and distorted journalism.

Lazy journalism when the spin factories of Opposition or government do the work for the journalists — the carefully-assembled research on a scandal, or the bundle of budget PR material — and the journalists come to rely overmuch on these factories. Or, having accepted a genuine product from the factory, to then take at face value a later product of inferior grade. For example in the frenzy of bottom-of-harbour stories of the early ’80s, some innocent people found themselves the subject of unfair allegations because everything the Labor Opposition pushed out on the subject got a run.

The spin process can lead to distorted journalism when “lines” on this or that are uncritically accepted, and become orthodoxies, or when the fashionable spin is strong enough to discredit what might be an alternative, well-based position.

Of course the distinction between what we are calling spin and the usual process of political persuasion is an artificial one. Was Paul Keating, when he was selling his plan for a consumption tax to the press gallery in the mid-’80s, best described as ardent persuader (what politicians are supposed to be) or spin doctor par excellence? The spin merchants are usually defined as the intermediaries, the professional salesmen, but some of the politicians are masters of the spin game. Keating’s spin came with the classic techniques:
promises and threats. Buy it and you would be “on the drip”; reject it and no drip, and probably a lot of abuse.

The federal parliamentary press gallery is especially easy territory for the spin doctors because so many journalists are collected under one roof — almost all the media reporting federal politics and many of those who commentate on it.

The spin merchants’ power is heightened because they control a substantial slice of the “talent” as well as the information, and both are in short supply. For instance, the Sunday TV interview shows must get a politician each week, and compete fiercely for them. Which show gets the PM, or the Treasurer, at crucial times is important to the vying networks (Channel Nine usually wins the contest), and this can give the relevant spin merchants considerable influence. One small example: this writer was vetoed from a TV interview panel by John Howard’s press secretary because he preferred others (even though this was done without the knowledge or authority of the PM). As British journalist Nicholas Jones reports: “Government information officers and the media staff of political parties can make life difficult for individual programs or producers through a surreptitious withdrawal of cooperation”. (Jones, 1995, pp.19-20)

One serious drawback of the proliferation of professional spin experts is that they tend to restrict journalists’ breadth of sources. This happens in several ways. The spin doctors’ power, including with their bosses, is directly proportional to how much they control the flow of information. So they will try to restrict access to those with the “primary” data — their own bosses (if they are ministers; this happens less in Opposition but is not unknown); experts on the minister’s (or sometimes the shadow minister’s) staff; and the public service.

The public service, increasingly intimidated about dealing with the media, is both discouraged from media contact by the government media advisers, and quite thankful not to have to run the me-
dia gauntlet, even on a background basis. And the journalists, if adequately catered for by the spin experts, have less motivation to seek more widely.

It should be noted that for all journalists talk about or complain about the political spin doctors, we ourselves practise the art. Just watch those two minute round-the-political-world news broadcasts, with the cynical tag lines. Or the way whatever happens tends to be interpreted according to a currently fashionable view of the world, which can vary from “Howard is a disaster” or “Labor can’t win”, to a broad framework such as the economic rationalist mantra.

Let me end on the story of the rise and rise of one spin man. Many of these people are journalists, some out of the Press Gallery. But this one used to work in Sydney PR, mainly, as he put it “flogging pet food and chocolates.” He had Uncle Ben’s Mars Bar account. And yes, he does speak about the “product” — its name is Kim Beazley.

References


Franklin, Bob (1994), Packaging Politics: Political Communications in Britain’s Media Democracy, Edward Arnold, London.


Jones, Nicholas (1997), Campaign 1997: How the General Election was Won and Lost, Indigo, London.


**Endnote**

1. Mandelson resigned as Trade & Industry Secretary in December after being accused of breaching the Blair government’s ministerial code by not declaring a substantial home loan from a parliamentary colleague.

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Birth of a novelist, death of a journalist

David Conley

The history of newspapers and novels parallel each other in many ways, yet links between journalism and fiction are often overlooked by The Academy. Founding novels in England and Australia were written by journalists and coincided with the emergence of newspapers. Since the first convict novel was published in 1830 at least 168 Australian journalists have written novels. This article examines journalism-fiction connections with emphasis on the work of Robert Drewe and the realism-fabulism debate.

Journalism and fiction usually are not mentioned in the same sentence unless in an unflattering sense, yet they have much in common. Journalist Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* is a founding text of the modern novel. It was published a decade after the emergence of England's first daily newspaper. Australia's first novelist, Henry Savery, worked as a journalist before his convict novel, *Quintus Servinton*, was published in 1830. A year later the *Sydney Herald*, which was to become Australia's first regular daily newspaper, began weekly publication. Journalist Marcus Clarke wrote the most successful convict novel, *His Natural Life*, published in 1874.

The development of newspapers and novels was associated with technological, social and economic change that contributed to the rise of the reading class. Stewart (1988, pp.179-180) suggests that
literary Australia was largely a journalists’ Australia. According to Henningham (1994, p.315), journalism in colonial Australia inherited a fully developed tradition of English literary journalism. A symbiotic relationship developed between newspapers and novels in that Australia’s early novelists could not write fiction without the prop of journalism in providing supplementary income. In addition, newspapers were, and remain, forums for critiquing, promoting and publishing literature. They also have served as a training ground for some of literature’s greatest novelists, including Dickens, Twain, Zola and Hemingway. In Australia Prichard, Johnston, Masters, Moorhouse and Drewe are among novelists with journalistic backgrounds.

Drewe in particular has drawn on his journalistic experience in his novels and short stories. This connection will be examined more closely in the next section of this article, which also will consider links between fiction and feature writing.

Somerset Maugham (1938, p.19) says no writer can afford to ignore news and newspapers: “It is raw material straight from the knacker’s yard and we are stupid if we turn our noses up because it smells of blood and sweat”. Dostoevsky, who regularly contributed items to his newspaper-editor brother, also saw value in a literary view of life through newspapers:

In any newspaper one takes up, one comes across reports of wholly authentic facts, which nevertheless strike one as extraordinary. Our writers regard them as fantastic, and take no account of them and yet they are the truth, for they are facts. But who troubles to observe, record, describe them (Allott 1962, p.68)?

Through a survey of biographical dictionaries this writer has thus far identified at least 168 Australian novelists since Savery with journalistic experience. Fifty-eight fiction writers have been noted in The Good Reading Guide (Daniel 1988) as having journalistic experience. If 58 taxi drivers had been listed one suspects The Academy would be asking whether driving taxis inspires fiction. Yet there is a
dearth of scholarly work on journalism-fiction connections by English and journalism academics in Australia and overseas.

Bennett (1989, p.5) cites the “relative critical neglect” of some Australian novelists with journalistic experience and refers to the “dandyism” displayed by some academics. He says university literature departments deride “literary journalism” and notes “slighting references” to the journalism experience of Australian novelists who worked as reporters. In his view Patrick’s White’s much-quoted phrase about novels that are “the dreary dun-coloured off-shoots of journalistic realism” retains a condemnatory force.

Australia is not alone. According to Fishkin (1985, p.3) the list of America’s most imaginative writers is crowded with novelists who served journalistic apprenticeships. She expresses surprise it has received so little attention:

Critics and scholars of American literature have paid a price for this neglect. By glossing over the continuities between the journalism and fiction of these great writers they have missed an important aspect of American literary history and biography. By failing to focus on the discontinuities between their journalism and their fiction they have lost an opportunity to gain special insight into the limits and potential of different narrative forms.

Writing and research skills obviously can be developed outside a journalistic framework. Thomas Keneally and Truman Capote are just two of many who have done so. However journalism is the most logical profession in which to develop such skills. This does not mean all journalism enables all fiction or that all journalists are latent novelists. Journalism may simultaneously aid and hinder fiction. It provides front-row exposure to life’s grand themes but, in so doing, may jaundice the observer to life’s grand possibilities. It may teach writing but of a kind that fits like a straitjacket. While Hemingway credited the Kansas City Star stylebook for teaching him the best rules of writing (Fishkin 1985, p.137) he also warned journalism “can be a daily self-destruction for a serious creative writer”
Robert Drewe is Australia’s most prominent journalist-novelist in that he has won awards for reportage and fiction. He has won two Walkley Awards (1976, 1981) and written five novels and two books of short stories, including The Bodysurfers, which became a TV mini-series. Fortune (1987) won the National Book Council’s Banjo Award for fiction. It can be argued journalism helped prepare him for fiction and made him a better, and certainly a different, novelist than he otherwise would have been.

Drewe undertook a cadetship with the West Australian on his 18th birthday and credits the profession with educating him. Becoming a journalist seemed a romantic notion. It offered travel and adventure while he was being paid for it (Hart 1988, p.5). “Unless you have a family fortune, like one or two prominent writers, you have to do something to make a living, and being a cub reporter . . . is a better training ground than most” (Baker 1989, p.75).

Drewe’s first novel was The Savage Crows (1976). He did not tell his journalistic colleagues he had been working on a novel until it was about to be published: “You know what journalists are like. There would have been the Hemingway cracks and ‘how’s Scott Fitzgerald this morning’” (Brown 1998)? First novels often are chiefly autobiographical and The Savage Crows is no exception. It tells the story of young journalist Stephen Crisp who, thanks to an Australia Council grant, quits his job to research and write about the genocide of Tasmanian Aborigines. That is similar to Drewe’s circumstance in writing his first novel. Crisp’s mother died after he married and had a child against her wishes. That too occurred to Drewe. Near the book’s end the central character is asked: “You
could do us a favour, sport . . . Know anyone in the media” (Drewe 1976, p.262)?

Drewe says *The Savage Crows* was well received, although at the time with some surprise, “like here is a dog that can ride a bicycle and play a trumpet at the same time, which was sort of flattering and slightly offensive” (Willbanks 1992, p.65). He said his transition to fiction entailed a grudging acceptance because of Australia’s tradition that novelists either came from the School of Hard Knocks — “the realist, outback, dingo-trapping background” — or from English Departments.

I was given the feeling now and then that “how dare I bring my tacky Grub Street ways to the noble art of Anglo-Australian letters”. It may have been easier if I hadn’t had a well-known by-line. Reviewers are romantics. They prefer to discover you. It gives them some credence in the literary process. I think that a pathetic lace-curtain provincial snobbery still exists in some English departments and in the minds of some reviewers, some of whom are journalists who would have preferred to be novelists (Baker 1989, p.74-75).

Drewe says mainstream Australian journalists distrust those with the “faintest intellectual claims”, adding that journalists regard themselves as great destroyers of intellectual pretensions (Baker 1989, p.76). And it seems they will never let him forget he once was one of them. He notes he was a journalist for 10 years and has been a novelist for 22 but because most interviewers are journalists the journalist/novelist question always comes up:

They don’t say ‘schoolteacher and novelist Helen Garner’ or ‘advertising man and novelist Peter Carey’. I mean, they’re allowed to have the occupation they’ve had for the major part of their lives. So in a way it does grate slightly (Brown 1998).

Drewe says there is a strangely naive view that if a former teacher writes a novel it is a wonderful fantasy. But if a former journalist writes fiction then he or she must be going through their old notebooks (Baker 1989, p.77). Some critics appear to focus more on the presumed journalistic qualities of Drewe’s fiction than its
poetic energy. In *The Savage Crows* he makes intertextual reference to White’s quote about journalism. His narrator was “overseeing a flock of dun-coloured sheep” (Drewe 1976, p.146). Then: “Dun-coloured animals hesitated, drew quick breaths and scampered from our path” (Drewe 1976, p.158).

Drewe seems ambivalent on a journalistic characteristic — distrust of intellectuals — that may contribute to the tension between the media and The Academy. He comments: “Journalists regard themselves as being great destroyers of intellectual pretension.” This view extends into newspapers where the arts section is regarded as “Wankers’ Corner or the Poofter Pages” (Baker 1989, p.76). Fishkin (1985, p.4) agrees journalism apprenticeship teaches reporters “to be mistrustful of rhetoric, abstractions, hypocrisy and cant”.

Drewe’s second novel, *A Cry in the Jungle Bar* (1979), is set in Asia, where Drewe was sent for journalistic assignments. While the protagonist is an Australian academic rather than a journalist, a newspaper columnist is a key character through which much plot and narrative information flow. Bennett (1989, p.1) observes that, at one level, the novel is a “news” story in its graphic observations. Newspapers are presented as pursuers of truth and used as communication tropes. The protagonist lives in a housing estate, developed by newspaper publishers, called The Fourth Estate. Drewe takes him on a jog that carries the reader past Stop Press Avenue, Headline Boulevard and Extra Avenue (Drewe 1979, pp.16-17).

Journalism is most prominent in Drewe’s third novel, *Fortune* (1986). One edition even depicts a newspaper clipping on the cover. The book can be read as a critique and even a condemnation of journalism. It also can be read as Drewe’s self-created platform for telling “truths” in fiction that he could not tell in journalism. The narrator, “Bob”, is a journalist and novelist who comments on journalism’s limitations and foibles. He laments that:
... journalism reduces most of its stories to political considerations. Matters are defined in terms of where the power lies, who opposes whom or what, where the special interests are. Nevertheless in 1983 I began blithely writing the story — the story as it stood then — as journalism. I stuck to publishable facts. I know the publishable facts are never enough but I thought then that straightforward reporting would be adequate to the task (Drewe 1986, pp.18-19).

“Bob” the novelist writes that journalism disregards “imagination and subjectivity” (Drewe 1986, p.68). It creates instant celebrities who may be dropped “like a hot coal and allowed to fizzle out” (p.115). Journalists like to “stop time . . . to mark an X in the air where the bullet stopped” (p.162) yet “the smell of crime wasn’t something you could capture in a newspaper paragraph” (p.143). Bob also says a reporter with 10 years’ experience [like Drewe] in a country as small as Australia feels not only that he has interviewed everyone but has done so at least twice. Drewe has made the same point about interviewing repetition during a media interview (Waldren 1996, p.13).

The core events in *Fortune* are based on incidents Drewe the journalist reported on for the *Bulletin*. They centre on a shady treasure hunter who becomes a media creation. Ultimately he commits suicide during a trial at which Drewe appeared as a witness. “Bob” begins *Fortune* by asserting journalism could not begin to tell the story that unfolds (Drewe 1986, p.18). The medium’s practices and restrictions frustrated the story Drewe sought to tell in his journalism so he has to tell the truth through fiction. Yet without journalism the fortune hunter’s saga would not have unfolded in fiction. In pursuing “truth” Drewe may have felt his fiction would let him flee journalism yet he has found himself typecast by some as a novelist/journalist hybrid. According to Brady (1988b, p.88) Drewe’s “glancing allusion to life” troubles many readers and critics and inspires them to accuse him of being a “mere journalist” writing a *roman a clef*. She also cites his first novel’s “journalistic accuracy of the descriptions” (1989, p.65).
Walker (1987, pp.106-107) argues Drewe’s books often exhibit disrespect for conventional divisions between fact and fiction. She cites passages in Fortune — “which characteristically emphasise the significance of the reporter” — about John Glenn’s orbit over Perth. Walker notes the passages are similar to those in Drewe’s journalism. The reader, she continues, might wonder about the distinction between the writer as journalist and the writer as novelist. She concludes: “The real differences seem to lie in the circumstances of their publication rather than in claims about the representation of ‘truth’ or ‘the universe’.”

No greater gulf exists between academe and journalism than definitions and perceptions of “truth”, “facts” and “fiction”. Fact and fiction are not mutually exclusive in fiction as they are, one hopes, in journalism. New Journalism uses fiction techniques but fictive invention is another matter. The parading of fiction as fact in journalistic garb creates serious ethical, not to mention legal, dilemmas. The “non-fiction novel” rose to prominence with Capote’s In Cold Blood (1966). Since then terms like “faction” and “fictuality” have taken form.

The journalist’s difficulty is that “facts” and “truth” are more likely to be debated in a courtroom than a lecture theatre. The consequences are vastly different, even if the legal system does not always get at the truth. In fiction or journalism it can be argued “truth” is more a reader than a writer function. After all, truth’s ultimate repository rests with each individual. This makes truth telling all the more important because, as Russell states, our knowledge primarily is from description rather than experience (quoted in Tallis 1988, p.23).

Journalism must contend with the frustrations involved in pursuing a truth that might be defensible in court but inadequate to the higher, harder task of truth telling: the whole truth and nothing but the truth. In Fortune “Bob” complains that:
In my experience journalism has enough trouble with the libelous, the abstract and the subjective. Its attention span is too short. Anyway, its space limitations prevent the true and continuous tracking of connections. Journalism shies away from psychology. For all its nosy reputation it mostly ignores the private life and rarely sees the larger truth (Drewe 1986, p.18).

Manoff and Schudson (1986, p.6) argue: “Journalism, like any other story-telling activity, is a form of fiction, operating out of its own conventions and understandings.” According to Hartley (1996, p.83): “News is characterized by image, symbol, story telling, fiction, fantasy, propaganda and myth — all the baggage of textuality and culture which is traditionally dismissed by journalists.” Hartley may be correct, in a lecture theatre. In a newsroom, it is doubtful his definition would placate an irate reader.

News reporting and truth seeking have different purposes. Lippmann (quoted in Epstein 1975, p.3) argues “news” and “truth” collide in a few limited areas, such as in footie scores. Of course there can be quibbling about that too. Lippmann continues: “The function of news is to signalize an event. The function of truth is to bring to light the hidden facts, to set them into relation with each other, and make a picture of reality on which men can act.” The reporter gathers facts and opinions that often are in conflict and invites readers to determine “truth”. After all, “one person’s probable fact can be seen by another person as a probable lie. This is one reason why people have differences of opinion” (Henshall & Ingram 1991, p.5).

Drewe remarks that Fortune is, in part, about journalism’s inability to get to the truth (Brown 1998). The narrator speaks of journalism’s “facts” and “non-facts” in which “truth” is not necessarily true and “non-facts” are not necessarily false (Drewe 1986, p.129). Journalism imposes its own form of order on facts and events in order to draw readers’ attention to the day’s happenings. This violates the larger truth of a chaotic universe (p.234). But this is true in fiction as well. Tallis (1988 p.21) agrees realistic narrative fiction
distorts reality and notes Barthes’ comment (1977, p.146) that agreement between a text and the world outside it is an illusion. In that sense all stories are untrue, for to have life proceed in an orderly manner as it does within a text would be like trying to catch time by the tail (Sartre 1965, p.63).

Drewe’s fourth novel, *Our Sunshine* (1991), is told in the first person and based on the imagined life of Ned Kelly. He describes it as his “breakthrough novel” that “freed up” his style and his mind (Brown 1998). His intent was to conduct traditional research before beginning the writing. But he said that, faced with the biggest file on any Australian living or dead at the Mitchell Library, he randomly opened a book taken from a shelf and it fell open to a photograph — “the world’s first news picture” — of a Kelly gang member who had been hanged. The photograph saddened Drewe. It said much about class and ruling cultures and involved a “tasteless and macabre” display of the body. He said:

Having seen that I left behind the files and didn’t bother to look anymore at [Kelly’s] character, whether he was good or bad. I just went home and wrote the novel. The only thing I actually researched, I just made a list on one page of a notebook of the actual dates as to what happened and where. (Brown 1998)

In the novel’s author note (Drewe 1991 p.183) he cites Kelly letters and three books about the Kelly Gang as part of his research. *Our Sunshine* represents a courageous attempt to parrot Australia’s most storied character but it is not Drewe’s most successful novel in a commercial or critical sense.


Bennett (1989, p.9) notes the symbolism in the fact that characters in White’s and Stow’s fiction rarely read newspapers. Those in Drewe’s often do. In *Fortune* (Drewe 1986, p.21) “Bob” remarks
that: “. . . fiction turns up its nose at coincidence, life insists on it”. Whether Drewe believes life, fiction and journalism represent an effective triangulation for the would-be novelist is open to question. He says it is “hard to guess” what effect journalism had on shaping him as a fiction writer but agreed it was “invaluable” in giving him a “brusk shove” into what goes on in the world (Willbanks 1992, p.60).

I really like journalism. My whole way of thinking was, in a sense, trained by that. But there came a point when cynicism for its own sake ... look, it's a closed culture, like the police force, and outsiders are regarded suspiciously (Waldren 1996, p.13).

Novelist-journalist Matthew Condon (1998) supports Drewe. He says journalistic training and practice have assisted his own fiction but there is danger of being “enslaved by cynicism”.

In a lot of cases, the better the journalist the worse the novelist. If you can put a foot in both camps — one leg in humanity and the other in the observational side — then I think that's the trick (Condon 1998).

Another novelist-journalist, Susan Johnson (1998), says journalism has enabled her in terms of writing skills, research, discipline and observation. But she says the profession has a limited scope for a creative writer: “In journalism you’re showing part of the tapestry where in fiction you’re showing the back of the tapestry, a secret self.”

Bennett (1989, p.8) says Drewe’s prize-winning journalism has a strong narrative line. To some extent, he adds, his literary form was a built-in component, perhaps even a determining element, in his journalism. With equal force one can speculate his reportorial training and experience flavour his prose style, themes and worldview.

Drewe may have escaped journalism to rescue his creativity from what he sees as relentless journalistic conformity to a mechanistic worldview. However, it is difficult to imagine another profession that could have offered Drewe journalism’s breadth and depth of experience, one that binds writing to observation and interaction.
at a professional and public level. It is equally difficult to disagree with Bennett (1989, p.15) when he concludes that Drewe’s search, “extends well beyond the boundaries of journalism without denying the motivating power of that profession’s most persistent ideal, the ‘push for truth’.”

In sum, journalism is an exemplary training ground for anyone seeking to achieve, in fiction, the basis of what Zola calls the grand style — logic and clarity (Allott 1962, p. 317). A decade as a farmer or insurance salesperson rather than as a journalist would not have prevented Drewe from becoming a novelist. But it may have made him a lesser one. As a journalist he was best known for, and won prizes for, his investigative journalism. It can be argued that feature writing — at which Drewe also excelled — is a superior avenue to fiction.

**Feature writing and fiction**

In terms of technique feature writing has more in common with short fiction than news reporting. A feature story’s building blocks — characterisation, scene building, narrative, dialogue and description — are more aligned with a short story than a news story. Wolfe has written at length about feature writing that reads like a novel. He says feature writers regard newspapers as an overnight stopover en route to the final triumph: The novel (Wolfe & Johnson 1975, pp.17-18, 21).

Maugham, among others, has spoken of the creative benefits in drawing fictional characters from living models as opposed to pure invention. Describing real people and places is a feature writer’s regular task. Singer describes the feature writer’s basic challenge:

* If you walk into a room you have to describe what’s going on in that room. If you talk to a person, at some point you have to render a portrait of that person. What does the person look like? What are his or her physical characteristics and tics? How does he or she dress? But you don’t
dump all those details in the reader’s lap at once. The idea is to build a
scene, and you build it with these bits of exposition and narration, along
with dialogue (Singer 1994, p.87).

For the accomplished feature writer who can develop plotting
skills and identify and sustain an engaging theme, the novel is not
such a great leap. A “how to” feature writing book based on the
*Wall Street Journal Guide* recommends a number of novels as well a

Looking through these books, the student who wants to write better
nonfiction will be struck almost forcibly by the concerns he shares with
the novelist or short-story writer. No Chinese wall divides writers of fact
and writers of fiction. Much more unites them than separates them, a fact
the student will appreciate when he studies — not just reads but studies
— the work of the best novelists and short-story writers (Blundell 1986,
pp. 227-228).

The bridge between fact and fiction that Wolfe helped to build
in the “New Journalism” of the 1960s was based on scene-by-scene
construction, dialogue, third-person point of view and symbolic de-
tail. In the 1980s the New Journalist was supplanted by the Literary
Journalist, whose broadened strategies include “immersion” report-
ing, accuracy, structure and responsibility. The “literary journalists”
have claimed among their number Defoe, Twain, Crane, Heming-
way, Steinbeck, Capote, Mailer, Didion and McPhee (Sims &

An analysis of literary journalism and New Journalism would
show their convergence with fiction, or “faction”, and the journal-
istic recognition that narrative forms are effective in both genres.
Research by the American Society of Newspaper Editors has found
readers prefer storytelling to the inverted pyramid in news stories.
It recommends journalists employ narrative techniques to encour-
age readers to read more deeply into stories (ASNE 1993, p.24).

The best feature writing, along with the best investigative re-
porting, can be described as “high journalism”. Some may see that
as an oxymoron but it can be contended, on the basis of skills re-
quired, that the best journalism can rank with the best short fiction. After all, Pulitzer Prizes are awarded for both journalism and fiction. A Miles Franklin award is more prestigious than a Walkley Award but there is irony in the fact that a journalist, David Bentley, has won a Walkley Award for exposing the true identity of a Miles Franklin winner, Helen Demidenko/Darville.

**Fabulism, realism and The Academy**

A cynic, perhaps even a realist, might speculate that academics in the study of English have been reluctant to study the connections between reporting fact and writing fiction because it would require them to learn something about journalism. In a hierarchy of discourses journalists may be seen as foothill denizens, cultural outlaws who suppress good, promote evil and murder truth. Bennett observes that:

Such claims to ascendance of a certain notion of the artist’s role above that of the working journalist, and an implied lack of discernment and intelligence in the Australian reading public, have a distinctly aristocratic air, which is not dissimilar in some respects to the dandyism displayed by certain literary theorists of our time (Bennett 1989, p5).

Realism has been out of favour within The Academy and journalists-turned-novelists have been among its chief practitioners. According to Bennett (1989, p.1) university critics prefer “neo-fabulist” fiction writers in Australia as well as in Canada and the US. He believes this deserves investigation. Generally, fabulists and scholars articulate one side of the fabulist-realist debate and realistic writers and journalistic supporters articulate the other. Within this dichotomy is the larger debate among intellectuals whose platforms are from within The Academy and the media, or both. Clouding the debate is that realism and fabulism rarely if ever exist in pure, isolated form. Any work of fiction may consist of a little of one and a lot of the other. Considering them in binary oppo-
sition, however, can inform both ends of the argument and help identify middle ground.

Wolfe’s *A Man in Full* (1998) has renewed questions about the values of realism, reporting and entertainment in the novel form. Wolfe remarks:

Even the obvious relationship between reporting and the major novels — one has only to think of Balzac, Dickens, Gogol, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, and, in fact, Joyce — is something that literary historians deal with only in a biographical sense (1975, pp.27-28).

Devine (1999, p.9) wonders what effect Wolfe’s “microscopically thorough reporting” would have on neo-fabulism and the readability of Australian novels. A risk exists of over-reaching and artificial polarisation in discussing realism and fabulism. As noted, integrations can occur between fabulist and realistic writing. One form does not obviate the other within the same text. The same kind of melding occurs with fact and fiction. Zavarzadeh uses the term “fictual” in noting the factual and fictional converge in a state of unresolved tension:

. . . the consciousness, engulfed in fabulous reality and overwhelmed by the naked actuality, articulates its experience of an extreme situation. This puzzling merging (is) a zone of experience where the factual is not secure or unequivocal but seems preternaturally strange and eerie (1976, p.56).

A writer’s journalistic background does not necessarily lock him or her into realism and its fact-based conventions. Frank Moorhouse has long been identified as a “new fiction” writer. Marquez, a prominent fabulist writer identified with magical realism, says he can see no difference between journalism and a novel: “The sources are the same, the material is the same, the resources and the language are the same” (Plimpton 1985, p.318).

Turner (1986 pp.135,145) notes the term fabulism originated in *The Fabulators* (Scholes 1967). He says it is story creation less dependent on reality than on invented worlds and constructions. Others have used words like fantastic, picaresque, satirical,
metaphysical, allegorical and surrealist. Fabulism also may contain
elements of science fiction and myth.

In contrast, realism is what Harry Levin calls “the willed ten-
dency of art to approximate to reality” (Bullock et al. 1988, p.725).
It is a method, not an aim (Tallis 1988, p.195). Tallis argues that:
“The ‘post-modern’ novel often seems as if it has been written by
academics for academics and is often about academics and even,
explicitly as well as implicitly, about literary theory” (p.98). The
anti-realist stance may be apprehended by Johnson’s paraphrase of
McLuhan, who posited that to comprehend an environment one
must transcend the consciousness that traps one within it (Johnson
1971, p.xii).

According to Wolfe the intelligentsia has always had contempt
for the realistic novel. It is:

... a form that wallows so enthusiastically in the dirt of everyday life and
the dirty secrets of class envy and that, still worse, is so easily understood
and obviously relished by the mob, i.e., the middle class (Wolfe 1988,
p.47).

Turner (1986, p.135) contends realism began its fall in Australia
in the 1950s as White’s books began to question natural truths. The
Academy has used as its catchcry White’s “dun-coloured” remark
(Lawson 1994, p.27). Turner (p.2) says the critical preference for
White over Hardy reflects a desire to identify Australian writers
comparable to the greats in the English literary canon. He cites
Docker’s identification of the “metaphysical ascendancy” in deter-
mining the dominant critical model for the best Australian writing.
That involves a search for writing that is universal as well as meta-
physical. Turner (p.143) believes there is a common assumption
that “skepticism and illusion-puncturing realism are Australian vir-
tues”. This, he says, does not adequately value individual effort,
hope and the possibility of change. That echoes Barthes’ (1977,
p.143) reference to “the castrating objectivity of the realist novel-
ist”.
Turner’s views have merit. Indeed he may have been justified in using the word cynicism instead of skepticism. However more weight should be given to reader responsibility and intelligence. Tallis (1988, p.192) argues fantasy imposes passivity on the reader: He either swallows what he is told or is excluded from the story altogether. Readers are not empty receptacles without reference points. They prefer facts to fancy and realism over surrealism in judging how to live, or change, their lives. In offering a picture of the world, skepticism has primacy over its antithesis: gullibility.

Realism and journalism have a duty to puncture illusions because they are illusions. For any society seeking transformation realism can offer the key ingredient: A mirror, however flawed. Ultimately the impetus for hope and change springs from self-recognition. Therefore the ultimate impact of any writing is a reader function, not a writer function. Journalists must communicate to the masses and, in that context, it is worth noting Bennett’s speculation about a critic’s source of envy: Journalists have an audience (Bennett 1989, p.5).

Fabulism is not a democratising, unifying model. It is an alienating one because it is implausible. According to Tallis (1988, p.99): “Implausibility is no longer the sad result of incompetence but the outcome of an intention to transcend or eschew the conventional modes of competence”. Writing without reality’s friction, the fabulist can invent new worlds and new rules: “How much easier it is to play tennis without the net” (Tallis 1988, p.108).

Lever observes: “The seeking of transcendence through the novel has remained a strong element in Australian fiction ever since White proposed that god was in a ‘gob of spittle’” (Lever 1998, p.329). White (1981, pp.99-100) speaks of being troubled by the relationship between fact and fiction in Australian novels and the tendency of novelists to “explore an autobiographical vein instead of launching into that admittedly disturbing marriage between life and imagination”. He says journalists are a different breed from expatri-
ate writers who starve in the absence of their natural sustenance. Journalists, he continues, survive on air roots. “I often envy them their freedom as I sit endlessly at my desk.” White (Lawson 1994, p.273) also argues the realistic novel is superficial and remote from art. “A novel should heighten life, should give one an illuminating experience. It shouldn’t set out what you know already.”

In that view the resulting fiction is a formality, a mere reshaping of prosaic clay. Life is dull. Why keep showing it to us? Meanwhile the post-modern novelists are locked away in their studies, their minds haemorrhaging myths, fables, tale, legends and sagas. It is they against reality and with so much arrayed against it — mainly hallucination — reality can never win. Of course White was not condemning all realism, only the journalistic brand. As Ferrier notes: “It is in fact White’s simultaneous engagement with the ‘dun-coloured’ and the metaphysical that gives his texts . . . their peculiar force” (Ferrier 1998, p.193).

It also should be noted White travelled extensively and this, as opposed to sitting endlessly at his desk, helped shape his worldview. White said: “... in spite of not writing what could be called naturalistic novels you have to keep in touch with fact, which I feel I do”. (White 1973, p.138) He added: “I enjoy . . . the accumulation of down-to-earth detail. All my novels are an accumulation of detail. I’m a bit of a bower-bird” (White 1973, p.139).

Condon, like Drewe, has made intertextual reference to White in his fiction. In The Lulu Magnet (1996, p.474) a character: “. . . ran his experienced eye over the dun-coloured undergarment”. According to Condon: “He was a monumental bitch . . . but there’s some truth in what he says” (Condon 1998). In a 1981 profile Drewe describes White as Australia’s most distinguished writer. White tells him: “Unfortunately or not, I was given eyes, hyperactive emotions and an unconscious apt to take over from me” (Drewe 1981, p.27).

In detailing the flight from traditional realism Lever (1998, pp.313-314) cites collections of “new fiction” in books produced
by Daniel (1988) and Kiernan (1977). Two writers are common to both books: Peter Carey and Murray Bail. Daniel describes the “New Novel” as:

   A prismatic play of mind, lucid and absurdist, a fabric of hazard, paradox, contradiction, instability — the instability that quantum physics shows us is at the core of things. Objects, things, are surfaces behind which there is an absurd or fantastic reality, sometimes surrealistic, shadows on the surface of the real (Daniel 1988, p.21).

Daniel draws her title from Twain’s observation in *More Tramps Abroad* (1897, p.107) that Australia is “like the most beautiful lies”. In her introduction she notes Carey used the quotation at the beginning of *Illywhacker* (Carey 1985) and that Kiernan used it in his book’s title. She continues: “Peter Carey also quotes Twain on the lies of Australian history.” But Twain was using a simile: “It does not read like history, but like the most beautiful lies.” This does not mean Australian history was a lie. It was like a lie, albeit a beautiful one. In fact it was true. Daniel goes on to say we sometimes are “duped by [realism’s] untruth” and that: “For me the paradox is that, in the end, Liars are more truthful, because they tell things the way they are in reality.” There are multiple ironies in Twain’s appropriation by the fabulist camp. He had worked as a journalist for 20 years before his first novel was published and once said:

   Reporting is the best school in the world to get knowledge of human beings, human nature, and ways. Just think of the wide range of [a reporter’s] acquaintanceship, his experience of life and society (Branch 1969, p.2).

   The context of Twain’s observation does not support the fabulists. He had been discussing the origins of Melbourne and reported his discovery that the city’s first house was built by a convict. He wrote: “Australian history is almost always picturesque indeed, it is so curious and strange, that is in itself the chiefest novelty the country has to offer, and so it pushes the other novelties into second and third place.”
Twain was not referring to *lies* but *novelties*. Novelties are not the inventions fabulists so admire. They are the kinds of things journalists are paid to uncover. But this is the greatest irony: Twain crossed the Pacific to discover Australia’s strange truths and transmit them in a form of reportage to an American readership. That would not have happened had he sat endlessly at his desk. Nor would *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* been written, at least in the form in which it appeared, without his experience as an itinerant journalist (Fishkin, 63, 71, 78).

The Twain anecdote is not of great moment. It is symbolic, however, of the debate between realists and fabulists over fiction’s fundamental methods and aspirations. Wolfe, for instance, believes the power of great writers “is made possible only by the fact that they first wired their work into the main circuit, which is realism”. The fabulist who gives up realism in search of “higher realities” in myth is like the engineer who eschews electricity because it has “been done” (Wolfe and Johnson 31, 57).

**Death of the author, birth of the critic**

According to Wolfe (1989, p.53) writing is 65 per cent material and 35 per cent talent. That means finding the world in the world, not inside one’s own head, which would seem more conducive to neurosis than art. Realism gave verisimilitude to the works of Dickens, Balzac, Hemingway, Dostoevsky, Conrad, Faulkner and many other novelists. Bonet (1958, p.36) argues realism is possible only “when drawn from living sources. Indirect observation leads to irrealism, to a conventional literature, to the expression of an invented or intuited reality”.

Wolfe (1989, pp.52, 55) has spoken of the symbolism in Zola’s *Germinal* of the workhorse that was lowered, as a foal, into a mine where it ultimately would be buried because it was too big for the shaft. Such detail was possible because Zola had ventured 50
metres below the earth. Sinclair Lewis moved from New England to Kansas City to write *Elmer Gantry*. Others went to war or sea in the name of experiential primacy. In contrast the fabulist — or the “whimlings” as Tallis (1998, p.101) calls them — seem rarely to venture beyond their own minds. The difficulty for anti-realists is that the best fictive material is in observation, not fantasy.

Barthes (1977, p.148) believes a text’s unity lies in its destination rather than its origins and that the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author. Brady (1988, p.472) observes the deconstructionists deny a text’s reference to anything outside of itself. That’s like a seismologist who studies earthquakes without reference to their origins. Yet Barthes (1988, p.147) argues that giving a text an author imposes a limit on the text. Identifying the author means the text can be “explained”. The critic can claim victory. In Barthes’ halcyon world there are no authors, only texts, readers and scholars. Least of all, one presumes, are there journalists.

Foucault (1979, pp.159-60) calls for a culture in which fiction would not be limited by an author. He foresees a time when the author-function will disappear. But it would be “pure romanticism”, he concedes, “to imagine a culture in which the fictive would operate in an absolutely free state . . . without passing through something like a necessary or constraining figure”. If only clouds could write.

In an author-less Foucault world literary festivals would be problematic. Who could readers turn to for interpretation? Who could supply a humanising element? The obvious answer: The very ones who call for the “death of the author” — critics and scholars. There is some validity to Foucault’s conclusion, which paraphrases Beckett: “What difference does it make who is speaking?” The obvious answer is that, in modern culture, it matters to the reader, not to mention the author. In pre-literate cultures, however, it may not have mattered. The speaker would seem to be irrelevant in oral-based traditions. Stories were told and retold through genera-
tions, whether they provided primitive infotainment or facilitated cultural cohesion and transmission.

This more readily fits Barthes’ (1988, p.46) argument that a text is not a line of words but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash: “The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture”. To argue that all writers are, in a sense, plagiarists, implies a curious definition of originality. It would be equally valid to opine every text has been written by one author, the universe’s infinite hand, and that every breath we take is linked to every breath ever taken. Humanity is, indeed, the sum total of all it is and all it has ever been. But it is, after all, made up of individuals. Some are authors.

Realism and fabulism are in a parallel “push for truth”, crossing and recrossing boundaries between them. Journalism is a companion whether as a critic, observer or participant. Although often unwanted and sometimes ignored it too can arrive at important versions of “truth”. It may be posited that fabulism’s truth can be more universal but it has a tendency, as Stevens contends, to invent without discovery (quoted in Tallis 1988, p.108).

The realistic writer not only is better equipped to find “truth” but also to communicate it. Walker asserts Wolfe values an unspecific realism but she acknowledges its power:

The view that fabulous or self-conscious narrative is incapable of confronting recognisable experiences and questionable ideologies is, of course, untenable, but obviously writing which addresses historically recognisable injustices has a particularly urgent moral force. (Walker 1987, p.105)

Wolfe (1989, p.5) insists factual details do more than create the authenticity that makes a novel gripping or absorbing. They are essential for literature’s greatest effects. If prominent fiction writers continue to ignore them journalists will claim life’s richness as well as its literary high ground. To paraphrase Wolfe, if Australia’s
fabulists continue to eschew realism they will leave the realists a significant little plot of ground: Australia (Wolfe & Johnson 1975, p.45).

The stuff of realism does not come easily and novelists who sit endlessly at their desks may, in a sense, hasten the death of the author. That would mean the birth of the critic, not the reader. In a 1965-1988 Australian literature survey Bennett (1988, pp.33-34) says a fascination with the reader and the process of reading has not resulted in the “death of the author”. He contends “literature” has attained a broad definition that includes essays, journalism, autobiography and historical writings as well as the traditional literary genres of novels, poems and plays. “High” and “low” culture, he argues, no longer are distinguishable.

If that were fully acknowledged by The Academy the links between journalism and fiction may achieve more recognition in scholarly study.

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ASNE. See American Society of Newspaper Editors.
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**Appendix: Australian novelists/journalists**

<p>| Adams, Arthur | Barken, Alan |
| Atchison, Ray | Bartlett, Norman |
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| Atkinson, Hugh | Bell, Betty |
| Attiwill, K.A. | Birmingham, John |
| Baker, Candida | Blunden, Godfrey |
| Baranay, Inez | Bosi, Pino |
| Boyd, A.J.    | Dickins, Barry |
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| Bridges, Roy   | Dwyer, J.F.  |
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| Brown, Max     | Ercole, Velia|
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| Carey, Gabrielle  | Fitzgerald, John Daniel |
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| Condon, Matthew | Hewett, Dorothy |
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| Costello, Elizabeth | Hungerford, T.A.G. |
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| Cross, Zona    | Jefferis, Barbara |
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Coverage of Australia by CNN World Report and US television network news

Mark D. Harmon

This content analysis contrasts CNN World Report and US television network news stories regarding Australia, using the CNN World Report Index and the Vanderbilt Television News (US networks) Archive and Index, both from 1987 to 1996. Significant differences emerged in the Australia topics chosen for presentation in these different news environments. US network stories typically were breaking news “voice-overs” of sports, disasters, animals, national politics, and crime. The two had similar percentages of soft news, but CNN World Report had significantly more background reporter packages on health, culture, economics, education, science, the military, and the environment.

News coverage of Australia is a marvellous case study of the news selection, or gatekeeping, processes at work in US network TV newscasts. The great distance from the US and network budget cuts regarding foreign bureaus (Matusow 1986, Sanit 1992) work against routine coverage using the network’s own resources. As with all international coverage on US networks, stories must get past a “gatekeeper”, typically a producer or assignment editor, mindset that stories must have a strong visual element, universal appeal, and/or an obvious US connection to make
it onto the newscast. Of course, one of the best ways to see the effect of gatekeeping is to note what happens in its absence, such as in a program like Cable News Network’s *World Report*.

CNN’s unusual arrangement with international producers allows each contributor who submits one news package per month to make use of all transmitted programming for the entire month in his or her own domestic news programming. Occasionally producers of other CNN news programs use World Report packages within those programs. The CNN World Report Television Archive, partially funded by CNN, is maintained at Texas Tech University for academic research purposes.

Another important television news archive is the Vanderbilt Television News Archive and Index. It has taped and logged all US network television evening newscasts (ABC, CBS, and NBC) since October 1968. Both have on-line indices. Thus, the CNN World Report can be combined with the Vanderbilt Index to examine news selection in very different news environments; and, indirectly, to see the effect of that environment on news selection.

**Literature review**

The term “gatekeeper” was used by David Manning White to describe the news selection processes of a wire editor at a newspaper. When White (1950) asked that editor to write on copy why he selected or rejected the stories, White got answers that mirrored traditional news principles: significant, controversial, unusual, and interesting to the audience.

Harmon (1989) conducted a similar gatekeeping participant observation and content analysis study using Cincinnati television news producers. He found that traditional news principles made up roughly half the stated reasons, but that the remaining gatekeeper choices revolved around three questions: Will this story interest all or most of my viewers? Can this story be shown to my viewers?
How will this story fit with the rhythm, flow, and content of the rest of the newscast?

Berkowitz (1990) extended Harmon’s work, and found a significant amount of gatekeeping by assignment editors as well as producers. He also found in an Indianapolis case study and participant observation that “news selection decisions were based on several considerations in addition to news values. News content seemed to be built from information that was easy to explain, that would provide a good audience draw, and that could be assembled with efficiency of effort (p. 66).”

A couple of authors have looked at the view of Australia selected by US network TV news gatekeepers. Breen (1996) coded all US network television newscast (ABC, CBS, NBC) coverage of Australia as noted in the Vanderbilt TV News Index and Abstracts from that work’s inception in 1968 through to 1995. He found an overall decrease in attention to Australia. The 1976 through 1985 numbers were 256 total stories, while only 185 in the span of 1986 to 1995. The three US networks were very similar in news judgment regarding Australia, and the trend was toward trivialisation.

Breen used an 11-category coding scheme. His tallies showed rather modest and declining attention to Australian legal/political news, and not much US news attention either to matters of crime, art or music, religion, or science and education. Environment got some attention, but that may have been an artifact of his coding scheme including disasters such as brush fires in this category. Sport attention was uneven; it could get a couple of stories a year or as many as 20 to 40 in an America’s Cup year.

Breen’s work expands the findings by Larson (1982) who used a sampling technique of the Vanderbilt Television News Index and Archive. Larson selected about 35 weeknights per year on all three US networks, approximately 13 per cent of the weeknight newscasts for the entire period examined, 1972 to 1981. He found Australia is among the “blind spot” nations, mostly in the southern
hemisphere, barely covered by US network television newscasts (0.7 per cent of all sampled coverage). Australia did not even make the top 50 nations covered in those newscasts.

Researchers also have begun to explore the news content of CNN World Report. Dilawari et al (1991), for example, looked at the program from the point of view of how many “development” stories were submitted, and from what countries. The researchers discovered that more than 60 per cent of all news contributed to CNN World Report is development news, specifically economic activities, social services, culture, science, and education. Developing countries in 1987-88 contributed a large portion of the development stories, but by 1989 developed countries were contributing almost as much.

Those researchers concluded:

Despite the fact that two-thirds of the contributors to CNN World Report are from developing countries, a ratio which did not change across time, just over 50 per cent of the news contributed by the developed countries was development-oriented. This suggests a tendency on the part of all countries to present more development-oriented news when a world-wide audience is watching. CNN World Report perhaps fosters a desire to present a certain image of their cultures and societies to the world (pp. 132-133).

Kongkeo (1989) also addressed development news and found no significant differences in the amount of such news submitted by different non-Western news organisations. Kongkeo found that international and domestic politics, economics, military and defence were the most common topic areas; development, self-sufficiency and political independence were the most common “themes”, while government officers and politicians were the most common actors within news stories.

Rytel and Harmon (1997) analysed CNN World Report contributions in two different environments, Polish submissions before and after the fall of communism. They found substantial changes in
the latter group: more hard news, more sources per story, more conflicting opinions, and more coverage of conflict.

The news environments between US networks and CNN World Report clearly are decidedly different. The US networks have a small news hole, a dearth of their own reporters on the scene (made worse by network budget cuts in the mid-1980s), and strong concerns not only for traditional news values but also for maintaining audience, flow, and pacing. On the other hand, CNN World Report has a large news hole, contributing reporters around the globe, no newsroom gatekeeping, and at least the potential for use of the news reports for promotional fluff pieces about beautiful beaches and colorful festivals.

Quite frankly, however, the available research is too limited to permit strong hypotheses related to how the two different news environments yield different news choices. Furthermore, absent any interviews with the gatekeepers themselves as to the reasons for differences, any observations as to motivations for news choices only can be preliminary.

**Methods**

The researcher chose to contrast CNN World Report and US Network news stories regarding one country, Australia. Australia was chosen for several reasons. It is a developed country, mixed governmental and commercial broadcasting, English-speaking, a United States ally. Thus, language, journalistic and cultural traditions, and political differences would not prove major obstacles. Nevertheless, it is distant enough as to not be covered easily by a network’s own resources.

This project used the CNN World Report Index record of every Australia report used from the inception of the program in 1987 to 1996. The researcher also selected every network television news story with a keyword Australia in the Vanderbilt Index. These sto-
ries were coded by form (reporter package, anchor package, multiple packages, voice overs, sound bites only, readers, and commentaries). The coding also kept track of story length (in the ten-second increments used by the Vanderbilt TV Index), date, and topic. The topics came from the existing coding scheme used for World Report. That scheme is in Table 1. Two archivists for World Report served as coders. Their intercoder agreement was 73 per cent. In cases of disagreement, the principal archivist’s coding was used.

Findings and discussion

Some clear differences did emerge in the Australia topics chosen for presentation in these different news environments (Table 1). US networks emphasized sports, disasters, animals, national politics, and crime. A review of these stories easily could be called “sailing ships, tennis, brush fires, and funny critters”. World Report also covered sports and animals extensively, but also gave significant attention to health and culture (Table 2). The high number of “other” stories is an artifact of sloppy and inexact coding in the early days of the program; this is slowly being remedied by the current archivist.

Table 1: US Networks v. CNN World Report, Australia Report Topics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>US Networks # stories</th>
<th>CNN World Report # stories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animals</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Diplomacy | 8 | 1
Disaster | 16 | 3
Drugs | 1 | 0
Economics | 0 | 9
Education | 0 | 6
Environment | 3 | 19
Health | 4 | 33
Media | 2 | 0
Military | 0 | 7
Music | 0 | 5
National Elections | 3 | 1
National Politics | 10 | 1
Other | 0 | 34
Poverty | 0 | 3
Protest | 5 | 4
Religion | 5 | 3
Refugees | 0 | 2
Science | 1 | 14
Sports | 21 | 22
Terrorism | 5 | 0
Tourism | 0 | 8
Transportation | 2 | 0
Women | 0 | 6

Totals | 108 | 248

Table 2: Top five story topics by percentage of stories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>US Networks</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>CNN World Report</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sport</td>
<td>19.44</td>
<td>Animals</td>
<td>13.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disaster</td>
<td>14.81</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>13.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animals</td>
<td>9.26</td>
<td>Health</td>
<td>13.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Politics</td>
<td>9.26</td>
<td>Sport</td>
<td>8.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>8.33</td>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>8.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
One could expect differences in form. CNN World Report is almost exclusively videotaped reporter packages. In sharp contrast, the US networks used only 50 reporter packages over the entire time period. More than 82 per cent of Australia stories were either simple anchor readers or voice overs. Australia apparently is a “kicker” story for many gatekeepers, a good opportunity to show quick video of an unusual, amusing event or animal. These reader and voice-over stories usually run about 23 to 30 seconds (Table 3).

Table 3: Manner of Presentation, US Network Australia Coverage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Mean Length (seconds)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reader</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>45.317</td>
<td>22.940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice-over</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>36.858</td>
<td>30.099</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporter package</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>15.106</td>
<td>119.787</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commentary</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.906</td>
<td>103.333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anchor package</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.906</td>
<td>130.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sound bite only</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>.906</td>
<td>30.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple packages</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another set of striking differences (with clear and obvious links to the news environment) emerge when one arbitrarily collapses the existing categories into three divisions: hard news, background news, and soft news (Table 4). The networks veer sharply toward the hard news stories with obvious timeliness, conflict, and significance. The networks and CNN World Report do not differ greatly in percentage of stories devoted to soft news (the kicker phenomenon at work), but the CNN World Report has significantly more background, or topical analysis pieces. And, yes, a few puff pieces about tourism do get into the mix, but hardly dominate the CNN World Report Australia stories.
Table 4: Classification of story topics: hard, background, and soft

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Report %</th>
<th>US Networks %</th>
<th>CNN World</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(N=108)</td>
<td>(N=214)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard: Crime, Diplomacy, Disaster, National Elections, National Politics, Protest, and Terrorism</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft: Animals, Art, Culture, Media, Music, Sports, Tourism</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding US network TV newscasts, the findings from this analysis neatly parallel the Breen and Larson observations. Australian stories rarely appear on US network TV newscasts. Network crews infrequently venture to Australia to create reporter packages. Instead, news is gathered from wire services and the video of others. This leads to brief accounts of brush fires, sailing races, tennis matches, and amusing features frequently highlighting unusual animals.

The highly competitive gatekeeping process in US network TV news means that all stories selected must interest all or most of the audience. This process works together with a news environment where many Australia stories simply aren’t on the agenda or available easily. Look for this pattern to change briefly when network crews descend on Australia for the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney. This should be especially evident in sports stories and on the network having the broadcast rights to the games. However, these long-term patterns of scant and generally trivial attention to Australia are based on real factors that should re-assert themselves shortly after the Olympic flame is extinguished.
References


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There has been much recent academic and popular interest in the media consumption habits of young adults, especially within the context of the Generation X phenomenon. Much of this discussion has argued the current generation of young people are consuming less news media than ever before. Using a range of primary and secondary statistical sources, this paper reviews youth news media consumption in Australia with particular reference to the past two decades. The paper finds some evidence to support claims of a youth exodus from conventional forms of journalism. However, the situation is not as clear-cut as some would suggest.

Regardless of how we define the youth audience for journalism, it appears there has been an ongoing concern over its size. However, compounding the problem is the fact that young people appear to be reading, watching and listening to increasingly less news and current affairs than ever before. While such a situation may be “somewhat surprising” considering it comes at a time when the public has more access to information than ever before (Evard 1996), the accelerating decline in young people’s news media use is a recurring theme in contemporary discussions of journalism in Australia and elsewhere (See for example Katz 1994a;
Sternberg 1995; Sternberg 1997a; Turner 1996a, 1996b). Indeed, the issue was the focus of a special conference, “Young People and the Media”, held by The Australian Centre for Independent Journalism in 1995, and formed the basis of an episode of the popular television current affairs pastiche-cum-parody, *Frontline* (1997).

Cobb-Walgren (1990, p.340) and Taverner Research (1995, p.1, Appendix 2, p.2) point to the historical concern over youth newspaper audiences and the medium’s lack of popularity with young people. Comparatively little research, however, has been conducted into the young audience for television news and current affairs. Another factor also makes the task of cross-examining youth news media use extremely difficult. Questions regarding young people’s use of journalism are relatively easy to determine when examined in the context of newspapers and television news and current affairs which are regarded as “general” media and genres. However, news and current affairs on radio and in magazines are quite different matters. These target niche audiences and, in the case of radio, are not discretely measured. However, in America, Katz (1994a, p.31) has argued that “[t]he young are abandoning conventional journalism in stunning and accelerating numbers” and are “fighting for and building their own powerful media”.

This paper is a review of primary and secondary statistical sources regarding young people’s news media use in Australia. For the purposes of this article, primary sources may be defined as “official” audience data on both print and broadcast media, gathered by the organisations that service Australian media outlets; namely, Roy Morgan Research, A.G.B. McNair and A.C. Nielsen. Unfortunately, due to cost restrictions and the detailed nature of the data presented, all primary data is restricted to the Brisbane youth audience only. However, with only a few exceptions (mentioned below), the media habits of Brisbane’s youth demographics are largely similar to those of youth audiences in other capital cities.
A broader picture of youth media use is provided by the secondary data. Secondary sources refer to discussions of youth media consumption levels contained in market research reports, policy documents, academic research and media reports. I have attempted to give these a national focus, as well as drawing on overseas research where applicable.

Reviewing youth media use in this way is important due to the “paucity” of relevant information in the area (Johnstone 1990/1, p.173). Several authors from within cultural studies (Mungham & Pearson 1976; Hall & Jefferson 1975; Hebdige 1979; Grossberg 1992; Lewis 1992; Hall & Whannel 1994) show how the electronic media, in particular, expanded to cash in on the post-World War II youth culture boom. However, while much attention is devoted to children’s media habits (See for example Melbourne’s 1995 World Summit on Television and Children and the Australia Broadcasting Authority’s Kids Talk TV: “Super Wickid” or “Dum” report (Sheldon et al 1996)), Bissnette (1990, p.55) criticises Australian media researchers’ “established reticence” towards examining the media consumption of teenagers. The situation only appears to be worse with people aged between 18 and 24, who straddle the categories of teen and young adult1 and are virtually absent from the literature.

Also, very few existing studies have attempted to examine young people’s media use over an extended period in order to understand changes and continuities in consumption patterns. This is a particular problem considering one of the primary motivations for studying youth media use is for its predictive capacity of future adult consumption (McLeod & Brown 1976). The study of youth media use (and youth culture in general) “is both piecemeal and historically contingent” (Tait 1993, p.41). Much of the research available on the topic of young people and their media use only seems to multiply and extend the confusion and mythologies surrounding the topic.
Recently, much of this mythology has revolved around the Generation X phenomenon. Through his 1991 novel *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture*, Canadian author Douglas Coupland without doubt “created a monster” (France 1994, p.11). Indeed, in the years following the novel’s publication, it seemed as if the already bizarre and contradictory world of youth culture had been transformed forever because of the term. Generation X has been used to describe groups ranging in age from about 13 to 40 and has developed into what Coupland himself (1995, p.72) describes as “demographic pornography”. The world seems to have gone “berserk” (McCaughan 1995a) over Generation X and its numerous spin-off labels such as slackers, twentysomethings and Baby Busters. It has spawned more discussion about youth culture than “freckles on a red-head” (Ritchie 1995, p.9). Much of this discussion about Generation X has referred to its media use, tapping into concerns about young people’s seeming abandonment of traditional journalistic forms (See for example Rushkoff 1994a; Tulich 1994; The Media Report 1995; Sessions Stepp 1996).

It is Generation X’s almost natural status as a descriptor of young people today and its applicability to their media use which is the second main concern of this paper. Elsewhere (Sternberg 1997b) I have argued that while Generation X does have some applicability to late twentieth century youth culture, the term has been so abused by the media that it is now almost worthless. However, what can the labelling of young people as belonging to Generation X tell us about their news media use?

**Newspapers**

Beavis: Words suck.

Butt-head: Yeah. If I wanted to read, I’d go to school.

For many, the youth audience has become “the Holy Grail of newspaper demographics — much pursued but so elusive” (Gibbons 1995, p.5). In particular, interest from publishers has been directed towards increasing the frequency of habitual newspaper reading (Taverner Research 1995, Appendix 2, p.7). Katz (1994b, p.50) observes that “for millions of Americans, especially young ones, newspapers have never played a significant role”. The decline in U.S. youth newspaper reading has been well documented by Cobb-Walgren (1990), Taverner Research (1995) and Katz (1994a). Similar problems have also been observed in nations and regions as diverse as Japan (de Jong 1992, p.57), Hong Kong (Turnbull 1993), the Pacific Islands (Evans 1992) and Finland (Finnish Newspaper Association 1995).

Although Australian research by Sachs et al (1991, p.19) found that morning newspapers were read “once a week to every day” by 69 per cent and evening papers by 45 per cent of the 12-17 year-olds they surveyed, some local market research has gone as far as not to include under-24s in surveys of newspaper buying or reading (Shoebridge 1990, p.91). This is not without some justification: 25 per cent of 14 to 17-year-olds in New South Wales read no newspapers at all Monday through Saturday (Taverner Research 1995, Appendix 2, p.2). However, some research suggests that when the young read newspapers, they prefer the Sunday press and tabloids (ANOP 1985; John Fairfax and Sons Pty Ltd 1993; Cf. Karmatz 1985).

Cobb-Walgren (1990, p.340) points out that researchers had previously explained adolescent non-readership of newspapers in terms of a “maturation effect” (Henke 1985, p.432; ANOP 1985; Sachs et al 1991, p.19; Taverner Research 1995, p.1), whereby “young non-readers will acquire the newspaper habit as they grow older and mature” (Cobb-Walgren 1990, p.340). However, more recently, it has been suggested that “readers lost in youth may be lost forever” (Cobb-Walgren 1990, p.340). Indeed, “[e]ditors are be-
coming increasingly concerned about the low levels of newspaper reading among younger members of the public” (Wanta & Gao 1994, p.926, emphasis added). As Margaret King, education officer for Fairfax Newspapers in Sydney points out: “. . . I believe they [editorial staff] think there has been a lost generation of readers . . .” (1995).

Monday - Friday readership

On the surface, this notion of a “lost generation of readers” does seem to be supported when we examine Figures 1 and 2, which depict Brisbane’s Monday-Friday and weekly newspaper readership in the 14-17 and 18-24 year-old age-groups between 1974-5 and 1992-3.

The decline in 14-17 year-old readership for both the afternoon tabloid the Telegraph, from 54.7 per cent to 17.1 per cent of the age-group and the consistently low readership figures for the morning tabloid, the Daily Sun, which had a mean readership in the demographic of only 17.2 per cent, are in keeping with the more general declines in readership that eventually saw both newspapers fold. Interestingly, however, both papers’ lack of popularity challenges the notion that tabloids are more popular with young people. For 14-17 year-old readers of the Courier-Mail, readership dropped by about half in the 19-year period, from 60.9 per cent to 31.6 per cent. In terms of frequency of readership, this data suggests that in 1992-3 68.4 per cent of 14-17 year-olds in Brisbane did not read their city’s daily broadsheet newspaper, which is the only daily paper published in the city2. Readership of Australia’s national dailies, the Australian and the Financial Review are both extremely low, never reaching above 6.7 per cent and 1.7 per cent of the demographic for each paper respectively. More importantly, since about 1989, there has been a downward trend in readership for both papers. Readership of weekly local newspapers is surprisingly high, with a mean readership for general and Quest publications of 59.9 per cent and 48.8 per cent respectively. Apart from 1981-2 and 1982-3,
Figure 1: Brisbane Monday-Friday and weekly newspaper readership
14-17 years

Source: Roy Morgan Research

Note: Quest Newspapers is owned by News Ltd. Roy Morgan did not distinguish between Quest and other newspapers in its surveys until 1991-92.
when they were first counted in the surveys, 14-17 year-old readership of local papers was larger than the same demographic’s readership of the *Courier-Mail* by never any less than 9.2 per cent. Such findings regarding the popularity of local newspapers are in keeping with market research conducted in Sydney (Filomena Bafsky Research 1993).

The 18-24 year-old readership for the *Telegraph* declined rapidly from 55 per cent of the age-bracket to 24.4 per cent in 1987-88 when the paper closed. *Daily Sun* readership was also never high, peaking at 29.8 per cent in 1985-6, before bottoming-out at 18.2 per cent in 1990-1. The 18-24 year-old demographic’s readership of the *Courier-Mail* dropped from 59.7 per cent to 48.2 per cent. Readership of the *Australian*, although low overall, declined from 11.3 per cent in 1974-75 to 3.1 per cent in 1992-93. *Financial Review* readership was comparatively more consistent, although once again very low, with an 18-24 year-old readership of no higher than 3.3 per cent for the 19-year period. Such findings are consistent with those obtained by Finger (1994), who in a survey of 18-24 year-olds in Brisbane found that only 16.6 per cent of respondents cited newspapers as their “source of most news”, 7 per cent listed them as the “best source of news for young people” and only 18.8 per cent spent between one and two hours reading a paper each day. Seventy-five per cent of young people surveyed said they spent less than one hour per day reading newspapers. Figure 2 also shows that readership of local newspapers is once again strong, regularly higher than that for the *Courier-Mail*.

**Saturday readership**

One of the major flaws in the Taverner Research study of 18-24 year-old newspaper reading habits is that it makes no distinction between weekday and weekend reading. Given the increased leisure-time experienced by young people on weekends, we could logically expect newspaper readership to increase as a result (cf. PANPA Bulletin 1996, p.67). For example, in New South Wales, 43
Figure 2: Weekday newspaper readership 18-24 years

Source: Roy Morgan Research
per cent of 14-17 year olds and 37 per cent of 18-24 year-olds only read a newspaper on the weekend (Taverner Research 1995, Appendix 2, p.2). This trend of increased weekend readership is carried over into figures for the 14-17 and 18-24 year-old markets for Saturday newspapers in Brisbane, as depicted in Figures 3 and 4.

The first thing that becomes apparent about Saturday readership of the *Courier-Mail* in the 14-17 year-old market, is that unlike Monday-Friday readership, it has remained relatively stable across the 19-year period. Readership for 14-17 year-olds has dropped only slightly from 64.4 per cent of the demographic in 1973-74 to 59.7 per cent in 1992-93. Mean Saturday readership for 14-17 year-olds is 56.9 per cent, as opposed to 47.3 per cent for Monday-Friday readership. Readership of the *Weekend Australian* is higher also, with a mean of 4.4 per cent, compared to mean of 2.8 per cent for the weekday editions. The decline in readership for the Saturday morning edition of the *Telegraph* was even more rapid than for the weekday edition, however, and its publication was ceased in 1981-82. Readership for the Saturday morning edition of the *Daily Sun* was also lower overall.

The 18-24 year-old demographic’s readership of the Saturday editions of the *Telegraph* and *Daily Sun* are highly comparable, both in terms of overall trend and percentage. However, the *Weekend Australian*’s 18-24 year-old readership, with a mean of 8.2 per cent, is almost double the readership of the same paper in the 14-17 year-old age-group. Saturday *Courier-Mail* readership for 18-24 year-olds declined only 1.5 per cent between 1973-74 and 1992-93. Mean Saturday readership for 18-24 year-olds is 61.2 per cent, compared to a mean Monday-Friday readership of 54.1 per cent. In terms of overall readership frequency, the 1992-93 figures show that approximately two-thirds of Brisbane’s 14-24 year-old population in each demographic read the newspaper on an average Saturday.
Figure 3: Saturday newspaper readership
14-17 years

Source: Roy Morgan Research
Figure 4: Saturday newspaper readership
18-24 years

Source: Roy Morgan Research
Figure 5: Sunday newspaper readership
13-17 years

Source: Roy Morgan Research
Sunday readership

However as Figures 5 and 6 show, it is the Sunday-Mail which may be considered the real “winner” in the youth readership stakes, particularly in recent years.

Sunday-Mail readership for 14-17 year-olds declined 10.9 per cent between 1973-74 and 1992-93 and had a mean of 67.1 per cent. Perhaps the most important aspect of 14-17 year-olds’ readership of the Sunday-Mail are the two substantial increases between 1983-84 and 1984-85 and 1990-91 and 1992-93. In 1992-93 readership for the Sunday-Mail was the highest it had been for 10 years, although neither that figure of 69.9 per cent nor the 1980-81 figure of 75.2 per cent beat the 19-year-high of 83.5 per cent in 1975-76. Significantly, 1992-93 was the same year the newspaper changed from broadsheet to tabloid format and as such, supports claims that Sunday tabloid newspapers tend to be more popular among young readers. This notion is also supported by the 14-17 year-old readership for the tabloid Sunday Sun, which despite being lower overall than the Sunday-Mail and being on the decline when it stopped production, still managed to draw equal with or beat the former broadsheet paper’s readership in four years. The rapid increase in the readership of the Sun-Herald and Telegraph from New South Wales is due to the fact that these papers began publishing Queensland editions following the Sunday Sun’s closure. However, these papers never posed a significant threat to the popularity of the Sunday-Mail and later closed their local editions.

Sunday-Mail readership for 18-24 year-olds differs from that of their younger counterparts. Readership for this age group actually increased — although only slightly — between 1973-4 and 1992-93; from 70.8 per cent to 72.4 per cent. However, as with 14-17 year-old Sunday-Mail readership, perhaps the most important trend to notice is the most recent one: the increase in readership between 1990-91 and 1992-93. Also, as with the younger demographic, there is an equivalent — although less dramatic —
Figure 6: Sunday newspaper readership
18-24 years

Source: Roy Morgan Research
mid-1980s increase between 1984-85 and 1987-88. For 18-24 year-olds, though, the most recent readership figures were the highest for 13 years, although they still did not beat the 1975-76 high of 79.7 per cent. Sunday Sun readership is lower overall when compared to the Sunday-Mail. However, between 1982-83 and 1989-90, the readerships of the two papers were highly comparable, although the Sunday Sun readership was only higher than Sunday Mail readership on two occasions.

A resurgence in reading?

The above weekend readership trends for the Brisbane newspaper market support recent claims that, after years of falling readership, newspapers are making something of a comeback amongst young people. A 1996 survey conducted by the Newspaper Association of America and the American Society of Newspaper Editors found evidence to challenge downward readership trends from the late 1980s and early 1990s, with nearly 66 per cent of 16-29 year-olds reading both a weekday and a Sunday newspaper and 49 per cent reading a weekday newspaper at least four times a week (PANPA Bulletin 1996, p.67).

However, overall, the Brisbane weekday findings do contrast fairly significantly with Taverner Research’s 1995 survey of 18-24 year-olds in Australia and New Zealand which pointed to “extremely encouraging readership figures” (Taverner Research 1995, Appendix 4, p.2). The report identified “a dedicated and significant core of young adult newspaper readers and a large majority who regularly or deliberately make use of newspapers to fulfil their own needs” (Taverner Research 1995, p.1). Overall, the telephone poll of 1296 18-24 year-olds in Australia and New Zealand found 78 per cent of the sample claimed to have read or looked through a newspaper yesterday and 96 per cent had done so in the past week (Taverner Research 1995, pp.21, 22). The report also found that
contrary to popular industry beliefs, young people exhibited “many positive attitudes towards newspapers” (Taverner Research 1995, p.5) and that “newspapers still have a strong presence as far as young people are concerned, even if there is no room for complacency” (Harvey 1994, p.61).

These arguments in favour of a resurgence in youth newspaper reading are consistent with 1995 Audit Bureau of Circulation figures for the total population which also point to the newspaper industry pulling out of its lengthy circulation decline (Beverley 1995; Strickland 1995). However, it is worth noting that the 1995 overall circulation trends for the Courier-Mail declined on weekdays and Saturday, and increased only for the Sunday Mail on Sundays (Beverley 1995, p.15), thus mirroring the readership trends displayed by the youth audiences above.

**Television news and current affairs**

Overseas, they found all these ancient paintings in this cave and said it was the greatest find this century and they talked about it for about 15 seconds. And directly after it, they showed for about a minute or two . . .

Agro becoming an honorary sergeant in the police force (19 year-old male TAFE student describing a television news bulletin, in Sternberg 1997a).

That *Today Tonight* show? The most pathetic piece of bullshit ever made! (17 year-old female high school student, in Sternberg 1997a).

Turner (1996a, p.78) notes that it has become “increasingly common” since the late 1980s for conventional commercial television news and current affairs programs (e.g. *A Current Affair, Today Tonight* and *60 Minutes* among others) to be attacked for their failure to attract a large youth audience. In a public broadcasting context, former head of ABC Television, Penny Chapman has also acknowledged problems with this group (1995).
This is a particularly confusing situation considering that survey results show television is rated as the best and most commonly used source of news for young people (Finger, 1994). However, it may be partially explained by evidence which suggests general television consumption is at its lowest point ever in the during the teenage and young adult years (McLeod & Brown 1976; Watson 1979, p.105; Wakshlag 1982; Johnsson-Smaragdi 1983; Sachs et al 1991, p.17; Bisnette 1990, p.57; Dorr & Kunel 1990; Ward 1992, p.214; Ricketson 1993, p.21; Arnett 1995; Arnett et al 1995; Larson 1995; Finnish Newspaper Association 1995; Emmison 1997) and that youth television consumption is currently declining (Shoebridge 1990, p.91; Cuppit et al 1996).

Since about 1980, surveys have consistently indicated news and current affairs programs are not popular with young people (Shoebridge 1990, p.91; Ricketson 1993, p.21; Jones 1993, pp.23-4; Williams 1995; Emmison 1997). Similar trends concerning the accelerating decline in young people’s news and current affairs consumption have been noted in overseas research. For example, news was listed as the least popular program type among 15-20 year-olds living in Saudi Arabia despite the fact it is screened at the time this age-group is most likely to be watching television (Boyd & Najai 1984, p.295). In America, a recent survey conducted by Yankelovich market research found that only 20 per cent of Americans aged 21-24 watched ABC’s World News Tonight, although 35 per cent watched The Simpsons (Katz 1994a, p.31).

As was the case with newspapers, while the low levels of young people’s news and current affairs consumption have historically been of concern to the television industry, it has usually been assumed that each successive wave of the youth audience would eventually mature into the genre. In support of the maturation effect, the ANOP (1985) survey found in the 15-17 year-old age-group, 22 per cent of females and 20 per cent of males nominated news and current affairs as being among their favourite pro-
grams, compared with 32 per cent of females and 31 per cent of males in the 18-20 year-old age-group, and 46 per cent of females and 45 per cent of males in the 21-24 year-old age-group (ANOP 1985, p.153). Also, American research has found that later college years are associated with heavier television news consumption (Henke 1985, p.431). However, recent Australian data suggests young people may be picking-up the news and current affairs habit increasingly later in life. An A.C. Nielsen list of 1995’s top 100 programs for the under-40 demographic included only one news and current affairs program — the Sunday night edition of National Nine News — which was ranked at number 74 (de Groot 1996, p.16). Once again, this would seem to be in keeping with the American experience. For example, a 1990 study by the Times Mirror Centre for the People and the Press found that the main audience for TV news was “increasingly drawn from the ranks of older people . . .” (Katz 1994a, p.32).

Such findings contrast with other research. In 1985, the ANOP survey found news and current affairs was the third most popular television genre among 15-24 year-olds. In fact, the ANOP survey found 60 Minutes ranked sixth in the list of the most popular shows nominated by the 15-24 year-olds. A 1988 Australian Broadcasting Tribunal survey found one in every five teenagers aged between 15 and 17 identified news and current affairs as the program they most enjoyed watching (Australian Broadcasting Tribunal 1988). Using an older demographic, a list of Nielsen’s top 10 television programs for the 18-29 year-old age-group in 1994 again ranked 60 Minutes at number six (McCaughan 1994, p.6).

Despite these trends, it is the case for a decline in news and current affairs consumption by young people which is supported by A.G.B. McNair’s and A.C. Nielsen’s Target Audience Rating Point (TARP)3 data. Figures 7 and 8 show each network’s nightly prime time news TARPs for the 13-17 and 16/8-24 year-old demographic between 1980 and 1990 and 1993 and 19954.
Figure 7: Prime time news TARPs 13-17 years

Source: AGB McNair/AC Nielsen
Figure 8: Prime time news TARPs 16/8-24 years

Source: AGB McNair/AC Nielsen
Commercial prime time news appears to have never attracted any more than 19 per cent of either the 13 to 17 or 16/8 to 24 year-old audience for a particular program for any of the survey periods between 1980 and 1990 and 1993 and 1995 analysed here. The TARPs for commercial prime time news also appear to have declined overall between 1980 and 1990. The only exception to this would appear to be the 13 to 17 year-old audience for *National Nine News*. Between 1993 and 1995, the audiences tended to decline overall. Although it is impossible to determine exactly how much the audiences declined due to the potential discrepancies in the data collection methods used by AGB McNair and A.C. Nielsen, no program registered a TARP in either demographic higher than 12 between 1993 and 1995 and all three commercial networks registered their lowest TARPs ever during this period. Prime time news in the public broadcasting sector appears to have never attracted any more than 5 per cent of either the 13-17 or 16/8-24 year-old audience for any of the survey periods between 1980 and 1990 and 1993 and 1995 analysed here. In particular, the 13-17 and 16/8-24 year-old audiences for the SBS World News frequently registered TARPs of 0. However, unlike the trends for commercial prime time news, the TARPs for both the ABC and SBS tended to remain relatively stable during this period (although it was hard for them to get any lower). Between 1993 and 1995, there tends to be little difference in the TARPs for Monday to Friday and Saturday and Sunday viewing in the 13-17 and 18-24 year-old age-groups. The only exceptions are the TARPs for the Sunday night edition of *National Nine News* and some weekend editions of *Ten News*.

Although there are fluctuations across time and survey period analysed, *National Nine News* tended to have the largest 13-24 year-old audience overall, followed by *Seven Nightly News*, *Ten News*, the *ABC News* and *SBS World News*.

In the A.G.B. McNair survey data, the 13-17 year-old demographic frequently out-rated the 16/8-24 year-old audience for
commercial nightly prime time news, throwing the maturation effect into some doubt. This is particularly the case for the period between about 1983-1988. In the A.C. Nielsen survey data, however, the 18-24 year-old demographic appears to out-rate the 13-17 year-old audience overall. Although the differences in the data for the younger and older demographics for the ABC News and SBS World News are too small to determine which is larger overall, the 13-17 year-old ABC News audience does manage to be slightly larger than the 16/8-24 year-old audience occasionally.

Similar trends may be seen in Figures 9 and 10, which show each network’s nightly prime time current affairs TARPs for the 13-17 and 16/8-24 year-old demographic between 1980 and 1990 and 1993 and 1995.5

Commercial prime time current affairs appears to have never attracted any more than 18 per cent of either the 13-17 or 16/8-24 year-old audience for a particular program for any of the survey periods analysed here. The Ten Network screened no weeknight prime time current affairs program between 1980 and 1990. However, the TARPs for weeknight prime time current affairs on Channels Seven and Nine appear to have declined overall between 1980 and 1990. Between 1993 and 1995, the audience for current affairs on Channel Seven tended to decline overall and the audience for The Ten Network declined overall between 1993 and 1994. However, the audience for Channel Nine appeared to increase and remained stable overall. Although it is impossible to determine exactly how much the audiences have declined due to the potential discrepancies in the data collection methods used by A.G.B. McNair and A.C. Nielsen, no program registered a TARP in either demographic higher than 10 between 1993 and 1995 and all three commercial networks registered their lowest TARPs ever during this period. Although data for the ABC was not provided for analysis until 1986 and for SBS until 1993 to 1995, prime time current affairs in the public broadcasting sector appears to have never
Figure 9: Prime time current affairs TARPs 13-17 years

Source: AGB McNair/AC Nielsen
Figure 10: Prime time current affairs TARPs 16/8-24 years

Source: AGB McNair/AC Nielsen
attracted any more than 3 per cent of the either the 13-17 or 16/8-24 year-old audience for any of the survey periods analysed here. In particular, the 13-17 and 16/8-24 year-old audiences for current affairs on SBS frequently registered TARPs of 0. However, unlike the trends for prime time news, the TARPs for both the ABC and SBS tended to remain relatively stable during this period.

Although there are fluctuations across time and survey period analysed, between 1980 and 1990, current affairs on The Nine Network tended to have the largest 13-24 year-old audience overall, followed by The Seven Network and the ABC (from 1986 onwards). Between 1993 and 1995, Channel Nine once again had the largest audience, followed by Channels Seven and Ten, the ABC and SBS.

As was the case with the news, the 13-17 year-old demographic frequently out-rated the 16-24 year-old audience for commercial weeknight prime time current affairs in the A.G.B. McNair survey data. Once again, this is particularly the case for the period between about 1983 to 1988. In the A.C. Nielsen survey data, however, the 18-24 year-old demographic appears to out-rate the 13-17 year-old audience overall. Although the differences in the data for the younger and older demographics for ABC and SBS current affairs are too similar to determine which is larger overall, the 13-17 year-old audience for The 7.30 Report does manage to be slightly larger than the 16/8-24 year-old audience occasionally.

In all the survey periods where both commercial news and current affairs audience data was available, the 13-24 year-old news TARPs tended to be larger overall compared to the current affairs TARPs. In other words, commercial prime time news and current affairs tended to lose, rather than pick-up 13-24 year-old viewers over the programming block. Although this tune-out factor can be seen taking place in the ABC news and current affairs audience, the TARPs for The 7.30 Report and SBS’s Dateline are generally too small and too similar for it to be seen with any consistency.
The myth of the displacement hypothesis

For the past 35 to 40 years, television has often been blamed for the increasing downturn in newspaper readership (Sachs et al 1991, p.19). For example, a 1992 U.S. study found that the average 11 year-old only reads 11 pages of text per day, but watches up to six hours of television (McCaughan 1993a, p.8). Conversely, Morgan data shows more 14-17 year-old Sydney Morning Herald readers are light or non-viewers of commercial television than heavy viewers (John Fairfax and Sons Pty Ltd 1993). Surprisingly, however, little research has been conducted on this form of media displacement (Stamm and Fortini-Campbell 1993, p.4). Also, given the fact that both general television consumption, along with the consumption of news genres, has declined amongst youth audiences, there would seem to be little logic to the argument. In relative terms, newspaper readership is readily comparable to broadcast media (Taverner Research 1995, p.21).

Radio


Never bothered with FM radio, grab a compilation tape and we’ll go. (You Am I, *Pizza Guy*, 1994)

Although there appears to be little displacement of youth newspaper reading by television, it seems that television viewing declines over time for young people while radio listening increases (Johnsson-Smaragdi 1983, p.52; Sachs et al 1991; Arnett et al 1995, p.520). Indeed, there is empirical evidence to suggest the place of radio in the lives of young Australians is increasing at the expense of television (ANOP 1985; Shoebridge 1990; McCaughan 1995b, p.1). As Turner (1993, p.142) points out, since the beginning of rock ‘n’ roll, commercial music programming has been dominated
by the “teen radio” format, which he defines as “Top 40 hits played in 24-hour rotation for an audience demographic of 10-25”. Ninety-seven per cent of the 12 to 17 year-olds surveyed by Sachs et al (1991, p.17) owned a radio. The ANOP survey found 91 per cent of 15-24 year-olds listened to the radio, and 86 per cent nominated a music program as their favourite. Young people are most enthusiastic about FM, with music stations on that frequency being the most often listed “favourite” radio stations in each capital city, except Hobart (ANOP 1985; Shoebridge 1990, p.91; Ricketson 1993, p.21; Cuppitt et al 1996, p.23).

However, against this backdrop of historically strong youth radio listenership, Turner (1993, p.143) argues there is currently an “urgent provocation for rethinking the institutional industrial centrality of teen radio” in Australia. Following the introduction of commercial FM radio in 1980, and especially since the large shifts in media ownership in 1986-8, teen radio has “virtually disappeared” from Australian radio (Turner 1993, p.145). As early as 1984, Windshuttle (1984, pp.240-1) was arguing that Australian radio was no longer meeting the needs or interests of teenagers and the industry and mainstream press, for many years, have “attacked the trend to ‘radio bland’, . . . [and] have accused radio of shooting itself in the foot by disenfranchising a key section of their constituency.” (Turner 1993, pp.145-6; See for example Safe 1994; Ruehl 1995)

In the switch to FM during the 1980s and into the 1990s, most stations have skewed their format towards an older audience of 25-39 year-olds (Safe 1994, p.15). Michael Gower from the advertising agency DDB Needham laments: “The problem radio may face is that as a medium it may lose all relevance to this generation of younger people who will grow up without developing the habit,” (Strickland 1994, p.26). The recent Mansfield Report into the future of the ABC noted that young people were not well served by radio, with only 7 per cent of radio stations explicitly targeting the under
24-age group in 1993-1994 (Mansfield 1997). Despite the phenomenal popularity of Hitz-FM, which began in 1993 and operated on short-term licences in Melbourne, the only youth radio station to emerge nationally since 1990 has been the ABC’s Triple J6,7, which is now broadcast to every capital city and more than 37 regional locations (Cuppitt et al 1996, p.25).

Gower (Strickland 1994, p.26) goes on to claim that because of teen radio’s demise, young people now actually listen to less radio than most of the community. Such arguments are supported by the recent ABA examination of the A.G.B. McNair audience data which found that between 1990 and 1995, radio listening by 10-17 year-olds declined 20 per cent, or an average of 3 hours and 7 minutes per week (Cuppit et al 1996). However, teenage satisfaction with radio remains well above average, although slightly lower in regional areas (Cuppitt et al 1996, pp.60, 63). Similarly, former Triple J station manager Stuart Matchett (1995) believes that although the industry currently has problems, younger listeners are not becoming increasingly disenchanted with radio as a medium:

\[
\text{... even though the actual content ... they might not be satisfied with, they will still use it. I’m always staggered by the number of under-17-year-olds who listen to hits and memories formats... which kind of doesn’t sort of make sense ... but I think young people are incredibly inquisitive and want to know what’s going on in the world and that radio’s a good way for them to find out. And these days there’s lots of radio stations and so they do a fair bit of channel surfing and check out what’s going on.}
\]

These trends are apparent when Figures 11 and 12, which look at Brisbane youth radio stations’ cumulative reach for 10-17 and 18 to 24 year-olds expressed as a percentage of market potential9,10,11 are examined.

The first and most apparent trend from these figures is the steady decline of the AM teen station 4IP (later Radio 10 and Stereo 10), which switched to an adult-oriented, easy-listening format in 1989 and now broadcasts horse-racing as 4TAB. However, as
Figure 11: Youth Radio Station CUMEs 10-17 years

Source: AGB McNair
Figure 12: Youth Radio Station CUMEs 17-24 years

Source: AGB McNair
Turner (1993, p.142) argues: “[t]een radio was not a passing fad; it continued to be a powerful programming format well into the 1980s”. To this extent, Radio 10’s audience rose between 1981 and 1982. However, the “forlorn challenge” (Turner 1993, p.144) of AM stereo could not prevent an even greater decline in the new Stereo 10’s young teenage audience which plummeted between 1982 and 1988 when the station eventually changed format.

At least part of AM’s decline can be attributed to the rise of FM radio, which has been “phenomenally successful in Australia” (Turner 1993, p.144). This situation is reflected not only by the decline in 4IP’s audience, but also by the rapid rise of Brisbane’s first FM youth station, FM104/Triple M. However, it was the stations that switched from AM to FM that made the biggest gains in terms of audience (Turner 1993, p.144). This is reflected in the success of B105, which changed its format and switched to FM in 1990. Turner (1993, p.145) notes the emerging drift towards homogeneity in commercial FM radio programming and its impact upon Triple M. When Brisbane AM station 4BK switched to FM and became B105, it did little more than copy the format of and poach the best on-air staff from Triple M. Triple M moved its format slightly downmarket, to cater for 18-35 year-old males. In the process it lost about half its audience (Turner 1993, p.145).

Despite Triple M’s eventual 1994 merger with Village Roadshow’s Austereo network, which owned B105, the network’s ratings continued to slide (despite increases in both the 10-17 and 18-24 year-old demographics between 1992 and 1993), with the introduction of Triple J in 1991. Triple J has always performed more strongly in the 18-24 year-old age-bracket than for 10-17 year-olds, lending some weight to Matchett’s (1995) claim that while the station targets 15-30 year-olds, its primary audience is 25-30 year-olds (See endnote 7). Nevertheless, Triple J’s success with its skew towards a younger audience and networked, nationally-broadcast format which included a strong component of dance, rap and pop
music clearly influenced the Triple M network. In 1994, it poached Triple J’s general manager Barry Chapman and several popular DJs including Ian Rogerson and Andy Glitre. It also began playing techno, rap and pop music and broadcast most of its content out of Melbourne\(^2\). What is interesting about Triple M’s attempts to capture a younger audience is that although they were considered a failure by the industry and may also be considered that way according to the data presented in Figures 11 and 12 — with Triple J actually outrating Triple M on occasion — they did not have that great an effect upon the 18-24 year-old age group in Brisbane.

While the 10-17 year-old audience for B105 increased between when it arrived on air in 1990 and 1995, its 18-24 year-old audience has remained relatively static. In fact, after peaking in 1991, 1995 was only the second time the station had a reach of over 60 per cent in the age-group. So, while B105 is Brisbane’s market leader in FM radio for both age-groups, consistently “out-reaching” Triple M every year since it came on air, the station contradicts suggestions that FM is somehow increasingly geared against a younger teenage audience by actually having a stronger audience in that demographic when compared to 18-24 year-olds.

**The problem of measuring news on radio**

Radio listenership surveys tend to consider radio formats as “programming entities”, with little regard for elements such as newscasts (Wright and Hosman 1986, p.802) and as such, “ratings firms . . . produce a vast amount of demographic information about radio audiences and track the popularity of radio stations, [but] rarely isolate news segments for analysis” (Finger 1994, p.10). Such a shortcoming in research throws the popularity of radio news with young people into some doubt. ANOP (1985) found only 16 per cent of 15-24 year-olds surveyed mentioned a news or information program as their favourite and only 9 per cent nominated a talk
show as their favourite, although 21-24 year-olds indicated a greater preference.

However, news may be an important and “underestimated” component of youth radio programming (Finger 1994, p.82). Indeed, in Finger’s (1994) survey radio was nominated after television as being “the source of most news” and the “best source of news” for young people by 36.6 per cent and 38.3 per cent of 18-24 year-olds respectively. Seventy-two per cent of those surveyed by Finger (1994, p.68) also claimed they would miss not having any news on the radio. This concurs with the nationwide ABA study of 14-19 year-olds, who gave news a well-above average importance rating in their assessment of radio content (Cuppitt et al 1996, p.49). Although only 9 per cent gave news as their primary reason for liking radio (Cuppitt et al 1996, p.53), the majority of those surveyed were satisfied with the quality of news on radio (Cuppitt et al 1996, p.62).

These arguments concerning the importance of news on youth radio are supported when we consider the rise of Triple J. Triple J produces an average of 5hrs 4mins of news per week with its composite bulletins relayed from Sydney (Turner 1996b). This is about 20 per cent more news than B105 (4hrs 4mins) and almost 30 per cent more than Triple M (3hrs 30mins), both of which share the same newsroom and produce a local composite bulletin (Turner 1996b). Neither B105 nor Triple M produce any current affairs, compared to the 15 hours13 produced by Triple J (Turner 1996b). Put simply, although it is the least popular youth station with 10-24 in Brisbane, Triple J is the youth station with the most news and has experienced the best growth in youth demographics over recent years. As the listenership of Triple J news cannot be judged apart from the overall audience of the station, assessing the popularity of its news is difficult. However, the effectiveness of the news service should follow from the success or otherwise of the station as a whole (Matchett 1995; Crowther 1997, p.9). To this end, Triple J’s
audience has more than doubled since 1991 and the station is now estimated to have an audience reach of around 2.1 million nationally (Mansfield 1997, p.24).

Magazines

Edina: ... darling names, names, names.

Market research argues that while young people “virtually ignored” newspapers (Strickland, 1994: p.26) and news magazines (ANOP 1985; Katz 1994a), they were reading more youth magazines than ever before. Indeed, during adolescence the primary shift in reading habits is away from books and towards magazines (Bisnette 1990, p.57) and magazine reading increases in importance with age. It may be argued that this is especially the case in Australia, which has the highest per capita consumption of magazines in the world (Bonner 1997, p.112). However, there is also evidence to suggest that magazine readership is declining among young people in this country. Once again, this is against the backdrop of a drop in consumption for the total audience (Cf. Bonner, 1997, p.112). For example, Audit Bureau of Circulation results show Rolling Stone’s circulation dropped by 7.07 per cent to 35,946 for the year to September 1993 (Hughes 1994, p.23), although it managed to rise again in 1995 (McIntyre 1995, p.6). Overall declines in circulation were also posted in 1995 by youth-oriented titles such as Mode, Vogue, Dolly, Cosmopolitan, Elle, TV Week and Cleo (McIntyre 1995, p.6).

Such declines are also demonstrated by an examination of the readership for Brisbane’s 10 most popular magazines in the 14-17 and 18-24 year-old demographic (Figures 13 and 14).

For 14-17 year-olds, youth magazine readership is dominated by women’s or fashion magazines such as Women’s Weekly, New Idea,
Dolly and television or light entertainment magazines such as TV Week\textsuperscript{16}. Such findings are consistent with the 1985 research conducted by ANOP. However, only Woman's Day, Cosmopolitan and the relative newcomer Girlfriend showed increases in readership between 1985-6 and 1994-5, with Woman's Day fluctuating wildly in readership from 1990-91 onwards and Cosmo holding steady from about the same period. Dolly remains the teenage girl's most loved title, despite dropping in readership from 1991-92 onwards\textsuperscript{17} after strong increases between 1989-90 and 1991-92. However, the 1994-95 figures only place its readership as being 0.1 per cent higher than Girlfriend, which showed an overall national increase in circulation for the year of 14.5 per cent (McIntyre 1995, p.6).

Overall, while the titles read are fairly similar, magazine readership in the 18-24 year-old demographic is lower overall than for the 13-17 year-olds. Except for Cosmopolitan, Woman's Day and TV Week, readership among the top 10 titles in the demographic has also declined between 1986-87 and 1994-95. Worth noting is the comparatively strong readership for the first two years of the “quasi-news” (Katz 1994a, p.32) magazine Who Weekly.

Indeed, it is this growth of new titles rather than readership per se which provides evidence to suggest that magazine reading is becoming increasingly important in the lives of young Australians. Although readership and circulation appears to be declining, in recent years there has been “an explosion” in the number of magazines pitched at young people (Shoebridge 1990, p.91). For example, in 1980, magazines aimed at teenagers and people in their early 20s had a combined circulation of 30.2 million. In 1989, the total was 47.5 million, a 57.3 per cent increase (Shoebridge 1990, p.91). In 1980, if females aged under 24 bought each issue of the main magazines aimed at them, it would have cost them $12 a month. In 1989, the monthly cost would have been $40 (Shoebridge 1990, p.92). In 1980, nine key magazines were aimed at under-24s or included the age-group in their marketing. They were: Dolly, Cosmopolitan, Cleo,
Figure 13: Magazine readership 14-17 years

Source: Roy Morgan Research
Figure 14: Magazine readership 18-24 years

Source: Roy Morgan Research

1. *Sports Illustrated* readership is calculated for the male audience. All other data is calculated for the female audience.
Australasian Post, People, Rolling Stone, Penthouse, Playboy and Ram (Shoebridge 1990, p.92). Ram disappeared in the late 1980s, but the other eight publications are still on the market (although Post and People have altered their target demographic). Over the past 17 years, they have been joined by other youth-oriented titles including Picture, Pic, Smash Hits, Girlfriend, Looks, WkD, Juice, Disney Adventures (which is aimed at the under 12 market)\textsuperscript{18}, Inside Sport, She, TV Soap, Marie Claire, Australian Women’s Forum and Hot Metal among others. These are only the titles that have managed to survive long-term. In a market characterised by high saturation and cashing in on trends casualties are inevitable\textsuperscript{19} (Shoebridge 1990, p.92).

\textbf{Conclusion}

Humans are the only animals to have “generations”, and personally I think that technology creates generations. (Douglas Coupland, author of \textit{Generation X}, 1994)

It is clear that the media play a significant role in the lives of young people. However, traditional media such as newspapers, television, radio and magazines should now be seen, not in isolation, but as one of a number of information and communication technologies, including pay television and the Internet\textsuperscript{20}, occupying domestic time and space (Morley 1992, p.201). The role media forms play in relation to each other becomes more integrative (Morley 1992, p.201) during youth and will continue to change with the introduction of new media. With reference to the current generation of young people Katz (1994a, p.31) notes: “No group of young people has ever had more choices to make regarding — or more control over — its own information, amusement and politics. Rock spawned one culture; TV, another; movies, hip-hop, computers, video games, still more”. For example, an Australian home with a 16-17 year-old has a higher than average number of electronic goods (TV, VCR, PC, CD, camcorder) (McCaughan 1993, p.4;
One potential result of this increasing multi-media environment is that young people simply may not need to rely on a single medium such as television for information. As Casimir (1995) notes: “. . . you get the news by osmosis now. You don’t need to listen to the radio, you don’t need to watch television, you don’t need to read a newspaper. You’re just going to get the daily news by walking the street these days because there’s so much stimulation”.

With its mysterious connotations, Generation X would therefore seem to be a useful phrase in that it gives a name to an age-based cohort which appears to be shifting its patterns of media consumption in complex and not always easily understood ways. Certainly, the media consumption trends are not always downwards. This is as true of the news media, as it is of other forms and genres.

As a result of these changes in the consumption and availability of technologies, young people today have been described as increasingly media literate (Sachs et al 1991, p.16). Indeed, media literacy is one of Generation X’s key defining features (See for example McCauaghan 1994; Rushkoff 1994b; Wark 1993; Ritchie 1995). However, discussions which claim to account for an entire generation’s media use should be treated with a high degree of scepticism. As Carey (1993, p.7) notes:

...if you look at social change from a distance, from on high, it seems neat and orderly, lines of clear projection and destination . . . However, when you descend into it, into the sheer dirtiness and disorder of the social, chaos reigns and it is difficult to get fixed angles and perspectives.

Literacy is culturally influenced and, to a greater or lesser extent, depends upon access to media, the ability to use it and above all, the desire to use it. Gender, race and socio-economic position would all appear to play some role in influencing these factors. As such, we should avoid abandoning these notions in favour of a generalised move towards labelling young people with titles such as Generation
X, in which the traditional relations of capitalism are transcended by age-based relations of consumption (Murdock & McCron 1975, p.17). The apparent lack of academic interest in such issues as they apply to youth media use over recent years seems to mirror much of the popular Gen-X hype.

Another key area in the Generation X phenomenon has been the emergence of the “new generation gap” largely fought out between Xers and their older demographic cousins, the Baby Boomers. If some of the popular discussion about this is to be believed, it seemed as though for the first few years of the nineties we were on the verge of a generational war (McGuiness 1994); not simply a widening of the generation gap, but a “polarisation of the generations” (Mitterauer 1992, p.240). On the surface, much of the evidence presented in this paper would certainly seem to support Carey’s (1993, p.9) argument that one of the most striking differences between the young and old today is “the development of new age segregated patterns of living and, more importantly... generational styles of popular culture that bear new and discontinuous outlooks and sensibilities” (See also Werner 1989, p.38). This, Carey (1993, p.9) argues, is the result of a postindustrial shift in the axes of diversity which prioritises time over space and, as a result move social forces “from differences between societies to differences between generations within societies”.

On one hand, older demographics would still appear to consume more media than young people overall (Cobb-Walgren 1990; Ricketson 1993). On the other hand, adult consumption may have declined to the extent that adult and youth media consumption is quantitatively more similar than we might have been led to believe. Lack of space has prevented the investigation required to uncover such findings and such an activity is further limited by the expense of obtaining primary audience data for other demographics. However, a partial cross-demographic examination of the primary data (Sternberg 1997a) suggests that how concerned one becomes about
young people’s media use depends on how one defines youth and what other demographics one compares their consumption to. The notion of the generation gap is “multi-dimensional; it can appear to be wider or narrower according to the particular subject of discussion” (Werner 1989, p.33). As such, a more detailed examination of different demographics’ news media use might find that much of the concern about young people’s declining interest in journalism is exaggerated when compared to older demographics and takes the form of a media moral panic (Drotner 1992), which is itself part of a larger “lifestyle panic” concerning Generation X (Sternberg 1997b).

Finally, more work needs to be undertaken to explain why young people’s media consumption habits appear to be changing (Livingstone et al 1994, p.374). Elsewhere (Sternberg 1997a), I have indicated through qualitative, critical empirical audience research that there are many possible explanations for the decline, including competing media, changes in lifestyle, the differing news needs of the young and representational issues. Also, most of the young people involved in this project reject the label Generation X and are highly critical of the media’s — and particularly television’s — attempts to produce news for them. If Generation X means anything at all, it means that this generation’s media use is almost still literally an unknown. Rather than trying to solve the mystery of young people’s media use through endless surveys and catchphrases such as Generation X, media industries should “Let X=X” (Coupland 1995, p.72) and re-commit themselves to understanding the factors which impact upon young people’s media consumption patterns and practices and become articulated in their increasingly fragmented and contradictory “socially perceptible subjectivities” (McRobbie 1994, p.180).
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Endnotes

1 Similar criticisms have been made of American research (See for example McLeod & Brown 1976), although a much stronger tradition of academic research into youth media use exists in that country than in Australia.

2 In this way, the Brisbane newspaper market differs from the Sydney and Melbourne markets, both of which are still served by morning tabloids.

3 TARPs measure the percentage “of the target audience that are tuned to a particular station at a particular time” (Nielsen) and differ from the more commonly known ratings points which are concerned with the percentage “of households that are tuned to a particular station at a particular time” (Nielsen). TARPs are produced by calculating the percentage of people in a demographic who are watching a particular show compared to the total population in that demographic. In the context of this study, TARPs provide the most accurate measure of how many young people may or may not be watching news and current affairs because they are based on the number of young people in the demographic under investigation, not on the number of households in the sample which may or may not include 13 to 25 year-olds. TARPs are also a more useful measure of the youth audience than “share” which is concerned only with the number of households or people in a demographic that have a television switched on (Nielsen), thus preventing us from obtaining an indication of the number of young people who do not watch any news and current affairs at all. This is clearly an important figure when examining claims about traditionally low levels of youth television news and current affairs consumption and an apparent “youth exodus” from news and current affairs. People who chose not to watch television at the time these programs are screening are just as — if not more important — than young people who have the television on, but are watching something else.

In 1990, the contract for measuring television ratings passed from A.G.B. McNair, which collected data via a diary method, to A.C. Nielsen which utilise peoplemeters. Because of the potential discrepancies in the data collection methods (peoplemeters are considered to be more accurate), the audience data for the years 1991 and 1992 were not supplied in order to avoid potentially skewing trends due to differences in collection methods, rather than actual viewing. Such a technique was also adopted by Cupitt et al (1996). Due to cost restrictions, the A.G.B. McNair data (from 1980-1990) only shows
TARPs for every second survey period during each year. Also, the McNair data measures the viewing for 16-24 year-olds, as opposed to 18-24 year-olds, which is the demographic used by the Nielsen data.

It is also important to note that in keeping with both A.G.B. McNair and A.C. Nielsen, all figures are rounded to the nearest whole percentage. As we will see, this has the tendency to overly simplify some of the figures presented. Unfortunately, this rounding-off process also makes it virtually impossible to check the accuracy of either companies’ data.

4 Notes to Figures 7 and 8: All commercial and SBS news programs screened from 6-6.30pm unless otherwise indicated. All ABC news programs screened from 7-7.30pm unless otherwise indicated. Between 1980-1988, all A.G.B. McNair survey data measured Monday-Sunday viewing. In 1989, A.G.B McNair surveys measured Monday-Friday viewing only. McNair conducted 8 surveys each year from 1987 onwards. Seven Nightly News was screened in a one hour bulletin from 6-7pm during 1987. Seven Nightly News was screened from 6.30-7pm between survey periods 2 and 4 in 1988. No data was available for Seven Nightly News survey 6 1988. Ten News was screened in a one hour bulletin from 6-7pm between 1986 and 1990. Ten News was screened in a one hour bulletin from 5-6pm from 1993 onwards. Weekend editions of Ten News changed to half hour bulletins screened at 5pm in 1994. SBS began transmission on June 30 1986.

5 All commercial and SBS current affairs programs screened from 6.30-7pm unless otherwise indicated. All ABC news programs screened from 7.30-8pm unless otherwise indicated. All “national” current affairs programs screened between 1993 and 1995 were during the off-peak summer viewing season. Not all A.C. Nielsen data was broken down according to this division. In these cases, the figure is indicated in the “ratings” column. McNair conducted 8 surveys each year from 1987 onwards. ABC current affairs data available for 1986 onwards.

6 For a useful history of Triple J and its early years as a national network, see Dawson (1992).

7 Former Triple J station manager Stuart Matchet admits that although the station’s target audience does range from 15-30, it has a specific emphasis on 20-30 year-olds (Matchet 1995).

8 Such a situation is particularly pertinent in Brisbane where in 1993, the station with the biggest market share for the breakfast timeslot was 4KQ, an AM station with a “Greatest memories, latest hits format” (Gardiner 1993, p.31). At the time of writing, both FM youth
stations B105 and Triple M were telling listeners in their station promos not to switch to the “daggy oldies” format.


10 This figure is the equivalent of the TARP for television and the readership percentage for print media.

11 et al (1996, Appendix A) provide a useful list of the audience shares of each mainland state capital city station by age group for 1994.

12 As it has increased in popularity with audiences and in stature within the ABC to become the Corporation’s key vehicle for capturing young audiences, Triple J has also entered the poaching wars. Its current station manager is B105’s former station manager Ed Breslin.

13 Although it cannot be stated with any certainty, this figure is likely to include talk-back, which accounts for 15 per cent of Triple J’s content (Cuppitt et al 1996, p.25).

14 A traditionalist would argue that many of the magazines listed in these figures such as Dolly and TV Week do not contain “hard news”, as it is taught in journalism schools. Certainly, research evidence (Finger 1994) suggests that young people also do not look to magazines as sources of hard news. However, to the extent that these products contain information that young people clearly like reading about, their inclusion is valid here.

15 American teenagers read fewer magazines than their adult counterparts (Cobb-Walgren 1990, p.340).

16 Apart from the readership figures for Sports Illustrated, which are based on the male audience, all figures quoted from Figures 13 & 14 have been calculated on the female audience. These figures reflect the largest niche audiences for each publication. All secondary data quoted in this section is based on the total audience, unless otherwise stated.

17 This result is consistent with national Audit Bureau of Circulation figures for 1993 (Hughes 1994, p.22).
And posted a 168 per cent increase in circulation in 1995 (McIntyre 1995, p.6).

See for example, *Countdown* and *The Edge*.

Although both pay TV and the Internet are increasingly popular media forms with young people in Australia, their potential as suppliers of news and current affairs are, at this stage, difficult to measure.

Rushkoff (1994b), Liu (1994) and Sternberg (1995a; 1997b) all refer to Generation X as a “postmodern generation”.
Invasion from the skies: 
the impact of foreign 
television on India 

Usha Manchanda

Increased competition and shrinking budgets have forced public service broadcasters around the world to reconsider their role. Doordarshan, India’s public service television network, shares the problems faced by its counterparts in more developed countries. Although it continues to enjoy the luxury of being the only television network broadcasting its programs from within national boundaries, it has had to change its policies and programming to compete with foreign television channels including Murdoch’s Star TV. However, it is the Indian audience that has benefited most from this competition from the skies in the form of improved quality and quantity of programs. This paper reports on an audience survey carried out in India earlier this year to gauge television viewers’ perception of these benefits. The paper also gives background on the developments in the television industry in India.

The visibility of television as a mass medium and its perceived impact on audience always generates passionate debate about the role of public service broadcasting in any country. Whether it is the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) in the USA, BBC in the UK, ABC in Australia, the Television Republik
Indonesia (TVRI) in Indonesia or Doordarshan\(^1\) in India, these public service broadcasters have an important role to play in their respective countries.

As with PBS’s mission and the ABC’s charter, Doordarshan has its own set of social objectives to live up to. In the United States, the PBS has to present programs that “educate and entertain, inform and inspire” (PBS online 1997, p.1). In Australia, the ABC has to broadcast programs that “contribute to a sense of national identity and inform and entertain, and reflect the cultural diversity of the Australian community” (ABC online policy issues 1998, p.1). Similarly, Doordarshan’s social objectives include that it has to: a) act as a catalyst for social change; b) promote national integration; c) stimulate a scientific temper in the minds of the people; d) disseminate the message of family planning as a means of population control and family welfare; e) provide essential information and knowledge in order to stimulate greater agricultural production; and f) promote and help preserve environment and ecological balance (Doordarshan Handbook 1997, p.23).

Like many public service broadcasters, over the past four decades Doordarshan has been criticised (Bhatt 1994, Mitra 1986, NAMEDIA report 1986, Singhal & Rogers 1989, Rajgopal 1993, Ninan 1995) for not meeting its objectives. However, this criticism has been harsher from its viewers as Doordarshan was the only source of television in India from its beginning in 1959 until 1990. Apart from a handful of Hindi soap operas which Indian viewers devoured, as they did not have a choice to switch channels, viewers have had to tolerate uninspiring programming for almost three decades (Kishore 1994). One of the reasons for the dismal performance by Doordarshan was lack of competition. Successive Indian governments legislated All India Radio (AIR) and Doordarshan as a duopoly. The AIR network was established in 1947\(^2\). Doordarshan which was part of AIR since its inception in 1959, was separated
from AIR in 1976 as the second public service broadcaster in the country.

However, in the past six to seven years Doordarshan has had to change its policies and programs to maintain its share of viewership and advertising revenue. In early 1990s following advancements in satellite technology and inadequacies in broadcast legislation in India, a number of broadcasters began telecasting their programs directly into Indian homes from foreign locations. These broadcasters use satellite transponders to send their signals into the country, while enterprising cable operators receive these signals via dish antennas and distribute them to individual households for a small fee. As a result, Doordarshan has been forced to respond to this increased competition by increasing the number of channels and programs it broadcasts; improving the quality of its programs and trying to gain credibility for its news programs by offering prime time slots to outside producers. It has also reduced its advertising rates and launched a number of purely entertainment channels to satisfy audience demand.

Today Indian audiences have a wide variety of programs to choose from on both Doordarshan channels and other channels. They can watch numerous news and current affairs programs. Therefore, to find out how television viewers in India perceive Doordarshan’s current performance, I carried out an audience survey in Bombay (Mumbai) and New Delhi. The survey included questions about the television industry as a whole: Are viewers satisfied with television programming in India at present? Are they satisfied with Doordarshan’s performance at present? If television as a medium as a whole gained people’s confidence as a source of credible news and information sorely lacking before 1991? The survey also asked whether news and current affairs programs improved sufficiently to provide in-depth information “to those who may not have a formal education” due to this competition in the television industry in India (NAMEDIA report 1986, p.23). This
paper looks at the survey results and discusses the impact of foreign competition on general programming, on public service broadcasting and, particularly news and current affairs programs in India.

**Doordarshan — a call for change**

After the demise of British rule in the Indian sub-continent, Indian politicians and people whole-heartedly embraced ideals of socialism. Hence, after independence in 1947 most of the basic industries were set up as public sectors. Since the country already had a flourishing print media that was working on the principle of “free speech and free expression for all,” no need was felt to develop broadcast media at the time. Therefore, it was almost by accident rather than through planning that television was introduced in India in September 1959. The multinational company — Philips — had been exhibiting some television equipment at an industrial expo in New Delhi. The company gifted the closed-circuit television equipment to the government at the end of the exhibition. This is when the Indian government decided to experiment with the new technology. From these beginnings the pattern was set for the growth of television in India, which was for almost two decades dependent on equipment gifted by either foreign governments or international agencies (Bhatt 1994 & Ninan 1995). Since AIR engineers were deeply involved with the development of the country’s first TV centre, television was perceived as an extension of radio until the 1970s when progress in space technology spurred the Indian government to experiment with television as a development communication tool.

In the 1970s and 1980s, although Doordarshan continued to expand its coverage across the country, the public service broadcaster remained torn between its role as a catalyst for social change and as a tool for government publicity. The Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE) in development communication was
launched in 1975. Whereas on the political front, the imposition of a State of Emergency by then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi placed Doordarshan at government’s disposal. Indira Gandhi’s government suspended many democratic rights and started using both AIR and Doordarshan to publicise government policies (Rajgopal 1993). As the print media largely decided to black out government propaganda, Doordarshan was used to churn out dozens of programs in support of the government’s 20-point development program (Ninan 1995). Meanwhile, the SITE project which involved broadcast of development oriented programs to 2400 villages in six far-flung states, lasted for a year instead of 10 years as planned. Analysts are divided about the success of the project, some contending that the project was envisaged as an experiment in satellite broadcasting rather than educational or development communication (Rajgopal 1993).

However, realising the potential power of television as a communication tool, the government began to adopt policies to popularise television viewing in India. This skewed Doordarshan’s focus from development to commercialisation. In 1976 Doordarshan started broadcasting imported programs and accepting advertisements to support the purchase of these programs (Ninan, 1995). Again, in 1982 — a significant year in the history of television in India — the government allowed thousands of colour TV sets to be imported into the country to coincide with the broadcast of Asian Games in New Delhi (Bhatt 1994). There were also sponsored entertainment programs such as Hum Log and Buniyaad that added to its efforts to attract viewers in mid-1980s. Later serials based on Indian epics Ramayana and Mahabharata had a very successful run. But on the news front, viewers did not trust Doordarshan (Singhal & Rogers 1989).

To boost the state broadcaster’s credibility, the Information and Broadcasting Ministry of India has over the past four decades appointed a number of committees to look into its status and perfor-
formance (Joshi 1998). But these committees’ recommendations have never been effectively implemented. One such international body was the Media Foundation of the Non-Aligned (NAMEDIA). The Ministry appointed the specialist organisation to convene the broad range of public opinion about television prevailing in the country at the time. In 1986 in its report, which was based on five “feedback” seminars and a national colloquium, NAMEDIA criticised Indian television (Doordarshan) for failing in its main objective of inducing development. A contributing factor was that television remained accessible only to urban, middle and high-income groups. The NAMEDIA report concluded:

The primary purpose of television in India is development through education, information and enlightenment, to improve the quality of life of the largest masses of the people; to bring communities and societies, regions and the states together as one nation through mutual awareness and sympathy while preserving, consolidating and enriching their unique ways of life, cultures, customs and traditions. The secondary purpose is entertainment per se or show-business. (NAMEDIA report 1986, p.13)

The report also stated that “news” could not be used to promote those in power. It urged a variety of programs based on issues and current affairs, rather than just half-hour news programs, to facilitate better understanding for those without formal education. On the issue of credibility the report advocated that television in India needed an “openness” to gain credibility:

Such openness, it was considered, would not put either the government, or the ruling party or the nation in jeopardy. Squarely and properly placed in intelligent and honest context it would promote understanding and confidence and lead to greater and discriminative appreciation of issues by the people. In the long run, it would strengthen the nation. (NAMEDIA report 1986, p.24)

The NAMEDIA report stated that Doordarshan needed to establish a separate autonomous operation for producing television news:

It should have freedom of appraising news values and judgement, news selection and content, emphasis in presentation, and freedom of choice
in summarising physical and human resources in making up a news programme. It should have a clear independent professional chain of command free from bureaucratic, political or other outside intervention and interference. (NAMEDIA report 1986, p.25)

One of the themes which came across very clearly from the public forums organised by NAMEDIA was that television (in this case Doordarshan) in India should be free of all government control. Over the years Doordarshan, though established with high social objectives, has failed to satisfy the intellectuals as well as the common people in India. Asok Mitra, former secretary of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting from 1966 to 1969, in his submission to NAMEDIA recalled that in the 1960s television was considered “essential for accelerating development, modernisation and social change” (Mitra 1986, p.96). He expressed his disappointment with the fact that India had followed a path similar to other Third World countries which first introduced television in the capital city and other metro cities, subserving the interests of the ruling class. In the process of making television more attractive to the audience, government allowed more and more commercially sponsored, privately produced programs to be aired; though always retaining the final say about what was suitable for the Indian audience. Critics examining the development of Indian television say that as television grew, developmentalist alternatives were steadily eschewed, and “over the years hardware expansion was undertaken with no evidence of planning for software” (Rajgopal 1993, p.93).

Television viewers, too, were not happy. Until 1990, most Indian viewers did not have a choice but to watch one national and one regional Doordarshan channel. In a survey in 1987, Singhal found that 90 per cent of the respondents preferred Hindi-film-based entertainment programs, whereas 60 per cent appreciated educational and development programs (Singhal & Rogers 1989). The survey of 1170 respondents showed that although 76 per cent were in favour of commercial advertising on television, 60 per cent of the low-income households, 75 per cent of viewers in
lower castes and 60 per cent of non-Hindi speaking viewers felt that the “problems and difficulties of their daily life were not adequately projected” by Doordarshan (Singhal & Rogers 1989, pp.81-82). Similarly, 92 per cent of them felt that political opposition’s views were not sufficiently represented, whereas 85 per cent said that Doordarshan adequately covered government policies and programs (Singhal & Rogers 1989).

The fact that Doordarshan’s performance did not receive many accolades was compounded by the reality that the people of India could not switch channels. Either due to its charter or due to political and bureaucratic interference, Doordarshan’s performance remained unsatisfactory and it was often referred to as “the government channel” and as being “dull and boring”.

**Competition from the skies and cable network**

The impact of foreign television in India has been two-fold: viewers — at least those living in urban areas — can watch more than 40 channels and the quality of television programs has improved. People subscribing to a cable service can now choose anywhere between 40 to 50 channels to watch. As an alternative to three half-hour news programs in three different languages, they can choose between the two 24-hour news channels (BBC & CNN) and up to 20 news and current affairs programs on various cable and foreign television channels everyday. Since the 1991-92 invasion from the skies by foreign television networks, Doordarshan too has expanded its service from 2 to 18 channels with a claimed viewership of 448 million at the end of 1997 (Doordarshan Handbook, 1997).

The first competition for Doordarshan came in the form of illegal distribution of television signal by cable and foreign television channels in late 1980s and early 1990s. With the introduction of VCRs in India, some dynamic entrepreneurs in Bombay in 1984
launched cable network. Instead of people watching programs on	heir VCRs at home by buying or borrowing videocassettes, the ca-
bble operator in the area/block connected their television set to a
community network for a small fee. This way all those connected to
the local cable network could watch one or two movies, sitcoms in
a regional language and perhaps a pirated foreign program every-
day. According to a survey cited by Rahim, there were about 3500
cable TV networks in India in May 1990. Another advertising
group estimated that more than 330,000 households in four metros
of Bombay, Delhi, Calcutta and Madras had cable connections with
a total audience of 1.6 million (Rahim 1994).

Legally, there is no prohibition on receiving a TV signal in India.
Therefore, other television channels and networks owned by Indi-
ans or foreigners have been able to beam their programs into the
country from the skies using satellite technology without violating
any Indian law or regulation6. However, there is legal uncertainty
over its distribution. Until 1995, the Indian Telegraph Act 1885 gov-
erned the laying of cables on public property. It required the cable
operator to apply for a licence to do so (Rahim, 1994).

The success of cable operation was due to a number of reasons:
on one hand the urban middle class had spare time and resources to
seek more entertainment; on the other, “the government channel”
remained slow in satisfying that demand. Being hooked up to a ca-
bble network became fashionable among the hotels that catered to
tourists’ needs. In fact, cable networks spread across smaller Indian
cities during and after the Persian Gulf crisis in February 1991,
when everybody was nervous about the war. One of the US televi-
sion networks did offer the Indian government broadcast rights to
its service at the time. Doordarshan declined the offer. Neverthe-
less, dish antennas picking up CNN and other satellite broadcast
service signals sprouted everywhere, defeating the Indian govern-
ment’s attempt to protect the politically stifled public service
broadcaster (Ninan 1995).
In the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Hamish McDonald wrote that Doordarshan’s credibility was undermined by its Gulf War coverage which was noted for its “state news, lack of visuals, use of ancient library footage and poor audio quality” (McDonald 1991, p.16). Although the war ended within weeks, people’s desire for foreign programs had been aroused and they wanted more. Entrepreneurs took advantage of this market opportunity and started installing their cable networks in every block of big cities where people were willing to pay between Rs 50 and Rs 150 (Aus$2-6) a month for the connection.

In May 1991, the Satellite Television for the Asian Region (STAR) TV launched its operation from Hong Kong beaming multi-channel television over a South Asian footprint via Asiasat. The television scene in India or for that matter in Asia has not been the same again. By the end of 1991, experts in the communication field began speculating the effect satellite television, in this case STAR TV network which at the time included BBC news service, would have on television programming in Asian countries. Columnists Margaret Scott and Hamish McDonald in the *Far Eastern Economic Review* wrote that:

Social, political and commercial surprises of immense proportions are bound to follow. For starters, using satellite for transborder television defies the tradition that national sovereignty includes state control over television within a nation’s borders...Nowhere will the impact be more profound than in news coverage, for most of the countries under Palapa’s and AsiaSat-I’s footprint have spawned heavily regulated television industries, often government-owned (Scott & McDonald 1991, p.33).

The small-time entrepreneurs who recognised the demand for more television in India spearheaded the massive, largely illegal proliferation of cable networks in India, rather than a single cultural imperialistic aggressor such as Rupert Murdoch. Cable operators began operating with two dishes — one pointed at Palapa for CNN and the other at AsiaSat for STAR TV (plus BBC) — and included
them both in their menu of channels for sale. The scene described by commentators at the time (1991 year-end) was something like this:

In crowded bazaars like Delhi’s Lajpat Nagar or Bombay’s Lemington Road, shops are busy taking orders for indigenously made satellite dishes. Rolls of cable are piled on pavements. All around Indian cities, private cable television operators are stringing coaxial cables along the road and up light poles (Scott & McDonald 1991, p.35).

For a small monthly fee, people could watch 24-hours a day the U.S. open (live), Prime Sports (the wrestlers of the WWF), MTV (music videos), American soap operas such as Santa Barbara and The Bold and the Beautiful, morning cartoon shows and BBC’s World News Service — all part of STAR TV network. Ninan says the impact of television in India in the 1990s has been accentuated by the rapid nuclearization of Indian middle class homes, the trend of the working mother, and the consequential rise in “latch-key children” (Ninan 1995, p.97).

Television viewing in India had been on the rise since the introduction of Hindi soap operas in the late 1980s. However, the television scene changed sensationally after the advent of STAR TV and subsequently the launch of other foreign and local channels. TV homes have more than doubled in the last seven years from about 30.8 million in 1991 to 65 million by 1998 (Handbook, 1998). At the same time, according to the Indian readership survey, cable and satellite homes have grown from 1.28 million in June 1992, 9.30 million in June 1995, to 11 million in December 1996. Doordarshan’s Audience Research Unit puts the total number of cable and satellite homes at 14.2 million in December 1996 (Doordarshan Handbook 1997); and Joshi estimates that there are about 15 million homes with cable connection (Goonasekera and Lee 1998).

An overwhelming number of viewers (90 per cent) in Hyderabad — a city in south of India — in July 1992 were thoroughly dissatisfied with programs and cited that as the reason for
the switch-over to cable TV (Rahim 1994). Abdur Rahim, who measured the impact of cable on television and VCR viewership, interviewed 250 people including 200 cable and satellite TV subscribers about a year after the launch of STAR TV. Many (62 per cent) felt that Doordarshan was wasting public money on “unimaginative”, “absurd” and “silly” programs (Rahim 1994, p.17). The cable subscribers who participated in the study considered cable TV not as “more than television” but as “more of television” (Rahim 1994, p.20). Viewers preferred cable TV channels to Doordarshan for both entertainment and news programs. Rahim found that BBC was the most popular channel because of the quality of its news programs.

**Research method**

I carried out a survey in Bombay and New Delhi in January 1998 to explore people’s response to the impact of foreign television and cable networks in the past five to seven years. The study was conducted in these two cities as the subscription to cable/foreign television channels remains an urban phenomenon. Self-administered questionnaires were delivered to 350 sample households and later collected in-person. In this way, the survey participants could seek clarification if they did not understand a question. This took into account the fact that English is a second or third language for Indians and even though they understand English, some of the complex questions can be confusing. This also prompted respondents to complete the questionnaire on time. A pilot survey was conducted in Bombay to fine-tune the questions, where 20 university students answered the questionnaire.

The stratified sampling method was used to ensure comparison between different groups of population. Three audience groups were chosen: 1. University students in Bombay, 2. Bombay residents and 3. New Delhi residents. The important variables included
age, education and income levels, as these can influence the consumption habits among audiences. An effort was made to select different suburbs in Bombay to have approximately equal representation of various income groups in the survey. Questionnaires were given out in areas with low, middle and high-income groups in Bombay, which was the main location for the survey. No such distinction was made in New Delhi or when asking university students to answer the questionnaire.

The questionnaire included a combination of closed and open-ended questions. Besides asking audiences to indicate their level of satisfaction with television programs, they were given an option to comment on the reason/s for their satisfaction/dissatisfaction. They were also asked of their perception of the quality of present day programs compared to those broadcast in 1991-92, and to name their favourite news programs and channels.

**Results**

In all, 350 questionnaires were given out to households. Of these, 291 were completed (51 by university students, 205 residents in Bombay and 35 residents in New Delhi). Overall, 3 to 6 per cent did not answer one or the other question. There was a higher number (40.7 per cent) of respondents in the age group of 18-24 years (Table 1.1, 1.2, 1.3). However, this group includes most of the university students. The over representation of younger people in the audience sampling was not planned, but can be explained by the fact that when a questionnaire was given to a household, it was generally answered by the younger member of the family. Reasons for this could be their better knowledge of English and interest in television programs.

As many as 99.3 per cent of the respondents watch television, whereas 97.9 per cent watch television at home, indicating a very high level of television adoption among the urban population in In-
dia. Most people (80.6 per cent) said they watched television every-
day of the week. More than 82 per cent watch television from one
to four hours a day (Table 2). It is significant to note that about 80
per cent of the cable subscribers watch television for one to four
hours a day. Overall, about 68 per cent subscribe to one or more
cable services. Those who do not subscribe to a cable service gave a
range of reasons from “parents do not allow,” “it distracts from
studies” to “not interested”.

Table 1.1: Distribution of respondents by age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audience/age groups</th>
<th>Bombay residents</th>
<th>University students</th>
<th>New Delhi residents</th>
<th>All groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 18 years</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>21.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-24 years</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>72.5</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>40.7</td>
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<td>25-34 years</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>11.8</td>
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<td>35-44 years</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54 years</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 years &amp; over</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>3.2</td>
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Table 1.2: Distribution of respondents by income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Annual household income in rupees</th>
<th>Bombay residents</th>
<th>University students</th>
<th>New Delhi residents</th>
<th>All groups</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More than 110,000</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>59.4</td>
<td>26.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>109,999 - 80,000</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79,999 - 51,000</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50,999 - 26,000</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25,999 or less</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9.7</td>
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</table>
Table 1.3: Distribution of respondents by education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education level</th>
<th>Bombay residents</th>
<th>University students</th>
<th>New Delhi residents</th>
<th>All groups</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University graduate</td>
<td>55.6</td>
<td>77.6</td>
<td>61.8</td>
<td>60.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>29.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary School</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the above</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Average number of television viewing hours per day

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>All areas (in %)</th>
<th>Cable Subscribers %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 hour</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>21.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 hours</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>26.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 hours</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 hours</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 hours</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 hours</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 hours</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 hours</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 hours</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 hours</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 hours</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 hours</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total =</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In response to the question about “how many Doordarshan channels and ‘channels other than Doordarshan’ can you watch daily?”, the response is so spread out that it is almost unquantifiable. Responses ranged between 1 to 100 channels. However, most of the television viewers watch either 1-3 channels (42.8 per cent) or 4-10 channels (47 per cent) regularly (Table 3).
An overwhelming number of respondents have one or more favourite television programs. The 10 most-favourite programs are Hindi soap operas (known as serials in India), viz., (in order of preference): Amanat, Hum Paanch, Aahat, Just Mohabbat, Hasratein, Banegi Apni Baat, Boogie Woogie, Teacher, Thoda Hai Thode Ki Zaroorat Hai and Dastaan. The (English) News and Aaj Tak (a Hindi news & current affairs program) on Doordarshan channels are the 12th and 13th most-favourite programs respectively. This indicates that the television audience in India still prefers Hindi-entertainment programs to other programs.

Similarly, the most favourite television channel is Zee TV — Star’s Hindi channel8; then in order of popularity Sony TV, Star Plus, Discovery, Star Movie, ESPN, Star Sports, DD2, DD1 and BBC.

Table 3: Number of channels regularly watched

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>All areas (%)</th>
<th>Cable Subscribers (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-3 channels</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>36.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-10 channels</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>51.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20 channels</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30 channels</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 30 channels</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An impressive 78.7 per cent of the respondents regularly watch news and current affairs programs on television. The most viewed news and current affairs programs are: Aaj Tak (a Hindi news & current affairs program on Doordarshan channel DD2) followed by The (English) News (on Doordarshan channel DD1), Zee News (A mix of Hindi and English news and current affairs program on Zee TV), Star News and the English news channel — BBC World service. More than two-thirds of the respondents rely on television and newspaper for their daily news updates (Table 4.1). However, the newspaper still remains as the source of news on which most people depend, followed by television (Table 4.2).
Table 4.1: Source of news

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audience/Sources of news</th>
<th>Bombay Residents %</th>
<th>University students %</th>
<th>New Delhi residents %</th>
<th>All areas %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>74.1</td>
<td>86.3</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td>77.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>86.3</td>
<td>94.3</td>
<td>82.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazine</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>19.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2: Source of news on which people most depend

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources of news/Age</th>
<th>Under 18</th>
<th>18-24</th>
<th>25-34</th>
<th>35-44</th>
<th>45-54</th>
<th>above 54</th>
<th>Overall %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>44.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper</td>
<td>65.4</td>
<td>49.1</td>
<td>57.1</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magazine</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Relatively higher numbers of respondents are satisfied with programs on “channels other than Doordarshan” for their technical quality, entertainment value, credibility of information and overall performance (Table 5). For overall performance, 91.1 per cent said they were satisfied with “channels other than Doordarshan”, whereas 67.6 per cent were satisfied with Doordarshan channels.

A striking majority (84-85 per cent) of the respondents said that Doordarshan programs had improved over the past five to seven years. A similar number of respondents wanted Doordarshan to improve further. Opinion varied about how Doordarshan programs should change from “needs to broadcast more entertainment programs” to “improve technical quality” and “show more educational and meaningful programs” (Table 6).
Table 5: Comparative ratings of programs on Doordarshan and other channels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories (in %)</th>
<th>TQ</th>
<th>TQ</th>
<th>TQ</th>
<th>TQ</th>
<th>EV</th>
<th>EV</th>
<th>EV</th>
<th>EV</th>
<th>CI</th>
<th>CI</th>
<th>CI</th>
<th>CI</th>
<th>CI</th>
<th>CI</th>
<th>OP</th>
<th>OP</th>
<th>OP</th>
<th>OP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>VS</td>
<td>Vus</td>
<td>VS</td>
<td>Vus</td>
<td>VS</td>
<td>Vus</td>
<td>VS</td>
<td>Vus</td>
<td>VS</td>
<td>Vus</td>
<td>VS</td>
<td>Vus</td>
<td>VS</td>
<td>Vus</td>
<td>VS</td>
<td>Vus</td>
<td>VS</td>
<td>Vus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doordarshan</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>32.8</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction level</td>
<td>61.6</td>
<td>71.2</td>
<td>78.8</td>
<td>70.2</td>
<td>78.8</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>67.6</td>
<td>73.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other channels</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>94.4</td>
<td>94.4</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>91.4</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>91.1</td>
<td>91.1</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TQ = Technical Quality
EV = Entertainment Value
CI = Credibility of Information
OP = Overall Performance

*Satisfaction levels between VS & VUS — Very satisfied, Satisfied, Average, Unsatisfied & Very Unsatisfied

VS = Very Satisfactory
Vus = Very Unsatisfactory
Table 6: How should Doordarshan programs be different?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How different should DD programs be?</th>
<th>% of response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More entertainment programs</td>
<td>24.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve technical quality</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve news and current affairs</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More educational &amp; meaningful</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More variety, less repeats</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hindi entertainment channels such as Zee TV and Sony TV are among the most popular cable/foreign channels. However, BBC still gets the highest score for credibility of news and information. More than 70 per cent of the respondents feel that Doordarshan covers local, regional and national issues better than international issues; whereas an almost equal number feel that channels other than Doordarshan cover all these categories of issues well. About 90 per cent of the respondents state that channels other than Doordarshan cover national and international issues better than Doordarshan (Table 7). Once again, Zee TV is considered the best cable/foreign channel to cover local, regional and national issues, whereas BBC remains the best channel for covering international issues.

An impressive number of respondents feel that programs on Doordarshan channels represent Indian cultural values, whereas only about half of those feel that programs broadcast by “channels other than Doordarshan” represent Indian culture (Table 8). As can be observed from the responses, younger generation is more satisfied with Doordarshan for representing Indian cultural values in their programs. However, more than two-thirds of respondents also think that foreign programs are good for the country as they are “informative and cover global issues”.

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Table 8: Representation of Indian cultural values in programs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Channels/age</th>
<th>Under 18</th>
<th>18-24</th>
<th>25-34</th>
<th>35-44</th>
<th>45-54</th>
<th>Above 54</th>
<th>Overall %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doordarshan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>88.1</td>
<td>87.6</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>69.7</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>80.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>19.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other channels</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>46.7</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>41.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>51.7</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>65.5</td>
<td>53.3</td>
<td>77.8</td>
<td>58.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Opinion is divided over the question of government censorship of programs. Most people are concerned about the broadcast of “vulgar programs” and “the need to preserve Indian culture”; however they “do not want the government to censor programs for political reasons”. A majority of people said that programs are “not biased” on television. However, more viewers feel that programs are “not biased” on “channels other than Doordarshan”, compared with Doordarshan (Table 9). Most of the respondents commented that Doordarshan programs were still “government oriented”, whereas “other channels” provided “more variety and entertainment”.

Table 9: Are television programs biased?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Channels/education level</th>
<th>University graduates</th>
<th>Secondary School</th>
<th>Primary School</th>
<th>None of the above</th>
<th>Overall %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doordarshan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>43.1</td>
<td>49.3</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>44.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>56.9</td>
<td>50.7</td>
<td>68.8</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>55.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other channels</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>29.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>67.8</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>63.3</td>
<td>70.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Significantly higher number of people are satisfied with the quality of news in January 1998 (93 per cent) than before cable and foreign television channels became popular in 1992 (64.1 per cent) (Table 10). Cable subscribers are marginally more satisfied with the quality of news today than before. However, an overwhelming majority of respondents feel that news program have improved in technical quality, entertainment value, credibility and coverage of current affair issues (Table 11).

**Table 10: Satisfaction with quality of news in 1992 and in 1998**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality of news</th>
<th>All Viewers</th>
<th>Cable subscribers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Before 1991</td>
<td>Early 1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>27.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfied</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>44.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsatisfied</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very unsatisfied</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 11: Changes in news programs in the past five to seven years**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources of news/age</th>
<th>Technical quality</th>
<th>Entertainment value</th>
<th>Credibility of info.</th>
<th>Coverage of issues</th>
<th>Overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improved a lot</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>56.1</td>
<td>57.7</td>
<td>60.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved a little</td>
<td>43.8</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>34.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not improved at all</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion**

The survey results support the research hypothesis that increased competition in the television industry in India has im-
mensely benefited the audience by providing them with better quality and quantity of programs and channels. Although the primary focus of programming provided by all channels has been entertainment, news and current affairs have not been far behind. Today, audiences have an option to switch between channels and watch a wide range of programs, and they do exercise this choice as is evident from the survey results. The profile of an Indian television viewer is one who watches one to three hours of television daily and three to four channels regularly. Although the typical Indian viewer still prefers Hindi-entertainment programs, he or she watches a number of news and current affairs programs on anywhere between two to 10 different channels every week.

The survey shows that respondents are very discerning in comparing the quality of programs offered by all channels. Although they are satisfied with the programs on offer as of today on all channels including Doordarshan, Indian viewers still want Doordarshan to further improve as they perceive that Indian cultural values are better represented by an Indian television network. This is one of the reasons why “other channels”, which began their broadcast by showing re-runs of Western soap operas from yester-years, have been Indianising their menu of programs. Not surprisingly, Star network’s Hindi channel — Zee TV — which essentially broadcasts Hindi-entertainment programs is the most popular among Indian audiences. Other channels including Doordarshan have tried to adopt Zee’s success formula to achieve the same result.

One of the focus areas of the survey was to find out if viewers can rely on television as their source of news. With the addition of two 24-hour news channels and a vast range of news and in-depth current affairs programs, Indians are relishing the visual feast of watching live telecast of news events around the world. The respondents in Bombay and Delhi overwhelmingly indicate that they are keen to watch news and current affairs programs on television,
and choose a combination of Hindi and English news and current affairs programs from both Doordarshan and “other channels”.

A new language called Hinglish — a mixture of Hindi and English — is becoming popular in India. Joshi refers to this language as the Bombay Hindi language (Goonasekera & Lee 1998). Channels such as Zee TV present news programs in this new language where a news story is told in both Hindi and English: sometimes even a sentence can have both Hindi and English words so that everybody can understand it. This relaxing of standards to reach a mass audience is one of the surprising outcomes of the recent expansion of television industry in India. Yet Indian viewers still want to watch more of local or regional language news and current affairs programs. This is evident from the fact that channels covering local issues in local languages such as Sun TV in Tamil Nadu and Eenadu TV in Andhra Pradesh have achieved some degree of success against other more popular national channels such as Zee TV and Sony TV (Lahiri 1997). Indian viewers are beginning to trust television as a source of news along with newspapers, which still remains popular.

One of the areas of dissatisfaction with the television industry had always been the technical quality of the programs telecast by the public service broadcaster. Although India has not lagged behind in venturing into satellite technology, during the first three decades of development of television, a number of factors from the quality of equipment used to produce programs to the quality of television sets at the receiving end diminished the entertainment value of television programs. However, with the advent of Star TV channels in 1991 and falling prices of television sets, Indian audiences today enjoy technically superior programming. In the survey, the audience indicate that though they are satisfied with the improvements in Doordarshan’s technical and entertainment quality of programming, they still consider “other channels” to be better.
Overall, urban Indian viewers are more satisfied with television programming at present than five to seven years ago. However, a future potential study could be to gauge the impact of foreign television on the rural population of the country. Because of time and resource constraints, this audience survey had to be restricted to two cities. But the study does allude to the improvements in programming for all viewers as competition from foreign and other cable channels has caused Doordarshan to improve its reach and programming. It could be deduced that as a result, today the Indian rural population is better off than before as they can view better Doordarshan programs. Cable networking has already spread to smaller cities and towns of India, and will soon reach the rural population.

There is no doubt that Doordarshan has a significant role to play in India, particularly in providing information and entertainment to the masses and, representing Indian cultural values (NAMEDIA report 1986). The network has to satisfy other social objectives such as disseminating the message of family planning and national integrity (Doordarshan Handbook 1997).

Television audiences across the world not only want to receive important information from their television sets, but also want to be entertained. Indian audiences in that respect are no different. They also want their television to be a window to the world via a variety of news and current affairs programs — local, regional, national and international. In the case of India, it is the other channels including both owned by foreign or Indian private businesses which have provided them with that opportunity. As a result, the national public service broadcaster has improved its performance. On the other hand, the presence of Doordarshan has made other channels Indianise their programs rather than feed the starving Indian audience old Western sitcoms.
References


Lahiri, Indrajit (1997), South Asia Correspondence, Televisionasia, personal communication.


**Endnotes**

1 Doordarshan (roughly translated) means “vision from far”.

2 All India Radio retains its monopoly as the sole radio network in the country. In 1997 it had 177 broadcasting centres, including 65 local radio stations, covering nearly cent-per-cent of the country’s population.

3 “Other Channels” refer to all channels broadcasting their programs in India other than Doordarshan channels. Some of these “other channels” are owned by Indians and others by foreigners. However, the common feature among all these channels is that they broadcast their program from foreign soil. There are some local cable channels, covering one or two residential blocks, which telecast programs from within the Indian national boundaries.

4 *The Constitution of India* provides for freedom of expression as one of the fundamental rights to which a citizen is entitled — 19 (1) says: “All citizens shall have the right — (a) to freedom of speech and expression.” The Supreme Court of India has interpreted this freedom of expression as being inclusive of the freedom of the press (Bhatt 1994).

5 The term “intellectual” is synonymous with “elite” in the Western world.

6 Apart from Doordarshan channels which largely utilise transponders on INSAT series of satellite, foreign television networks such as Star TV, Sony, Home TV, Sun TV, TNT, CNN, BBC World Service and others use transponders on Asiasat-1, Asiasat-2, PAS-4, IntelSat-703, IntelSat-4 and Goryizont-42 (Doordarshan Handbook, 1997).
7 A Hong Kong entrepreneur, Li Kashing, and a regional conglomerate, Hutchinson Whampoa, founded a pan-Asian satellite network STAR TV. STAR TV Services via its three footprints (or the geographic area of coverage) — AsiaSat 1, AsiaSat 2 and Palapa C2 — covers two thirds of Asia. Rupert Murdoch bought a controlling share (64 per cent) in STAR TV in 1993 from Li Kashing.

8 STAR TV owns 49.9 per cent of Zee TV network and the rest is owned by a number of non-resident Indians.

9 Sony TV does broadcast some English program. The channel is partly owned by a number of film personalities in India.

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The influence of newsroom layout on news

Beate Josephi

Although valuable empirical research had been done on individual journalists, aspects of some of the results in international surveys remain puzzling at times. This paper argues that organisational and institutional factors should be taken into account to make the existing data more meaningful. An approach to this is suggested in this study of the new newsroom of the West Australian in Perth, and comparing it to the newsrooms of a German regional newspaper. By looking at the West Australian’s new newsroom, the linkage between newsroom layout and final print product becomes clearer.

While much attention has been given to journalists as primary gatekeepers of news, attention has also been directed towards news as “the product of practicalities and constraints of the processes by which it is created” (Berkowitz 1997, p.vii). In other words, the focus has broadened from the individual to the organisational. The research reported in this article aims to add to understanding of the impact of organisational structure by looking at the new newsroom of Perth’s morning daily newspaper, the West Australian.

The micro issue of newsroom layout offers an important insight into newsroom culture, especially when looked at on a comparative basis with other countries. In Australia, the final print product is
the result of a finely-tuned, if enforced, team effort. In Germany, by contrast, the final product is the sum of individual efforts which, to exaggerate slightly, happen to be contained in one edition.

**Research into newsroom work practices**

The value of newsroom studies has been the subject of some debate. It has centred on the question of the individual (i.e. journalists’ influence on news) versus the institutional (i.e. the media organisation as a whole). The two poles of discussion in the US were articulated by S. Robert Lichter and Herbert J. Gans. (Esser 1998, p.31)

Lichter concluded from a survey of journalists that news judgment is subjective and that decisions about sources, news pegs and the use of language will partly “reflect the way a journalist perceives and understands the social world.” (Lichter 1987, p.31) Gans held that the institutional sphere’s influence was too strong for subjective opinion to penetrate. (Gans 1985, p.29)

Pitching the individual against the institutional leaves out the intermediary level — the organisational. Kepplinger (who originated the concept of comparative workpractice studies in which I am currently engaged) wrote in a conclusion to the first comparative study of British and German journalists that “[t]he editorial structures probably have a significant impact on the final product ... although this aspect has not yet been systematically investigated.” (Kepplinger & Köcher 1990, p.292). This was almost a decade ago.

Today we know a lot more about the individual, that is about journalists, thanks to the work of people like Weaver, Henningham and many others. In exploring “the global journalist”, Weaver came to the conclusion that the surveys which have been conducted so far are valuable in establishing basic characteristics of journalists such as age, gender, minority representation and education levels. However, with questions such as journalistic autonomy or watch-
dog role on governments, it is far more difficult to establish meaningful data, since some of the figures blatantly contradict observable everyday practice. For example, journalists in the People’s Republic of China said they thought it was more important to be the watchdog on government than did journalists in France or Canada. (Weaver 1998, p.466)

A broadened research basis is needed to align already existing data with a supporting context, and the area most conducive to further empirical research is newsroom practice. In their 1986 study, Weaver and Wilhoit pointed to the organisational environment as being highly predictive of journalists’ role orientations. (Weaver & Wilhoit 1986, p.117; also Shoemaker & Reese 1996, p.5). Furthermore, they saw the newsroom environment as “extremely important in the ethical decisionmaking.” (p.137). This point was reiterated in the findings on Brazilian journalists who “[i]n sum . . . perceived their organisational contexts, which include journalistic training, newsroom routines, more experienced editors, more experienced reporters and other peers, as the most influential factor in their conceptions of ethics.” (Herscovitz & Cardoso 1998, p.427)

Breed’s 1955 classic, “Social control in the newsroom” (reprinted in Berkowitz, 1997), came to the conclusion that a journalist looks to his colleagues and superiors, not the public, for recognition: “Instead of adhering to societal and professional ideals, he redefines his values to the more pragmatic level of the newsroom group.” (p.120)

Breed further concluded that this produces results insufficient for wider democratic needs. More recent research has abandoned this kind of openly normative approach in favour of more guarded semantic signifiers, such as labelling newsroom routines as a “set of constraints”. (Shoemaker & Reese 1996, p.105) This still pitches the individual in conflict with the organisational and/or the institutional. However, there is also increasing recognition of the fact that “[p]rofessionalism and (bureaucratic business) organisation cannot
be conceived as being opposite poles on a continuum of freedom and control.” (Soloski 1989, p.142)

In fact, looking at the changes to the newsroom layout at the *West Australian*, as an aspect of organisational structure, it becomes obvious that there is a conscious attempt to lessen this inherently conflictual situation of freedom (individual) and control (organisational/institutional).

### A comparative angle

When discussing the surveys of journalists in many countries, Weaver, in his introduction to data assembled in *The Global Journalist*, found the patterns of similarities and differences “striking and intriguing in their variety.” (Weaver 1998, p.6) Hidden behind this phrase is the fact that the world of journalists does not divide neatly into East and West, or into democratic or non-democratic countries. There were as many dissimilarities between Western European nations as there were similarities.

The former came compellingly to my attention when I visited a German regional newspaper, the *Mainzer Allgemeine Zeitung*, in June 1998. The newsroom layout, and the work practices could hardly have been more different to those I had experienced in Australia. Most rooms, off on either side of a long corridor, with firmly closed wooden doors, had no more than one or two work stations. The sports department, with six work stations, had the largest number of computers in one office.

Via the pagination system, into which the dummy had been fed, the German journalists know exactly how many centimetres they have to fill. They write their story from beginning to end, and add their own heading and any captions needed. No-one touches the article once it has been lodged by the journalist. No sub-editor or editor checks it. This is a pattern common to most German regional dailies. (Esser 1998, p.390)
In other words, the German and the Australian systems, or for that matter the British system on which the Australian is modelled, are significantly different. Even if almost identical percentages of Australian and German journalists state that they want to report news quickly (74% and 73% respectively) and want to provide analysis (71% and 74% respectively) (Weaver 1998, p.466), they do so under considerably disparate organisational structures. These differences are reflected in the layout of their newsrooms. I therefore would like to suggest that newsroom layout can be used as a paradigm for newsroom culture.

The newsroom at the West Australian

Over the Easter weekend of 1998, Perth’s daily newspaper the West Australian moved from its location at Forrest Centre, off St Georges Terrace, in the CBD to its newly built premises at Herdsmen Lake, eight kilometres north of its previous location. The move, described by the editorial manager as a move to a more efficient operation, but less efficient location, was economically motivated.

The West Australian had moved in 1987 to Forrest Centre while being under the ownership of Robert Holmes a Court (who had bought the paper in 1987 from the Herald and Weekly Times/Murdoch), and who also owned the building. After the stockmarket crash, Holmes a Court sold the paper to Alan Bond, and the building to the State Government Insurance Office (SGIO). When Bond was declared bankrupt in 1991, the banks were in receivership of the West Australian and its associated country papers which in January 1992 were floated. With the Forrest Centre building owned by the SGIO, the West Australian found itself in rented accommodation.

Before the move to the Forrest Centre, the West Australian’s address had been 125 St Georges Terrace, in premises custom-built
for the paper in the early 1930s. All editorial sections there except photographic had been on one floor. Forrest Centre, which can be described as approximating an octagonal shape, offered less space per floor, and the departments were distributed over three floors. On the first were photographic and design, on the second business and features, and on the third were the editor, general (news), foreign, sport, the leader writer and the cartoonist.

On the third floor of Forrest Centre, which offered splendid views over the Swan River, the Narrows Bridge, the offices of senior staff, including the news conference room, were situated along the window front. General was towards the riverside of the building, with the chief-of-staff at its centre. Sport, and the work stations for subeditors, were towards the St George’s Terrace side of the building. The floors were connected by lift only — there were no stairs — which was perceived as an additional barrier.

So much for the old. The present research examines the impact of the new newsroom on editorial staff. Information was gained through individual interviews with a range of journalists, including reporters, sub-editors and editorial executives. At least one journalist from each section of the newspaper was interviewed.

The new Newspaper House at Herdsman Lake is rectangular in shape, containing within it a long rectangular entrance, like an open air atrium, before one steps into the building. This means that photographic and the library are on the same floor as the newsroom, but on the other side of the atrium.

Given again the chance to design a newsroom, the West Australian opted for one large floor. The editor, Paul Murray, made the point that, in drawing up the plan, everyone was consulted. However for most staff the level of consultation was at the “micro” level — that is, concerning the size and design of their own work stations.
As the rationale behind joining everyone on one big news floor, Paul Murray primarily pointed to the earlier "geographical isolation" of the various sections, including the library, which led to their not being used or interacted with to their fullest potential. As Paul Murray put it, "our principal wish was that everyone be together. That was our first design imperative." (Paul Murray, 4 Nov '98)

The idea of greater staff cohesiveness seems to have been successful. Everyone I talked to welcomed the new newsroom’s possibilities for interaction, especially the staff in those sections which were previously removed from the decision centres. I did get the odd ironic statement, though, mentioning that “even if they [in the news department] still don’t talk to us, at least we can talk to them”. There was overall agreement that the new layout made communication easier, and more personal, since it now was frequently done face to face rather than by phone or email message.

Other major changes in the new design were to bring the artroom more into the newsroom, and to position the sub-editors as a “central core” down the middle of the building, “much more into the path of reporters.” (Murray, 4 Nov ’98) Moving the sub-editors was a deliberate strategy, aimed at easing their isolation and improving on their previous work environment — a choice of either staring at one’s own screen or at the back of another sub’s computer. In their new location in quadrants, they can talk more easily to each other and to reporters. Paul Murray remarked with pleasure that he sees reporters far many more times standing with sub-editors, discussing the treatment of their stories.

This results in a change in culture, away from the old adversarial roles played by subs and reporters. But it is not a sudden change: Murray says he has tried to change the sub-reporter relationship since taking over as editor in 1989. But it was only now that the change could be given physical expression in having the sub-editors forming the spine of the room.
Figure 1: The new newsroom of the West Australian
Also of importance is the relationship between sub-editors and section editors. The cooperation between editor and sub-editor was particularly noticeable in Foreign and Sport. The foreign editor who, on the whole, works entirely from wire services, is in constant consultation with his chief sub-editor, who is also his deputy. Similarly the sports editor (heading a department of 28 people), named his chief subeditor as his main discussion partner.

According to Murray, putting the sub-editors along the centre of the building is also aimed at greater productivity. The same drive towards multi-skilling, which can be observed in newsrooms around the world, is here at work. Sub-editors are encouraged to be flexible, and in particular are able to give assistance to other editorial sections.

The open newsroom floor underlines the ease with which subs or reporters can move or be moved from place to place. But this also applies to senior staff. I happened to do my research at the *West Australian* at a time when the editor was overseas, and everyone, except for the chief-of-staff, had played musical chairs. The deputy editor was editor, the night editor was deputy editor, the news editor night editor etc. In a working environment, which produces a fresh product six days a week when most people only work five, this flexibility seems entirely appropriate.

This also puts the question of job autonomy, raised earlier in comparison with the German system, in a new light. The assessing of autonomy should possibly be weighed against available responsibilities. If the lines of responsibility are kept fluid, with certain tasks not permanently appropriated by certain people, then the clearly drawn work demarcation lines exemplified by the one person offices in Germany, seem unnecessary. Responsibilities are bestowed as part of a flexible system, which expects people to take them on—or hand them over—due to the incongruity of people’s working week or year and the 24-hour nature of news.
Impact of interactions between departments

In conducting my research I could not help realising that in expecting the newsroom would impact on the product, I may have put the cart before the horse. If restructuring of the newsroom is to result in changes in the product (the content of the *West Australian*), such changes are evident only to a small degree as yet, although they may filter through in time. For the moment, it is far more evident that the new newsroom formalised changes which had recently been initiated.

The return of the features department to the same news floor is, in part, recognition of the importance of entertainment segments to the paper. In Australian newspapers the percentage of entertainment in features and lift-outs over the last decade has increased by 7 per cent (while news has decreased by 8 per cent), as highlighted by Grattan (1998, p.26) This phenomenon has been observed in other countries, including Germany. (Kepplinger 1998)

The features editor is in no doubt that his department has benefited most from being on the same floor. Apart from the fact that the other staff can see “that we work as hard as they do and don’t drink champagne all day,” he notices a far greater cross-fertilisation between news and features. Features now can alert news to a good general story, and they also can add to the creative input.

Putting the arts and design department on the same floor is a further great advantage for features which, of all the departments, interacts most with art, layout and design staff. These now attend news conferences. (The features editor began attending conferences some six months before the move.) In the morning news conference, the features editor gives notice of the pointers he needs on the front page, and what the main stories of the day’s lift-out are.

The sports department, too, although previously on the same floor, feel more included. With senior staff offices being part of the
central spine, consciously offering an “open door policy”, as Murray put it, sport finds it easier to talk to editorial people. According to deputy sports editor Trevor Gilmour (interview 22 Oct ’98) this has resulted in sport stories getting more frequently into a prominent place outside their own section, especially page 1 (and the tabloid *West Australian*’s front page has room for only two stories).

The compartmentalisation which had been in place, due to the geographical separation of departments, is breaking down. The newspaper “dummy” still allocates space to departments, but where a story eventually finds its place is now more open.

The accessibility of photographic, layout and design has led to a greater involvement of these departments in the working of some staff. For example, the foreign editor now gets the first batch of potentially interesting wire photos when he comes in at around 10 a.m., rather than searching later for the pictures to go with the stories. This does not mean that the stories are now pictorially driven, although an element of this may have come to bear on the selection. (According to foreign editor P.T. Singham, the availability of pictures makes the choice of stories easier, as the choice between stories of similar level of interest can be made on the strength of the photo.)

The department which appears to have been least affected by the changes is news (or general, as it is called at the *West Australian*). The chief-of-staff is now, as it were, sidelined, looking down on his reporters from a kind of raised commando bridge, rather than being at their centre as before. Apart from his seating, little has changed. Whether this constancy can be interpreted as meaning that news is an area of stagnation, not affected by new ideas or changes, is open to discussion. News, as research has shown (Grattan 1998, p.26), is fighting a battle for the attention of the public, and has to prove its relevance. The breaking down of barri-
ers between various segments of the paper might be, in the long run, more a benefit to them than a danger.

Conclusions

For the moment, the new newsroom exemplifies rather than generates the changes which are occurring in the news product. These product changes — higher profile of features, more emphasis on layout — preceded rather than followed the move to Herdsman Lake. But they have been maintained and strengthened. Other changes, such as a continuing breaking down of barriers between sections, may possibly be observed in the future.

The new floor design emphasises flexibility and transparency. Job autonomy, in places like Germany, is achieved by strict segregation of jobs which, in turn, are entirely one person’s responsibility. At the *West Australian* the reverse is the case. By expecting staff to take on — or hand over — responsibilities, which are linked to a position rather than a person, the feeling of being stuck in one employment situation does not arise easily.

Surveys on journalists may produce similar answers to questions, but the way meaning is given to criteria such as job autonomy can be very different indeed. Without a closer look at the organisational level these embedded differences will not be revealed.
References


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News media chronicle, 
July 1997 to June 1998

Rod Kirkpatrick

Symbolic of a year of change in the elite Australian print media companies, Lachlan Murdoch and James Packer each became the leader of the Australian publishing arms of his father’s media and business empires.

Murdoch, a third-generation member of the Murdoch media dynasty, was 26 when he replaced the 62-year-old Ken Cowley as News Corp’s Australian chief executive. Lachlan is shaping up as the successor to his father, Rupert Murdoch, in running the group’s global news and entertainment empire. James Packer, at age 30 and a fourth-generation member of the Packer dynasty, became executive chairman of the Packer group, Publishing & Broadcasting, after the departure of his mentor, Brian Powers.

At John Fairfax Holdings, there was a constant state of flux in the higher echelons of management. Brian Reynolds departed the Age as chief executive and was replaced by Steve Harris, who was given the title of publisher editor-in-chief of the Age and Sunday Age, Melbourne; Bruce Guthrie departed the Age’s editorial chair and was replaced by Michael Gawenda; Sir Laurence Street resigned as chairman of the Fairfax board and was replaced by Rod Price who, six months later, was replaced by Brian Powers; John Alexander was sacked as publisher and editor-in-chief of the Sydney Morning Herald, and soon had a job at Australian Consolidated Press, running their magazines. Greg Hywood, previously publisher
and editor-in-chief of the *Australian Financial Review*, replaced Alexander at the *SMH* and Michael Gill replaced Hywood at the *AFR*.

Victoria became the scene of a newspaper price assault as the year closed. Seven weeks after the *Age* had undergone a facelift, News Ltd. remodelled the *Australian* and cuts its price from 90¢ to 40¢ in Victoria, while increasing it to $1 in other mainland states and to $1.20 in Tasmania. Early figures suggested the price cut was lifting the circulation of the *Australian* and cutting that of the *Age*.

Federal Cabinet scrapped plans to reform Australia’s cross-media-ownership laws after months of speculation that seemed to suggest the Packer family could be in control of the Fairfax newspapers by Christmas 1997. At the ABC, heads were kept low as a barrage of attacks was fired upon it by Communications Minister Richard Alston. The attacks ranged from accusations of editorial bias to allegations of breaching its charter over “promoting” a film. The federal government ignored strong warnings from all its economic-policy departments when it decided to give free-to-air TV stations, in effect, a multi-million-dollar gift of exclusive access to digital broadcasts until 2008. Digital broadcasts are expected to begin on 1 January 2001.

**ABC**

Communications Minister Richard Alston butted into the affairs of the ABC for various reasons during 1997-98. In December, Senator Alston asked the ABC for assurances that it was not breaching its charter by running television promotions or advertisements for a film to which it had acquired distribution rights. The cinema release of *Her Majesty Mrs Brown* was promoted on ABC television and radio. In March, the Minister appeared on ABC radio deploring an Elle McFeast interview with a convicted criminal, Mark “Chopper” Read. In April, Senator Alston accused the ABC of bias in its coverage of the waterfront dispute involving the Maritime Union of Aus-
tralia and Patrick’s Stevedores (closely allied to the government’s bid for reform on the waterfront). He demanded an explanation from ABC managing director Brian Johns over a senior ABC executive’s directive to rural reporters not to promote a rally organised by farmers to protest the New South Wales government’s handling of the dispute. Senator Alston stepped up the pressure on the ABC, requesting definitive guidelines about what the corporation regarded as the “coverage” or “promotion” of political events. Alston sent the letter to the managing director, responsible for the ABC’s day-to-day management, rather than to the chairman of the board, traditionally the recipient of ministerial queries.

At the end of May, Senator Alston used an informal address to the ABC board to release a range of procedural overhauls designed to combat bias. Chairman McDonald responded with a personal message to Senator Alston and a public statement that the board was satisfied the ABC’s present editorial policies were “comprehensive and effective”. Before the Senate Estimates Committee in June, Alston attacked the 7.30 Report substitute presenter, Jennifer Byrne, and NSW Liberal Senator John Tierney accused 7.30 Report presenter Kerry O’Brien of bias against the Coalition in his handling of the 1993 debate between Dr John Hewson, then the Coalition leader, and Paul Keating, then the Prime Minister.

In the midst of Alston’s campaign against the ABC, Victorian Premier Jeff Kennett said a State Parliamentary Economic Development Committee would be set up to review the role and adequacy of the ABC in its coverage of the Victorian economy and community. Then came the Federal Budget, and Johns accused Alston of making misleading statements about the money the Government allocated the ABC for digital broadcasting in the Budget.

An Australian Broadcasting Authority inquiry found that Four Corners had been inaccurate and unfair in its treatment of the Foundation For Humanity’s Adulthood group and a high-profile adher-
ent, the mountaineer Tim Macartney-Snape. The ABA found that *Four Corners* had wrongly portrayed the foundation as a cult in a program screened in April 1995. It had also declined to allow other opinions and viewpoints as a balance to assertions made by *Four Corners*.

A storm broke out in November over a $1.1 million outsourcing deal which the ABC struck with a company representing the former Nine and Seven current affairs presenter, Jana Wendt, to present a series of 10 half-hour interviews on the ABC. The deal was struck with an independent commercial company, Beyond International. The $100,000 per episode compared less than favourably with the $25,000-$30,000 an episode for Jennie Brockie’s *Speaking Personally* series. The two series had a similar aim: to get the essence of a person rather than to chase the news angle, according to ABC’s commissioning editor of talks, Jeune Pritchard. While Wendt had the luxury of international travel and a more generous budget, Brockie could not conduct interviews outside Sydney or Melbourne. There were three in Brockie’s team, and four in Wendt’s. Wendt chased big international names, Brockie chased Australians. Quentin Dempster, a staff-elected ABC director from 1992-1996, wrote: “This is not about Jana Wendt. It is about the independence and integrity of the ABC, now confronting the full impact of budget cuts.” The ABC was in the midst of reducing its staff from about 5700 in late 1996 to about 4100 by middle of 1998. Jana Wendt’s series of 10 *Uncensored* interviews began on 8 July, 1998.

In July, Ian Callinan, QC, a Queensland barrister, was appointed to the ABC board, strengthening the conservative influence. He replaced Queensland trade unionist Janine Walker whose term had expired. Callinan’s term was brief: in December he was appointed to the High Court and resigned as an ABC director. In February, the president of the Victorian branch of the Liberal Party, Michael Kroger, was appointed to the ABC vacancy. Alston said it had been impossible to find anyone in Queensland with the requisite skills...
and qualifications to represent the state on the ABC board. Until a short time earlier, Kroger had been closely identified with Kerry Packer’s attempts to persuade the government to alter cross-media ownership regulations.

Public debate in the columns of the press ensued in March after the *Australian*’s media writer, Errol Simper, had highlighted the turmoil at the ABC. Simper’s article was written upon the departure from the ABC of its manager of network television, Penny Chapman. It had been announced she would privately adapt a major work of Australian literature for ABC-TV. The main staff union, the Community and Public Sector Union, told the head of networks, Andrew Lloyd James, that it was “highly inappropriate for any member of staff to use their position inside the ABC to secure ABC funding for their private venture”. Simper rattled off a list of recently departed senior ABC executives such as Neville Oliver, head of sport; Peter Loxton, director of radio; and Derek White, manager of Radio Australia. “The truth,” Simper wrote, “is that ‘Your ABC’ of 1998 is a sad, badly managed, demoralised, disorganised place. It lacks leadership and political support. Collectively, it is beginning to wonder if it has a purpose.” The article brought highly critical letters to the editor from the managing director, Brian Johns, and the chairman of the board, Donald McDonald. But it also brought highly supportive letters from Tom Morton, a senior reporter with Radio National, and whistleblower John Millard, a reporter/producer with ABC-TV, and a supportive article from Tim Bowden, a former ABC foreign correspondent best known for fronting the *Backchat* ABC listener-feedback program for seven years from 1986.

The nine-year-old *Media Watch* television program underwent a changing of the guard over the new year with the decision by executive producer David Salter to pursue other interests within the ABC and then the resignation of the founding presenter, Stuart Littlemore, after he was unable to reach agreement with the ABC.
about “the kind of staffing arrangements that would allow us to keep up the program’s quality”. In February the ABC appointed a staunch Littlemore critic, Richard Ackland, as the new presenter — but on only a one-year contract. A law columnist and publisher, Ackland, 51, has had a long career in print and radio journalism, working mostly for either Fairfax newspapers or the ABC’s Radio National. A graduate in economics and law, he writes a legal column for the *SMH* and edits and publishes the cheeky legal magazine *Jux- tinian* and the *Gazette of Law and Journalism*.

In the Budget in May, the government allocated only $20.8 million of the $84 million the ABC said it would need over the next five years to introduce digital television. The ABC said it needed a total of $180 million, of which $96 million would come from property sales and other measures. In June the ABC told a Senate committee investigating the Television Services (Digital Conversion) Bill that, unless it received more than the $20.8 million. it might not be able to begin digital transmissions by 1 January, 2001, when the commercial networks planned to go digital.

**SBS**

Malcolm Long, 49, resigned as managing director of SBS in September 1997 to pursue a career as an independent communications adviser. Nigel Milan, 47, was appointed to replace Long and began duties in February. Milan’s most recent position had been chief executive of Australian Radio Network (a 67-station commercial network, including stations such as MIX-FM, Sydney, and Gold 104-FM and TT-FM, Melbourne), half-owned by regional newspaper proprietor Cameron O’Reilly. Indira Naidoo, newsreader, left the ABC for SBS in December 1997 to read the World News at Nine. She said she wanted to focus on journalism rather than continuing to become the star that the ABC was making of her.
Fairfax

For John Fairfax Holdings, whose flagship newspaper, the SMH issued its 50,000th number on 2 December, 1997, it was a year of change in the higher echelons, from both board and staff viewpoints, and a year of pressures from institutional investors for it to perform better. John Fairfax Holdings reported a 15.4 per cent drop in profit in 1996-97 from $87.43 million to $73.94 million, joining other media groups in blaming continued poor economic conditions for depressed advertising sales. For 1997-98, Fairfax’s net profit jumped 51 per cent to $111.8 million. Trading revenue rose 8.4 per cent to $1.109 billion.

In July, John Reynolds announced his resignation as managing director of The Age to join Normandy Mining as strategy and structure group executive. Reynolds, who left on 8 August, had joined Fairfax in 1996 after six years as chief executive of Australian Provincial Newspapers Holdings Ltd. Reynolds’s role was filled by Steve Harris, who had been News Ltd.’s group senior executive in the office of the managing director in Sydney, but Harris was given the title of publisher and editor-in-chief of the Age and Sunday Age, Melbourne. Harris had immediate impact. In August, Bruce Guthrie resigned as editor of the Age, telling staff he did not share the same vision for the newspaper as Harris. Guthrie had been editor since October 1995. Fairfax observers said the board had begun to move against Guthrie nine months earlier, after Canadian publisher Conrad Black had sold his Fairfax shareholding to Brierley Investments, whose appointed directors were understood to be supporters of Victorian Premier Jeff Kennett. The Age, under Guthrie, had been highly critical of Kennett’s measures. Michael Gawenda replaced Guthrie as editor.

In November, the chairman of Fairfax, Sir Laurence Street, resigned from the board after having been a member for six years and the chairman for three years. Rod Price, the head of Brierley Invest-
ments Ltd., was elected as the new chairman, but left six months later when he was a victim of a radical management shakeup at BIL.

On 18 May, everything started coming to a head for Fairfax which had endured months of criticism from institutional investors about its failure to rein in costs. On that day a Fairfax board meeting gave the chief executive Robert Muscat the power to hire and fire senior editorial executives, ostensibly so he could win arguments on cost-cutting. Later, at the same meeting, the appointment to the board of Brian Powers, until a fortnight earlier the chief executive of Kerry Packer’s Consolidated Press Holdings, was confirmed. Powers, the representative of the Packer-controlled FXF Trust, was regarded as an ally of John Alexander, the publisher and editor-in-chief of the SMH. On 29 May, Powers was appointed chairman of the Fairfax board, but it was a week too late for Alexander. On 22 May, Muscat had struck, sacking Alexander, ostensibly for leaking to a Herald journalist a memo from Muscat about a proposal by the publisher of the Age, Steve Harris, for joint cost-cutting measures, including the merging of the Canberra bureaux of the two papers. Powers replaced Rodney Price as chairman of Fairfax. Price left the Fairfax board when he resigned from Brierley Investments Ltd., which held 25 per cent of Fairfax’s shares.

On 29 May, Greg Hywood, who had replaced Alexander as editor-in-chief of the Financial Review in 1995, was announced as Alexander’s replacement as editor-in-chief and publisher of the Herald. In June Michael Gill was appointed publisher and editor-in-chief of the Financial Review, to replace Hywood. Gill had been Fairfax Business Online manager for two years and had headed up the development of the AFR Trading Room Internet site and other Fairfax business-related information products. He is a former deputy editor of the AFR and former companies editor. Gill is also remembered for launching the Business Daily which survived only six weeks in 1987.
In June, Muscat launched Project Hercules, a review of the Fairfax operations designed to cut costs by $40 million, or about 5 per cent of its total cost base. Hercules, which brought in management consultants McKinsey & Co. to help make a “thorough review of all the company’s operations”, would pick up on initiatives undertaken at the Age, Muscat said.

In May, John Fairfax reached a one-off agreement with its newsprint and paper suppliers, Australian Newsprint Mills and Tasman Pulp and Paper, to cap the newsprint price increase to 8 per cent. Without the agreement, Fairfax would have faced an increase of more than 22 per cent, with the Australian dollar depreciating 19 per cent against the US dollar in the previous 12 months.

**Murdoch**

On 21 April the *New York Post*, owned by News Corporation, disclosed that Rupert and Anna Murdoch had separated. Rupert Murdoch, previously married, wed Anna Torv in 1967. Mrs Murdoch, a novelist and philanthropist, would remain on the News Corp board as a non-executive director and continue in the Murdoch businesses, wrote Post gossip columnist Liz Smith. The *Australian* ran an 11-par report on page 3 on 22 April. A former Murdoch editor and confidant, Andrew Neil, wrote that one of the strains in the Murdoch marriage was Anna’s insistence in continuing to live in Los Angeles, whereas Rupert wanted to spend more time in New York. Also: “Anna could not get him to reduce his punishing travel schedule and relentless deal-making . . . Anna hopes the separation will concentrate his mind and bring him to his senses.”

In May, News extended the $1.3 billion buyback scheme for its preferred shares for another six months, a move that analysts predicted would continue to bolster the price of its limited voting
shares. The stock had gained more than 45 per cent in value since the buyback was announced in August 1997.

On 30 June, the *SMH* reported that the value of News Corp shares meant that the company was now $10 billion clear of the next largest company on the Australian Stock Exchange, the National Australia Bank. For 1997-98, News more than doubled net profit to a record $1.68 billion, largely because of the international success of the blockbuster movie *Titanic* and better-than-expected earnings from Fox Television. The result came after an abnormal loss of $118 million related to Super League charges and early debt retirement. For 1996-97, News had reported a 29 per cent drop in net annual profit to $720 million after a modest gain in income was wiped out by a $575 million abnormal write-off, much of it related to the restructuring of the HarperCollins book publishing operation.

In July, Ken Cowley, at age 62, retired as executive chairman of News Ltd., the Australian arm of News Corp, after 33 years with the company. Cowley, a printer, joined the company to help establish the *Australian*. Lachlan Murdoch succeeded Cowley as executive chairman. Rupert Murdoch confirmed Lachlan as the heir apparent of the global news and entertainment empire. Although he had no plans to step down, he told media analyst Mathew Horsman, who was writing a book, that Lachlan was shaping up to head News.

In December, News Corp continued its disposal of non-core Australian assets by selling its 14 per cent stake in the Seven Network, for a profit of $135 million. News said it had sold because of the federal government’s decision not to relax cross-media ownership regulations. News had held the stake in Seven since 1993.

The appointment of receivers and managers to pay TV battle victim Australasia Media Ltd. seemed to provide hope for News Ltd. that its half-owned Foxtel would emerge from loss into profit in coming years. Foxtel was committed to pay Australis $4.5 billion
over 25 years for the supply of movies from Hollywood studios (see under “Pay TV”).

After two years and the reported injection of $300 million into Super League, News Ltd. agreed to a merger of its breakaway competition and the old, established Australian Rugby League, creating the NRL, or National Rugby League, with 20 teams in 1998, reducing to 14 by the year 2000. In 1998 Foxtel and Optus Vision shared equally, for the first time, the screening of league matches, both showing eight matches a week.

HarperCollins paid a modest financial sum to former Hong Kong Governor Chris Patten as part of an out-of-court settlement in a breach-of-contract law suit which Patten brought when the publisher dropped his book, *East and West: The Last Governor of Hong Kong*, from its publications list. Macmillan was the new publisher for the book.

In May, Twentieth Century Fox, owned by News Corp, opened its Sydney studio at the old Sydney Showground site. Fox film chief Bill Mechanic described it as “the best” and “most state-of-the-art film studio in the world”. The New South Wales Auditor-General, Tony Harris, said the showground site was delivered to Fox Studios without competition or proper assessment of the economic benefit to the state and was expected to cost NSW taxpayers up to $106.8 million.

News Corp was frozen out of the United States direct-to-home satellite business. The US Justice Department announced it would block Primestar’s merger with the MCI-News Corp joint venture, ASkyB. In June, News Corp sold its US TV Guide business to satellite broadcaster, United Video Satellite Group, for $3.4 billion. TV Guide and United Video were merged into an entity in which News holds a 40 per cent interest.

On 30 June, News Corp announced it would split in two. It unveiled a $25-30 billion spinoff of its American motion picture, tele-
vision and sports divisions. It would create a new company, Fox Group, to house assets including its Twentieth Century Fox film studio, the Fox television network and interests in sporting teams such as the LA Dodgers. Up to 20 per cent of the new company would be floated on the New York Stock Exchange by the end of 1998 in the biggest public share sale in US corporate history. After a legal battle with News Corp, Time Warner Inc gave Fox News access to the United States’ biggest cable pay TV market.

An international task force of tax investigators was set up to examine why News Corp paid virtually no tax. An agreement to begin the inquiry, involving tax officials from Britain, the United States, Canada and Australia, was reached at a meeting in Sydney in December. In the year to June 1999, News Corp provided for tax of $138 million on an operating profit, including abnormal items, of $905 million. At the full corporate tax rate of 36 per cent, $326 million would have been due.

Packer

On 18 May, James Packer, at age 30, became executive chairman of the Packer group Publishing & Broadcasting Ltd., after the departure of his mentor, Brian Powers, to the John Fairfax board (see “Fairfax” above). There were other changes to the PBL board, but the main one was that finance director Nick Falloon, 40, became chief executive officer.

In Business Review Weekly’s 1998 rich list, Kerry Packer was tops with a personal worth estimated at $5.2 billion, more than $3 billion clear of the second place holder, shopping centre developer Frank Lowy. Kerry Packer reaped $558 million from the sale of his 50.3 per cent stake in US magazine and inserts group, Valassis Communications Inc. A pending marriage, announced in February, between two magazine houses, Australian Consolidated Press and Time Inc.’s Australian magazines, failed at the altar. The centre-
piece of the marriage was intended to be the marketing of Time magazine alongside the Bulletin, via an independent joint venture vehicle, Premier Magazines. Time Inc.’s Who Weekly was to have been enveloped into Premier, along with its fierce Australian competitor, New Weekly. ACP’s Australian Gourmet Traveller and Wine magazine were also to join Premier.

PBL almost trebled its net profit for 1997-98, to $476.44 million, after revaluing its television licences and selling its John Fairfax and Sky investments. It raised the book value of its Nine Network television licences from $554 million to $1.32 billion. In March, the New South Wales TAB bought racing service Sky Channel in a deal that delivered 5 per cent shareholdings in the TAB to both Kerry Packer and Rupert Murdoch. In 1996-97, PBL’s net profit was $182.12 million.

PBL signed a new $175 million, seven-year (from 1999-2000 season to 2005-2006) deal with the Australian Cricket Board, covering all Tests in Australia, the annual triangular one-day series and selected domestic one-day Mercantile Mutual games. The deal excludes pay television rights in Australia and the sale of Australian rights to overseas TV interests. The ACB and Nine agreed to form a joint venture to operate the ACB’s Internet site.

PBL failed in its plan to expand into South Africa. The local regulator awarded the country’s first private free-to-air television licence to a consortium backed by the US media group Time Warner. PBL had formed in 1996 a development company of which it owned 20 per cent, to draft a licence proposal for a television network dubbed Station for the Nation with six South African partners.

**News media people**

* Tracey Holmes, formerly the host of ABC Radio’s Grandstand sports program, quit in April as media information manager for
SOCOG (the Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games). Her resignation followed months of tension between SOCOG’s media office and the office of the Olympics Minister, Michael Knight. Within days of leaving SOCOG, Ms Holmes was signed by SBS to cover the World Cup soccer tournament in France.

* Paul Kelly, a former editor-in-chief of the *Australian* and now its international editor, was elected in October as a Fellow of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia. Few non-academics are elected to the academy.

* Former ABC-TV presenter Mary Delahunty, a leading spokesperson for the Australian republican Movement at the 1998 Constitutional Convention, joined the Kyneton branch of the Australian Labor Party and was expected to seek party pre-selection for a seat at the next Victorian State election.

* The social affairs commentator, columnist and author, Hugh Mackay, discontinued his association with the *Weekend Australian* and rejoined the *SMH* in January to write a weekly column on social issues, as well as a monthly marketing column.

* Professor David Flint, chairman of the Australian Press Council for 10 years, left in October to become chairman of the Australian Broadcasting Authority. He was replaced at the Press Council by Professor Dennis Pearce, the Commonwealth Ombudsman from 1988-1991 and Professor of Law at the Australian National University from 1981-1996.

* The New South Wales Industrial Commission ruled in November that Channel 7 did not victimise reporter Graham Davis after he decided to sue the network over his dismissal from the *Witness* program. Justice Frank Marks said the relationship between Davis and Amalgamated Television Services had deteriorated to such an extent over time that the network had dismissed him over what it saw as a failure to comply with his contract. Davis joined
Witness at the beginning of 1996, as did Jana Wendt, but was dismissed on 28 April 1997.

* In November, shortly before Jana Wendt was signed by the ABC for a 10-part interview series (see under “ABC”), she attacked Australia’s news media in the 1997 Andrew Olle Memorial Lecture. She accused managing directors and executive producers of worshipping ratings and profit. This had become a faith that discarded all other values.

* Two Australian journalists made the news, even as they were reporting it. Andrew Bolt, the News Ltd. Asia correspondent, was detained by Chinese authorities after he had reported they were detaining a Gold Coast ship captain against his will. Two shots were fired over his head before he was detained while trying to approach a tanker captained by Kenneth Blyth and seized by pirates in the South China Sea. Bolt was released and wrote about his detention. Russell Skelton, the Fairfax correspondent in Tokyo, was the focus of Tokyo news for a day when his pet wallaby escaped. “The small and shy wallaby I had rescued from a Tokyo pet shop as part of an investigation into the illegal animal trade,” wrote Skelton, “was handed back to me by Tokyo police under the glare of television camera crews. My terrified Icpota-chan replaced President Clinton’s visit to China as the lead item on the Asahi national news, his nocturnal exploits featured prominently in daily newspapers and were discussed on afternoon chat shows.”

* In July, Dale Jennings retired as general manager of the Geelong Advertiser after working for the paper for 37 years. He joined as a first-year cadet at the age of 23 when he was studying to be an accountant. He later became a sports and general reporter, chief sub-editor, chief of staff and news editor before becoming managing editor of the Geelong News, shortly after he was acquired by the Advertiser. Jennings, who won a Walkley Award as a journalist and a Commonwealth Press Union scholarship, became general manager

* Paul McGeough (pron. McGoh), of the *SMH*, was awarded the 1997 Graham Perkin Australian Journalist of the Year Award for his outstanding international reporting. Alan Ramsey, also of the *Herald*, was runner-up for his consistently high standard of national-affairs columns.

* In the 1997 Walkley Awards, Mary-Louise O’Callaghan, the *Australian’s* South Pacific correspondent, won a Gold Walkley for revealing the Sandline mercenaries’ scandal in Papua New Guinea. She was chosen from the 28 category winners at the 42nd Walkleys presentation. The category Ms O’Callaghan won was for Excellence in International Reporting. Paul Chadwick was honoured for the most outstanding contribution to journalism.

**Other Walkleys went to:**


RADIO - Best news report, Justin Kelly and Ben Fordham, Radio 2UE (“Thredbo”); best current affairs report, David Spicer, AM, ABC Radio (“Juvenile justice”); best feature or documentary,
Norman Swan, Science Show, ABC Radio National ("QUT: A university for the real world").

TELEVISION - Best news report, Glenn Milne, Seven Network ("Thredbo disaster, Day One"); best current affairs report [less than 15 minutes] Janine Hosking, Witness, Channel 7 ("Tjandamurra"); best current affairs report, feature, documentary or special [more than 15 minutes], Ben Cheshire and Sophie Emtage, Australian Story, ABC-TV ("Valentine's Day"); best cinematography, Chantal Abouchar, Foreign Correspondent, ABC-TV ("East Timor resistance").

GENERAL - Excellence in business reporting, Malcolm Maiden, Age ("Inside the citadel"); in coverage of suburban and regional affairs, Ingrid Svendsen, Melbourne Times ("David Marriner demolition"); in investigative reporting, Paul Daley, Sunday Age ("The Colston affair"); in indigenous affairs, Bruce Belsham and Victoria Pitt, ABC-TV ("Frontier"); in coverage of sport, David Wilson and Patrick Smith, Age ("The Encosta de Lago affair"); in on-line or wire-service journalism, Michael Perry, Reuters ("PNG army revolt"); in commentary, analysis, reviews and opinion, Tony Stephens, SMH; in broadcast presenting, Jim Waley, Nightline/Sunday, Nine Network; in coverage of Asia (broadcast), Ross Coulthart and Nick Farrow, Sunday, Nine Network ("Cambodia: descent into chaos"); in coverage of Asia (print), Rowan Callick, AFR ("Hong Kong"); in news leadership, Stephen Rice, Sunday, Nine Network.

Obituaries

Following is an alphabetical list of key news-media identities who died in 1996-97:

Adams, Geoffrey Coker Arding, died 10/2/98, aged 88; worked in advertising department of various Beaverbrook newspapers in London; after war, bought two Colac (Vic.) newspapers, the Reformer and the Herald,
and merged them to forge a base for a profitable regional company with six mastheads, Western District Newspapers.

Bailey, John, died 25/5/98, aged 63; former television news reader at Sydney studios of Seven and Ten and Melbourne studios of Nine; retired in 1996 as executive producer at Radio 4BC, Brisbane. Survived by his wife, Tanya Halesworth, former high-profile ABC and commercial television presenter and journalist, and their three sons.

Barnao, Tony, died 6/2/98, aged 40; crime reporter, Daily Mirror and Ten network; died in two-seater aircraft which crashed near Burketown, Qld. while chasing a freelance journalism story.

Brennan, Columb Henry, died 9/3/98, aged 84; born into family of journalists and lawyers and became acknowledged dean of Melbourne’s law reporters for nearly 30 years; general president of Australian Journalists’ Association, 1951-55; secretary of Victorian branch of AJA, 1970-71; explained complex legal issues with great clarity.

Busmer, Don, died 29/8/97, aged 61; journalist on the Australian, 1964 until he became editor-in-chief of a chain of Melbourne suburbs and editor of the Melbourne Truth; edited a newspaper in north Queensland; joined Sunday Mail 1987.

Chapman, Kevin, died April 1998, aged 71; read the news on ABC radio and television, was a commentator on Royal tours, sporting editor, broadcast the weather and introduced rural and light entertainment programs; remembered manly for his insightful commentaries during parliamentary broadcasts from Canberra for 29 years from 1957 until his retirement.

Corbett, Harold Macintosh (Mac), died June 1998, aged 83; last member of an outstanding quartet of Sydney journalists from one family; father was Claude and uncles were W.F. (Bill) and Jack; all worked primarily for the Sun; at one period in 1939, all four were on the staff; became chief make-up and layout sub-editor; in mid-1970s, Mac acted often as chief sub-editor and sometimes as editor; worked for the Sun for 45 years; played active role in the Journalists’ Club, including serving as treasurer and president.

Courtney, Michael Charles Palliser, died 28/1/98, aged 67; editor of the Examiner, Launceston, 1976-92; began career with Sun News-Pictorial, Melbourne, in 1949, before joining Sir Frank Packer’s AM magazine in 1952; thence to the Argus, Melbourne; enormously successful as first ghost writer for footballer Lou Richards; moved to Launceston in 1959 as chief reporter and civic roundsman for the Examiner; in 1992 Courtney led his newspaper and his team of reporters in covering the Edmund Rouse scandal in which the proprietor of their newspaper attempted to bribe a state politician and former company employee, Jim Cox, to cross the floor of the State House of Assembly to restore a working majority to the Gray Liberal government.

Cummins, Alan, died 6/4/98, aged 88; chief of staff at the Courier-Mail for 20 years during the Theodor Bray editorship; editor, 1968-69.

Davies, Douglas Morton (Taffy), died 1/1/98, aged 65; born in Swansea, Wales; began career on South Wales Evening Post as a machine room copy
boy, sports cadet and sub-editor; from 1955-61 worked on *Straits Times* in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur as a sub-editor and arts critic; was chief sub-editor and then editor of the *Daily Advertiser*, Wagga Wagga, in 1962-63; joined the *Sun*, Sydney, and was in turn a sub-editor, travel editor, feature writer, columnist, entertainment writer and production editor, as well as a theatre critic; had wonderful grasp of language and was contributing a weekly column, “About a thousand words”, to the *Daily Advertiser* when he died.

**Dixon, Dave,** died April 1998, aged 84; worked for the *Sun* before war; after war, worked a professional fisherman before becoming a member of the famed *Daily Mirror* crime-reporting team led by Bill Jenkins; also covered courts, floods, bushfires, stories about the weather, animals and all manner of humankind.

**Dow, Hume,** died 22/11/97, aged 81; graduated from Harvard after living in the US from age 8 to 22; began journalistic career in Australia shortly before World War II; joined Australian Army Education Service and by 1943 was editing *Salt*, the legendary journal of information, comment and creative writing to which members of the armed services were invited to contribute; after war, worked in Radio Australia and then on the *Argus*, Melbourne; became tutor and then lecturer in English Department at University of Melbourne.

**Hart, Nigel,** died 5/12/97, aged 48; English-born cricket writer who lived most of his life in Australia; enjoyed productive writing partnership with Bernard Whimpress, producing three cricket books, including the privately-published *Australian Eleven* in 1997.

**Kelly, John,** died 16 May 1998, aged 54; general manager of Area News, Griffith, for 20 years; began career as an apprentice hand and machine compositor on the *Murrumbidgee Irrigator*, Leeton, in 1963; became printing foreman at *Area News* in 1969 just as it became a daily for two years; became general manager in 1978; kept *Area News* at forefront of technological change.

**Lockwood, Frank Wright,** died Oct. 1997, aged 78; former manager of *Wimmera Mail-Times*, Horsham, Vic.; on leaving school, joined family-owned *West Wimmera Mail* as the paper’s first linotype operator; played major part with his brother Allan in developing the Mail after their father retired in 1951; amalgamated the *Mail* with the *Horsham Times* in 1959, with Frank serving as manager until 1984 and Allan as editor.

**Mahoney, Peter,** died March 1998, aged 66; first full-time editor of *Choice* magazine; began career on *Barrier Miner*, Broken Hill, but had been a sports copy boy at the *Daily Truth* since age of nine; worked on papers in Wollongong and Brisbane before joining *Daily Mirror*; covered NSW State Parliament for the ABC; joined *Courier-Mail*, Brisbane, and became the Melbourne correspondent in 1957; a senior writer for the *Sun-Herald*, 1968-85.

**Moore, Henry Amos (Harry),** died 20/4/98, aged 94; editor of *Daily Mercury*, Mackay, 1941-49, and associate editor, 1929-37; began career as a cadet journalist on the *Lone Hand and Fair-Play* magazine in 1919; reporter and sub-editor for *Daily Mail*, Brisbane, and *Labor Daily*, Sydney, and at *Truth* and *Sportsman* in Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane in
1920s; edited *Australian Sugar Journal*, 1949-71; published news of the end of the war four days before Brisbane dailies, thanks to the powerful shortwave radio American servicemen had given him.

**O’Callaghan**, Francis (Frank), died 20/11/97, aged 73; noted rugby writer and sports journalist for Brisbane’s *Courier-Mail* from 1957-90, and casual writer for the same paper until his death; began his career on the *Downs Star*, the daily launched in 1955 by a journalistic foursome to compete with the long-established *Toowoomba Chronicle*.

**Parsons**, Betty, died 3/9/97, aged 77; joined ABC in Perth in 1944 as a schools broadcasts presentation officer; later moved to Melbourne and Sydney; first woman to be appointed to a senior management position at the Australian Broadcasting Commission; retired in 1983 as controller of Radio 2 (now called Radio National); climbed higher in the managerial hierarchy than any woman in ABC history.

**Riggs**, Patricia, died 12/3/98, aged 77; editor, *Macleay Argus*, Kempsey, NSW, for more than a decade in fact but for only three years in name; became a cadet journalist on the paper at the age of 35, starting the career she had always desired; winner of two Walkley Awards for provincial journalism; fought for Aboriginal advancement long before the cause was popular; Shire Councillor, 1983-1991, after retiring as editor.

**Stevens**, Harold Ross, died 12/7/97, aged 50; broadcast journalist; joined New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation in 1969; TVNZ *60 Minutes* correspondent; taught journalism at the University of Papua New Guinea for seven years from 1975; wrote history of the United Nations; director of NZ international aid agency, Corso, 1983-85, demonstrating his religious and humanitarian commitment.

**Stuart**, Charles James Bishop Grayburn, died 29/1/98, worked as a reporter and editor in Britain, Canada and Cyprus before moving to Queensland in 1979 with his Brisbane-born wife, Monica, whom he had met in London; worked at *Sunday Sun* and on Brisbane suburbans; began teaching journalism at the University of Queensland while studying for an undergraduate degree; was the senior lecturer in journalism at what is now the University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba, for 11 years; shortly before his unexpected death, he was awarded a PhD by the University of Wollongong for a thesis on the history of tertiary journalism education in Australia.

**Thomson**, Owen Mackay, died 26/1/98, aged 65; started journalistic career in Mount Isa, Qld.; former editor, the *Australian*, and the *Daily Telegraph*; joined Mark Day in buying *Melbourne Truth* from News Ltd.

**Walker**, Isaac Augustin Arthur (Zic), died on 9/1/98, aged 82; owner of the *Gnowangerup Star*, Western Australia; continued to use hot-metal technology, including a 1956 Linotype and a press designed 120 years ago; his family launched the *Star* in 1915; it did not report local court cases. His widow and sons still run the paper.

**Watson**, Harold Douglas, died 16/10/97, aged 83; proprietor of the *Tumut and Adelong Times*, NSW; joined the paper in 1933 as a printer; assumed control in 1949 when his father, Alexander Wilkie Watson, died; devel-
opened one of the most highly mechanised and versatile plants in southern NSW; edited paper for 30 years; lived whole life in Tumut.

**Williams, Mal**, died in Hobart, aged 77; joined the *Mercury*, Hobart, in 1935 as a copy boy and rose to become chief of staff, 1970, the first editorial manager, 1974, and editor, 1982; retired 1984.

**Zanetti, Jules Terence**, died 9/10/97, aged 69; first news editor of the *Australian*; was main recruiter of editorial talent for the paper in its planning stages; began career with West Australian Newspapers after graduating from University of Western Australia; finance editor of *Daily Mirror*, Sydney; established tip-sheet, *Your Money*, for stock market; editor of *People* magazine; publisher of all Fairfax magazines when they were sold in 1987.

### Journalistic ethics

In April, the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) invited AJA section members to take part in an “advisory and anonymous” ballot on a revised 12-point Code of Ethics, replacing the 20-point draft code issued a year earlier. The Ethics Working Party developed the 12-point code after consultation with members had indicated that the Ethics Review Committee’s 20-point code needed revising. The ballot resulted in an overwhelming endorsement of the revised 12-point code, with 1110 in favour and 63 against (and two informals). A total of 6,789 ballot papers had been distributed. The appropriate rule changes were to be considered at the next meeting of the Alliance Federal Council. If Council were to adopt the changes, the 12-point draft would replace the old 10-point Code.

In a submission to the Senate Select Committee on self-regulation in the information and communication industries, Mrs Dawn Colston, wife of the Independent Senator Mal Colston, painted a picture of a family under siege from the news media. Her submission argued that the media had harassed, stalked, persecuted and assaulted her family, and unlawfully invaded their privacy in the pursuit of her husband. The Papua New Guinea Prime Minister, Bill Skate, attacked Australian journalists after the broadcasting in Australia of secretly recorded videotapes in which Skate described
himself as the “godfather” of Port Moresby’s raskol gangs. He told a rally that he had been “set up” by his former close adviser, Mujo Sefa, who secretly filmed him at the office of a Port Moresby pipe factory he operated.

A survey in 1997 of 20 regional daily newspapers by the Pacific Area Newspapers Association (PANPA) found that the vast majority of Australian newspapers used “advertorial” as a sales incentive for display advertisers, but there was considerable scepticism within the industry about the overall benefits of doing so. Many senior newspaper personnel were actually opposed to advertorial in principle, but in practice there was an economic imperative to offer it. It was growing steadily by volume in Australian newspapers. The survey was conducted after a wide diversity of opinion about the risks, costs and rewards of advertorial had emerged among delegates to PANPA’s advertising managers’ conference in 1996.

The Nine Network’s *A Current Affair* was under a cloud when a man whom it had accused of ripping off customers in his inner-western Sydney electrical repairs shop committed suicide three days after the segment. Benedicto Mendoza, 45, of Chatswood, was found hanged in his garage. Friends described him to Ten Network’s news as a proud man who had been devastated by the *ACA* program. The Ten report said Mendoza had written a suicide note to his wife, children and friends, saying there was no chance he could clear his name. *ACA* presenter Ray Martin said that inevitably some would “blame us for this man’s death”. Jane Hansen was the reporter.

The Seven Network won the rights to exclusive interviews with Stuart Diver, sole survivor of the Thredbo landslide disaster in which 18 people died on 30 July, 1997. Seven’s winning card was its proposal to employ Diver as a commentator during its coverage of the Winter Olympics and Diver would help raise money for the Thredbo Family Relief Fund. Diver returned to his ski-instructor role in the winter of 1998.
“The media and the murder”: That’s how the *SMH* headlined an examination of the news media’s reportage of events leading up to and following the bludgeoning murder on 27 June 1998 of the former Wollongong Lord Mayor, Frank Arkell, an alleged pedophile. The *Illawarra Mercury*, Wollongong’s own daily, had campaigned vigorously against Arkell, and other alleged pedophiles. Editor-in-chief Peter Cullen defended the paper’s reportage, saying that the Wood Royal Commission, not the *Mercury*, had brought down Arkell. The *Mercury* published an eight-page “Arkell Murder Edition” on the Monday following his death. Arkell’s barrister, Phillip Boulten, complained about the stridency of reports after Arkell’s death and “inaccuracies”.

“Cashed up tabloids dotty over Di”: That’s how the *Australian* reported The Kiss — between Princess Diana and Dodi Fayed — and the $550,000 the *Sunday Mirror*, London, allegedly paid for its picture of that momentous event. And three weeks later, both were dead as the result of a car smash in Paris, unleashing huge waves of public emotion, and voluminous press coverage. In addition, the media in general and the paparazzi in particular came under attack for the part they was seen to have played in the deaths. One result of the attacks on the media was that the British tabloid, *News of the World*, announced that it would in future stick to the guidelines of the newspaper Code of Practice which forbids long-range shots of people on private property and the “merciless stalking and pursuing” of people in the news. Intensive Australian press coverage of anything related to Diana’s life, however, continued to occur well into 1998, and magazines found a wide range of excuses to sneak Diana’s face on to their cover.

**Legal**

Photographs published by the *Age* and the *Canberra Times* showing Prime Minister John Howard laughing and holding his arms
wide, allegedly in delight at receiving news of a favourable High Court decision on the Hindmarsh Island bridge controversy, were referred to a parliamentary joint committee by Speaker Ian Sinclair. The photographs were, in fact, taken when Mr Howard was responding to a comment that Treasurer Peter Costello had made about tax deductibility.

A Victorian Supreme Court judge fined Nationwide News, publisher of the *Australian*, $75,000 for printing an article which was found to be in contempt of court. The article, by Mark Westfield, appeared in the business section of the paper on 7 April, 1997, and commented on the trial of former Coles Myer chief Brian Quinn, who was in the midst of giving evidence against a conspiracy charge. Westfield was fined $10,000. Justice Bill Gillard said the article implied Quinn was “a liar, a perjurer and a contemptuously cowardly person”. The offending paragraphs appeared at the foot of a column on page 24.

A new Australian damages record of $2.5 million for defamation was awarded against the *SMH*, almost doubling the previous record of $1.3 million, also awarded against that paper, in April 1994. In the latest case, the jury found a report published by the *SMH* had implied that promoter James Richard Erskine was a vicious person prepared to murder a rival. Erskine, head of the Australian branch of International Management Group (IMG), had sued the John Fairfax group over the report which appeared in September 1992. The story referred to a claim in an affidavit by businessmen Dick Tanner that Erskine had threatened to send two hitmen around to him if he persisted in taking action in a copyright case. A Fairfax spokesman said the company would appeal.

In July, the High Court handed down a unanimous decision in the Lange case, a decision that had commentators puzzled. One said the decision meant that court had abandoned a three-year-old experiment with a constitutional defence against defamation actions from politicians. In its place, the court had created a restric-
tive common-law defence for the mass media that was closely related to a discredited provision (s. 22) of the New South Wales Defamation Act. The provision had been used successfully only three times in 22 years. Another commentator said the court had confirmed the decision of the majority in the 1994 cases (Theophanus and Stevens) that defamation law must conform to the implied freedom of political communication. In Lange it was decided that the common law and federal, state and territory legislation must all conform to the implied freedom of political communication. This means that any of the laws that restrict the publication of material may be read down or held to be invalid if they contravene the implied freedom of political communication. The High Court’s version was described as a form of common-law qualified privilege which had not previously been available for mass communicators. The court outlined the details after the former New Zealand Prime Minister, David Lange — who was suing the ABC for defamation — challenged the constitutional defence presented by the ABC. After accepting Lange’s argument that the defence was “bad in law”, the court sent Lange’s case back to the NSW Supreme Court for determination. The court ruled that whenever the new common-law defence was used by the mass media, the media must meet extra tests that did not need to be met by anyone else. The Lange judgment was praised by University of NSW law professor George Winterton, the chairman of the Australian Press Council, then Professor David Flint and the Hearn professor of law at the University of Melbourne, Sally Walker.

In September, the federal government initiated new efforts to protect national defence and intelligence secrets. The Coalition government decided to seek a introduce a voluntary form of media censorship after backing away from threats by the former government to impose $1 million fines for publication of official secrets. Cabinet’s National Security Committee decided to begin talks with media executives on voluntary censorship.
At the end of the year under review, the appeal case of the four editors of the La Trobe University student magazine Rabelais was still listed for hearing before the High Court. It concerned an article headlined “The Art of Shoplifting”. The refusal in September 1995 by the Chief Censor, then John Dickie, to classify that edition of Rabelais meant that the editors could be liable criminally for distributing a publication instructing in matters of crime. The four were each charged with three counts relating to distributing an objectionable publication, but their failed appeals have taken them to the High Court where the matter awaits hearing.

Media ownership

In September, federal Cabinet scrapped plans to reform Australia’s cross-media-ownership laws after months of speculation and damaging infighting. Until then, it had seemed the Packer family could be in control of the Fairfax newspapers by Christmas 1997. Prime Minister Howard told colleagues the government could not afford to let media policy distract it from the higher priorities of jobs, tax reform and resolving the uncertainty on native title.

Newspapers

Victoria became the scene of a price war as the year closed. Seven weeks after the Age had undergone a facelift, News Ltd. remodelled the Australian and cuts its price from 90¢ to 40¢ in Victoria, while increasing it to $1 in other mainland states and to $1.20 in Tasmania. The announcement of the Victorian price cut led to a 14¢ drop over two days in the share price of John Fairfax Holdings ($166 million). From 9 March, the Age adopted the livelier, more reader-friendly format of its Saturday edition, including its bold new “square” middle-of-the-page masthead. As part of the change, the distinctive Sunday Age, known for its confrontation with Victo-
rian Premier Jeff Kennett and its investigative edge, disappeared. Now the paper appears each day as the *Age Monday*, the *Age Tuesday*, etc., through to the *Age Sunday*. The move reflects the harder-edged commercial approach of publisher and editor-in-chief Steve Harris. Despite this, the circulation of the *Age* for the six months to 30 June fell slightly.

On 27 April, the *Australian* was re-launched, complete with colour masthead, typographical changes, etc., and its cover price more than halved in Vic.) By the end of June, News Ltd. was claiming that daily sales of the *Australian* and the *Weekend Australian* had risen by an average of more than 40 per cent since the changes (see Table 1 for full six-month circulation figures). There had been an even stronger growth in Monday sales. An additional 10 per cent rise in sales was being attributed to the new 12-page sporting liftout, covering all football codes but with five pages of Australian Football League reports and comments. On the assumption that, before the launch of its Victorian edition (which features Melbourne Extra, a page of state news, opinion and information), the *Australian* sold 25,000 copies each weekday and 60,000 on weekends, the officially released percentage gain figures indicate the paper has added 10,000 weekday sales and 24,000 on weekends.


Three daily newspapers ditched the broadsheet format in favour of a tabloid format. They were the *Townsville Bulletin* (first tabloid issue on 27 October); the *Advertiser*, Adelaide (3 November); and the *Bendigo Advertiser* (29 June). The *Newcastle Herald* had announced it was about to change to tabloid. The *Australian Magazine* enlarged its format from the issue of 5-6 July (switching from 20.5cm x 27.5cm to 25.5cm x 31cm). And the *Good Weekend* magazine, which
appears in the Age and the SMH on Saturdays, followed suit on 16 August, but appeared in an even larger size (27.5cm by 35.5cm). It had appeared in the small format (20cm x 27.5cm) since its launch in 1984.

On Sunday night, 1 March, the Courier-Mail was printed in Townsville for the first time — at News Ltd.’s new $22.5 million Townsville publishing centre. This enabled News Ltd. to reduce the cover price of the North Queensland edition by 40¢ to 70¢. The Saturday Courier-Mail, much bulkier, although still printed in Brisbane, was also cut in the north by 40¢, to $1.20. North Queenslanders will also pay the same price as “southerners” for the Sunday Mail.

On 21 May the Courier-Mail launched a two-week public journalism project in conjunction with Queensland University of Technology and community groups. The focus of the pilot project, labelled “Reconciliation: Local Solutions”, was the race relations debate. The project culminated in a public forum on 1 June at Caboolture Community Centre. During the fortnight the Courier-Mail published articles almost daily and an eight-page tabloid liftout on the Caboolture forum. Channel Nine telecast the highlights of the forum on its Eye on Queensland program.

Kerry Stokes placed the Canberra Times on the market in May. Three potential buyers, West Australian Newspapers, Australian Provincial Newspapers and Rural Press Ltd., were said to be interested. Stokes reportedly wanted somewhere between $200 million and $300 million.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Circulation six months to 30/6/98</th>
<th>Circulation six months to 30/6/97</th>
<th>Change %*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australian (M-F)</td>
<td>126,514</td>
<td>120,433</td>
<td>+5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian (Sat)</td>
<td>310,597</td>
<td>310,419</td>
<td>+0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publication</td>
<td>Last 3 days</td>
<td>Last Week</td>
<td>Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian Financial Review</td>
<td>91,000</td>
<td>88,463</td>
<td>+2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekend Review (Sat)</td>
<td>77,000</td>
<td>Not published</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Telegraph (M-F)</td>
<td>437,986</td>
<td>440,354</td>
<td>-0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Telegraph (Sat)</td>
<td>367,941</td>
<td>359,280</td>
<td>+2.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMH (M-F)</td>
<td>238,000</td>
<td>237,700</td>
<td>+0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMH (Sat)</td>
<td>410,500</td>
<td>410,000</td>
<td>+0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun-Herald</td>
<td>613,000</td>
<td>561,874</td>
<td>+9.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Telegraph</td>
<td>715,358</td>
<td>710,697</td>
<td>+0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herald-Sun (M-F)</td>
<td>563,800</td>
<td>566,484</td>
<td>-0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herald-Sun (Sat)</td>
<td>524,000</td>
<td>523,834</td>
<td>Steady</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (M-F)</td>
<td>202,573</td>
<td>209,000</td>
<td>-3.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (Sat)</td>
<td>354,362</td>
<td>362,000</td>
<td>-2.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Herald-Sun</td>
<td>524,100</td>
<td>522,253</td>
<td>+0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Age</td>
<td>205,832</td>
<td>206,000</td>
<td>-0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courier-Mail (M-F)</td>
<td>212,675</td>
<td>215,500</td>
<td>-1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courier-Mail (Sat)</td>
<td>341,000</td>
<td>335,000</td>
<td>+1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Mail (Qld)</td>
<td>585,400</td>
<td>579,995</td>
<td>+0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertiser (M-F)</td>
<td>204,905</td>
<td>199,874</td>
<td>+2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertiser (Sat)</td>
<td>271,751</td>
<td>264,194</td>
<td>+2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Mail (SA)</td>
<td>344,778</td>
<td>340,625</td>
<td>+1.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Australian (M-F)</td>
<td>227,114</td>
<td>231,182</td>
<td>-1.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Australian (Sat)</td>
<td>389,226</td>
<td>389,490</td>
<td>-0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Times</td>
<td>346,415</td>
<td>349,084</td>
<td>-0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercury (M-F)</td>
<td>50,140</td>
<td>49,762</td>
<td>+0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercury (Sat)</td>
<td>63,435</td>
<td>63,433</td>
<td>Steady</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Examiner</td>
<td>41,777</td>
<td>41,957</td>
<td>+0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Tasmanian</td>
<td>53,928</td>
<td>53,449</td>
<td>-0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canberra Times (M-F)</td>
<td>41,631</td>
<td>41,624</td>
<td>Steady</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canberra Times (Sat)</td>
<td>71,999</td>
<td>71,893</td>
<td>+0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canberra Times (Sun)</td>
<td>38,939</td>
<td>38,913</td>
<td>+0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Territory News (M-F)</td>
<td>23,033</td>
<td>22,503</td>
<td>+2.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Magazines

In May former *Woman’s Day* editor Bunty Avieson was appointed editorial director of *New Idea*. In May, *TV Week*, with its circulation down around 363,000 (500,000 fewer than a decade earlier), appeared with a new logo, the culmination of six months of design and editorial changes under new publisher Vicky Mayer and editor Katie Ecksberg. In February, Australian Consolidated Press and sister company, the Nine Network, completed arrangements to launch in mid-year a monthly magazine carrying the title of the high-rating television show, *Burke’s Backyard*. The aim was for the magazine to have about 180 pages, with 40 per cent advertising. Publishing and multimedia company PMP Communications reported an 18 per cent fall in net profit for 1996-97 to $47.7 million. In July, News Corp quit its 40 per cent stake in PMP Communications for $325 million.

In the top 20 magazines by circulation (see Table 2), the *Australian Women’s Weekly* (now below one million), *Woman’s Day* and *New Idea* continued as the top three, *TV Hits* jumped from no. 15 to no. 8, and *Australian Good Taste* and *Marie Claire* made their first appearance, displacing *New Woman* and *Australian Penthouse*.

Table 2: Top 20 magazines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Magazine</th>
<th>Circulation six months to 30/6/98</th>
<th>Circulation six months to 30/6/97</th>
<th>Change %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Australian Women’s Weekly</td>
<td>963,626</td>
<td>1,004,191</td>
<td>-4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Woman’s Day</td>
<td>892,155</td>
<td>962,442</td>
<td>-7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. New Idea</td>
<td>570,418</td>
<td>563,782</td>
<td>+1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. That’s Life</td>
<td>523,577</td>
<td>504,277</td>
<td>+3.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Reader’s Digest 501,059 518,312 -3.0  
6. TV Week 354,481 400,923 -11.6  
7. Better Homes and Gardens 318,751 342,462 -6.9  
8. TV Hits 253,000 156,160 +62.0  
9. Australian Family Circle 243,882 265,945 -8.3  
10. Cleo 234,264 247,196 -5.2  
11. Cosmopolitan 222,351 224,816 -1.1  
12. Who Weekly 210,721 234,775 -10.2  
13. Dolly 195,000 177,205 +10.0  
14. New Weekly 185,176 199,259 -7.1  
15. Girlfriend 176,246 150,228 +17.3  
16. Picture 159,129 164,099 -3.0  
17. Australian Good Taste 150,897 97,166 +55.3  
18. Time 144,153 153,515 -6.1  
19. Marie Claire 121,838 113,574 +7.3  
20. For Me 120,731 137,752 -12.4

**Commercial broadcasting**

For the year to June 1997, commercial television enjoyed an advertising sales rise of 6.7 per cent to $2.4 billion, according to the Australian Broadcasting Authority. Profit rose 4.2 per cent. Radio advertising sales rose only 1.1 per cent to $523 million, resulting in a 4.2 per cent decline in profit. In both TV and radio, the metropolitan stations outperformed their country counterparts. Of the 44 commercial TV stations, the 15 state capital stations contributed 79 per cent of total revenue, with 13 of them profitable. There were 181 commercial radio stations, 14 more than the previous year.

In July, the Government announced five new appointments to the ABA, including a new chairman, Professor David Flint, an academic lawyer who had served for a decade as chairman of the Australia Press Council.
Radio

In November, Reg Grundy’s RG Capital Radio spent a record $2.32 million for the Albury radio licence auctioned by the ABA. The price was $225,000 more than Telecasters Australia paid for the second commercial TV licence in Darwin. RG Capital also paid $1.25 million for an FM licence in Shepparton, Vic. (pop. 41,000). In all, the ABA raised $8.8 million with the auction of licences in November. When the ABA invited applications for commercial radio broadcasting licences in Cairns, Mackay and Townsville (each two licences) and Bundaberg (one licence) in May, prices were lower. RG Capital dominated the bidding, but paid only $2.425 million for five of the seven licences on offer. It obtained both new FM licences in Townsville and one each in Mackay, Cairns and Bundaberg at prices between $325,000 and $600,000 per licence.

DMG Radio Australia — owned and controlled by British media company, Daily Mail & General Trust — bought one FM licence in Cairns for $550,000 and one in Mackay for $400,000. DMG, the largest regional radio network in Australia, already held two FM licences in Townsville and an AM and FM station in Cairns and Mackay. It was going to have to sell its AM stations in Cairns and Mackay to comply with the two-station rule, which prohibits an individual from holding more than two radio licences in the same market.

In June the Federation of Australian Radio Broadcasters (FARB) agreed that deficiencies had been found in regard to sex and language in its industry code of practice. Brisbane station Triple M admitted that a live commentary of a sex act in a brothel early in 1998 had not been suitable. FARB chairman Tony Bell said FARB would redraft its code of practice to include specific reference to language, sex and sexual behaviour and the portrayal of violence. Communications Minister Alston had complained there were virtually no rules in radio and television paid little regard to its rules.
Television

Izzy Asper’s Canwest Global Communication’s was forced to reduce its stake in Ten Group after the Federal Court had dismissed Canwest’s appeal against a ruling by the ABA. The ABA had ruled that Canwest was in breach of foreign ownership rules. Canwest had to reduce its stake from 76 per cent to 57.5 per cent. This triggered a float, with Telecasters North Queensland as the vehicle. This company, renamed Ten Network Holdings, held a 39.14 per cent stake in the unlisted Ten Network.

Ten Group Ltd. announced a 12.8 per cent increase in net profit before tax to $146.9 million. Revenue grew 16.6 per cent as a result of the contribution of stations in Adelaide and Perth, acquired in November 1995 in a settlement with Charles Curran’s Capital Television Group Ltd. On a comparative basis, advertising revenue rose 6.1 per cent. In the nine months to 31 May, net profit jumped 6 per cent to $53 million.

In April, the High Court cast doubt on Australia’s ability to control the amount of foreign content on commercial television when it ruled that New Zealand programs should be treated as if they were Australian. The case was brought by an NZ screen industry group under the banner, Project Blue Sky. The NZ lobby argued that because the Closer Economic Relations Treaty gives Australia and NZ equal access to each other’s markets, NZ films and TV programs should qualify under the ABA’s local content quotas. ABA chairman Flint said the ruling had undermined the industry’s regulatory framework.

In June, analysis based on people meter ratings by AC Nielsen revealed a continuing decline in the number of children and teenagers watching free-to-air TV. Mediacom says the decline, for children aged five to 12, amounts to 18 per cent over the entire day. Pay TV operators were not able to produce figures to suggest the “lost” children were watching pay TV.
Bruce Gordon’s WIN Television overcame fierce competition to secure in April the second commercial TV licence for regional Western Australia with a record bid of $36 million. WIN — a Nine Network affiliate with four regional stations and one metropolitan station — then had 12 months to establish a second commercial station to serve at least 60 per cent of the 500,000 West Australians living outside Perth.

In March, the federal government ignored strong warnings from all its economic-policy departments when it decided to give free-to-air TV stations, in effect, a multi-million-dollar gift of exclusive access to digital broadcasts until 2008. Digital broadcasts are expected to begin on 1 January, 2001. Commentators were amazed at the government’s failure to auction the spectrum to various bidders, arguing that the Government’s comprise was a “recipe for mediocrity”. John Fairfax Holdings and News Ltd. were excluded from a high-level government consultative group that was to begin work on implementing the new digital regime.

For 1996-97, Seven network announced a 22 per cent drop in net profit to $88.9 million after allowing for a big notional tax payout — $48 million more than paid the previous year. Total revenue was up from $676 million to $799.5 million. For 1997-98, net profit slumped 77.1 per cent to $20.4 million. The result came after a net abnormal loss of $62 million related to writedowns on its investment in the former pay TV sorts channel Sports Vision and costs associated with exiting its stake in Hollywood studio Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

In July, Seven bought the ABC’s loss-making Australia Television for less than $5 million, ending the national broadcaster’s four-year attempt to run a commercial Asian satellite service. Seven planned to use the service as a springboard into the Asian market, intending to add up to eight channels in the next several years. Seven guaranteed that ATV would broadcast at least 16 hours of predominantly Australian content a day for the next four and a half
years. In September, Seven agreed to cover part of any shortfall in funding for the $350 million AFL Docklands Stadium in Melbourne, in addition to its already announced commitments of $150 million. News Ltd. was part of the winning Seven bid which was tied to obtaining first and last rights of refusal over television rights to AFL matches. The rights, presently held by Seven, expire in 2001.

**Television news**

Fewer and fewer Australians are watching television news each year. Between 1991, when people meters were introduced to measure TV ratings, and 1998, the audience for Sydney’s top-rating Nine news fell by 140,000 to 498,000; for Seven news, by 75,000 to 338,000; for Ten, by 34,000 to 198,000; for SBS, by 41,000 to 46,000. For the ABC, however, the audience rose by 38,000 to 341,000. There was a national decline, too, despite Nine increasing audiences in Brisbane and Perth. Current affairs programs have been losing audiences, too. In Sydney, *A Current Affair* lost 218,000 viewers, falling to 473,000; *60 Minutes* lost 114,000, falling to 509,000; *Four Corners* lost 78,000, falling to 183,000.

**Pay TV**

On the pay TV front, the news of the year was the demise of Australis Media Ltd. In October the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission blocked the proposed merger of Foxtel and Australia Media Ltd. Seven months later the end came for Australis. It was placed in receivership in May when its directors moved to protect themselves after the company’s crucial $155 million refinancing deal collapsed. Australis had traded on the financial brink for a year. It sacked 140 in November. The demise of Australis left Foxtel free to implement a new programming supply deal with four Hollywood
studios. Foxtel had been contracted to buy its films from Australis for $4.5 billion over 25 years. Significant savings for Foxtel were expected under its direct supply agreement with the studios. Weeks later, Foxtel secured a major strategic advantage over Optus when it agreed to acquire Australis Media’s network of 50,000 satellite dishes and decoders in former Galaxy subscribers’ homes.

Six weeks after the demise of Australis, Optus’s SportsVision programming company was placed in provisional liquidation. The collapse of SportsVision was greeted as another potential trigger for rationalisation of pay TV programming. A day later, Optus Communications signed a fresh sports programming deal with the Seven Network that opens the way for non-exclusive programming deals. Seven thus becomes the major supplier of sports channels to Optus’s pay TV subsidiary, Optus Vision.

Optus Communications, which reported a $411.8 million loss for 1996-97, recovered to lose only $83.6 million for the December half of 1997-98. Chief executive Chris Anderson, who joined the company in October after two years as chief executive of Television New Zealand, claimed a sharp turnaround in earnings and fortunes under his brief tenure and vowed to end the “giddy days” of expansion at all costs in favour of pursuing sustainable earnings growth. By May he was talking of achieving a bottom-line profit in 1998-99.

Internet and the media

In June, a $50 million Internet venture jointly owned by Microsoft and Kerry Packer’s Publishing and Broadcasting Ltd. slashed its news service, sacking seven editorial staff and four others. Ninemsn’s original news was replaced with a feed from the Australian Associated Press. On 12 March, the Nine Network Microsoft Web site, ninemsn, was launched. News Ltd. launched an online news service, the Australian News network, on 1 Octo-
Stories from the company’s Australian newspapers became available on www.theaustralian.com.au. The network was constantly expanded during the year. In February, entertainment news, features and reviews were added, and in March, an extensive and constantly updated weather service. APN News & Media Ltd. entered into a joint venture with the Brisbane Internet company, DVP Media, to develop Checkout Classifieds, which can be called up on its Web site, www.checkoutclassifieds.com.au. It contains a compilation of classified lineage from all of APN’s 13 regional daily newspapers. According to a Roy Morgan Research Centre survey, nearly 33 per cent of Australians had accessed the Internet by the end of 1997, up from 19 per cent a year earlier. Nearly 20 per cent accessed the Internet at least once a month.

Other Publishers

Rural Press Ltd. recorded a 15 per cent increase in operating profit to $61.2 million in 1997-98 but its 101.5 per cent increase in earnings was skewed by a $27.42 million abnormal gain from the sale of its broadcasting operations. For 1996-97, Rural Press lifted net profit by 2.1 per cent to $32.2 million. It was its sixth successive year of earnings growth. APN News & Media Ltd. posted a 15 per cent rise in profit to $14.5 million for the six months to 30 June. For the calendar year 1997, APN posted a record $30.4 million net profit. West Australian Newspapers lifted net profit for 1996-97 by 3.3 per cent to $49.3 million. For the first six months of 1997-98, it posted a decline of 14.9 per cent to $21.53 million.

Dr Kirkpatrick is a senior lecturer in journalism at the University of Queensland.
Australian journalism research index 1992-97

Kerri Elgar

This is an index of Australian journalism and news media-related articles and books from 1992 onwards. The index is in two main parts: a listing by author, and a listing by subject matter in which an article may appear a number of times. Multi-author articles are listed by each author. To advise of errors or omissions, please contact the author via journ@mailbox.uq.edu.au.

Source journals

(APME) Asia Pacific Media Educator. Published by the Graduate School of Journalism at the University of Wollongong; edited by Eric Loo. University of Wollongong, NSW, 2522, Australia. Tel: (02) 4221 3190; Fax: (02) 4221 4128.


(AJC) Australian Journal of Communication. Published by the School of Communication and Organisations Studies and the Communication Centre, Queensland University of Technology; edited by Roslyn Petelin. Address: c/- Roslyn Petelin, School of Communication and Organisational Studies, Faculty of Business, Queensland University of Technology, GPO Box 2434, Brisbane, Qld 4001.

(AJR) Australian Journalism Review. Published by the Journalism Education Association; edited by Lawrence Apps of the Curtin University School of Communication and Cultural Studies, PO Box U1987, Perth WA, 6001. Phone: (09) 351 3247. Fax: (09) 351 7726.

(ASJ) Australian Studies in Journalism. Published by the Department of Journalism at the University of Queensland; edited by Professor John Henningham. Founded 1992. Address: Department of Journalism, Uni-
versity of Queensland, 4072. Phone: (07) 3365 2060. Fax: (07) 3365 1377.

(BJR) British Journalism Review. Published by British Journalism Review Publishing Ltd, a non-profit making company.

(CJC) Canadian Journal of Communication. Published by Wilfrid Laurier University Press for the non-profit Canadian Journal of Communication Corporation, and is a collaborative venture between the Centre for Policy Research on Science and Technology and the Canadian Centre for Studies in Publishing; edited by Rowland Lorimer of the School of Communication, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, B.C., Canada.

(CP) The Contemporary Pacific. Published twice a year by the Centre for Pacific Islands Studies, University of Hawaii Press.


(JME) Journal of Media Economics.

(JQ) Journalism Quarterly. [Now Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly] Published by the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, in cooperation with the Association of Schools of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of South Carolina, Columbia, USA.


(MIA) Media Information Australia. [Now Media International Australia] Published by the Australian Film Television & Radio School; edited by Stuart Cunningham, Murray Goot, Elizabeth Jacka, John Sinclair, Rodnev Tiffen, Peter B. White. Address: Cnr Balaclava and Epping Rds, North Ryde, NSW (PO Box 126, North Ryde, NSW, 2113). Phone: (02) 805 6611.

Metro. Published by Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM), with assistance from the Australian Film Commission and Film Victoria; edited by Peter Tapp. Address: PO Box 204, Albert Park, Victoria, 3206. Phone: (03) 9525 5302. Fax: (03) 9537 2325.

(WJR) Washington Journalism Review. Changed to American Journalism Review in 1993. Published monthly by the College of Journalism of the University of Maryland at College Park, USA, through the University of Maryland Foundation.
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Ms Elgar is a Brisbane journalist and lecturer in media ethics. She is undertaking a PhD in photojournalism ethics at the University of Queensland. Editing assistance by Grant Dobinson is gratefully acknowledged.
On a visit to the front line during the Bosnian War, a journalist was told by a sniper that he could see two people walking in the street below. “Which of them do you want me to shoot?” he asked. Taken aback, the journalist urged the sniper to shoot neither, made his excuses and turned to leave. As he did so, two shots rang out. “That was a pity,” said the sniper. “You could have saved one of their lives.”

This dramatic incident, related by former BBC foreign correspondent Martin Bell in a chapter in *Media Ethics*, raises some basic ethical questions. Not the least of these concerns the part that the presence of the journalist played in bringing about the deaths in the first place. But there are others. To what extent was the journalist’s response appropriate to the situation? Could, and should, he have saved one life by asking for another life to be taken? And at what point does someone stop being a journalist and become an ordinary person entitled to react simply as an individual member of the human race?

Bell uses the Bosnian episode to illustrate his case against what he describes as the myth of the journalist as neutral observer and witness. Bell, who spent many years in the world’s battlefields before becoming a Member of Parliament at the last UK general election, advocates the journalism of attachment — a journalism that cares as well as knows; that is aware of its responsibilities; that will not stand neutrally between good and evil, right and wrong, the victim and the oppressor. Although at times he comes close to it, Bell does not actually reject the notion of objectivity, that traditional foundation stone of journalism in liberal democracies. Rather, he argues that journalists are implicated within the events they are reporting and therefore they should not avoid making evaluative judgements about them. His is one of the most interesting of many interesting contributions to this book.
On a par with Bell’s chapter is editor Matthew Kieran’s discussion of objectivity and impartiality in journalism. To some extent, Kieran outflanks the illustrious former foreign correspondent by mounting a strong defence of objectivity, arguing that in journalism, as distinct from fiction, there is a truth of the matter and this is what objectivity aims at. Further, as others (of whom Judith Lichtenberg is perhaps the best known) have argued, it is only by understanding that journalism is aiming towards objectivity in news reports that we can criticise the news media where this goal is clearly not aimed at or a report fails to realise this goal.

Kieran, a philosophy lecturer at the University of Leeds, began to establish a reputation in this field with his 1997 book *Media Ethics: a philosophical approach* (no doubt his publishers can take the blame for the confusing similarity between that title and the title of this latest volume). As with the first book, *Media Ethics* draws heavily on the fields of philosophy and applied ethics and (in spite of the significance of Martin Bell’s contribution) it is this perspective which gives the book its greatest strength. For unlike sociology, communication studies, political science or cultural studies, philosophy in general and applied ethics in particular allow questions of right and wrong to be dealt with. In journalism, this means consideration of such fundamental issues as what constitutes ethical practice and why; how and why journalism should be accountable; and the appropriate responses to various ethical dilemmas at a time when there is widespread confusion over ethical standards.

Thus Andrew Belsey’s chapter in *Media Ethics* asks the important question of whether and why it is reasonable to try to make ethical demands on journalism in the first place. Although he reaches the less than earth-shattering conclusion that, because journalism occupies a distinctive role in the democratic process, journalists must serve the public interest in a virtuous manner, he has raised an issue which needs to be considered by anyone with a concern for journalism ethics.

Other useful contributions in this book include Mary Midgley’s discussion of the way that the culture of journalism seems to presume that, partly in the quest for impartiality, journalists need to focus on the negative side of public figures; Nigel Warburton’s argument that many of the ethical dilemmas raised by the use of new technology in preparing and presenting photographic images are not actually new (and, indeed, are often based on a misunderstanding of what press photography is all about); and a chapter by Ian Cram (the only legal academic represented here) who argues for the importance of non-legal forms of encouraging and enforcing ethical standards.
Media Ethics is not without weaknesses. Indeed, one is the actual phrase used in the book’s title — “journalism ethics” and “media ethics” don’t necessarily mean the same thing, yet here they are frequently used as if they are interchangeable. Nor do any of the contributors show much awareness of the ongoing debate about public or civic journalism which has occurred within American — and to some extent Australian — journalism over the past half decade or so, even though objectivity has played a central part in that debate. Yet another objection, at least from an Australian perspective, is its unrelenting UK focus.

Yet while some of the specific details in Media Ethics are not especially useful in the Australian context, most of its broader arguments are directly relevant to the on-going debate in this country about media ethics in general and journalism ethics in particular. While some of the contributors clearly offer more insight than others, overall this book will be of considerable interest to a wide range of people, from journalism educators and thinking journalists to those whose prime concerns are professional and applied ethics.

— Ian Richards
University of South Australia

The Global Journalist: News People Around the World


This is one of a series of worldwide studies currently pursued by the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR). When some of the findings were presented in a special session of the Professional Education Section at the 1998 IAMCR Glasgow Conference, Robert White, communication ethics scholar at the Gregorian University in Rome, suggested the following criteria to measure the increasing professionalisation of journalists in the world. It can be found where the highest value is placed on journalism as a public responsibility, and on providing analysis due to a more informed insight.

Held against these, or even much less ambitious criteria, David Weaver cannot see professionalisation increasing around the world. If anything, it
is decreasing. Weaver comes to this conclusion after collating data brought together by 36 scholars from 21 different countries and territories, where systematic surveys of journalists have been carried out in the years 1986 to 1996. The book contains within its 21 separate studies more than 20,000 interviews which compare the demographics, education, socialisation, professional values and working conditions of journalists in these 21 societies, including Algeria, Australia, Brazil, Britain, Canada, Chile, China, France, Germany, Hungary, Korea, Spain and the United States.

The Global Journalist was not a book that was planned and then the studies conducted to meet its requirements. It brought together already existing studies, which followed roughly the questionnaire developed by Weaver and Wilhoit for their 1986 survey of American journalists. The assumption was that journalists’ background and ideas have some relationship to what is reported, in spite of differing societal and organisational constraints, and that this news coverage matters in terms of world public opinion and policies. It was the aim to “discover patterns of similarities and differences that can provide a foundation of empirical data for future theorising about the influences on journalists and their influences on the news”.

The study finds that several basic characteristics, such as age, gender, size of workforce, minority representation, education levels and percentage studying journalism at a tertiary institution can easily be measured. According to these, the global journalist is a 36-year-old male who, more likely than not, is a college graduate — but not with a journalism degree — and who belongs to the racial majority (or the dominant cultural group) of his country. Overall representation of women in the journalistic workforce is around 33 per cent and rising.

Once the questions move to working conditions, professional values and roles, aspects of job — such as job satisfaction — and images of the audience, the global comparison of the data becomes far more difficult, and at times mystifying. Whereas 41 per cent of Algerian journalists, who have to follow the government line closely, were satisfied with their perceived autonomy, only 10 per cent of the British journalists were. Similarly British journalism, which is mentioned in other countries as being the yardstick for “good journalism”, registered the lowest importance attached to reporting accurately and objectively — a mere 30 per cent.
The individual studies, on the other hand, often explain satisfactorily how certain political and societal circumstances have shaped the data. This is the case in particular with countries, which have recently changed to a more democratic form of government, such as Hungary, or countries where the change occurred some years ago but still can be felt, as in Spain or Brazil. Especially the style of reporting, whether adversarial or constructive, is much determined by the political circumstances. Two of the most interesting chapters focus on countries with a non-democratic form of government, China and Algeria. In the latter, questions of access to news sources, frequency of interference and too much attention to routine government activities were answered, as it seems, in line with a Western appreciation of these functions. In China, on the other hand, there was more support among journalists for investigating government than in France or Canada, which seems to point to some wishful thinking included in the data.

The chapter on Australian journalists (as well as the one on British journalists) was provided by John Henningham. In the demographic profile, Australia — together with Mexico — stands out as being the country with by far the lowest percentage of journalists holding a college degree, 33 per cent (Britain 49 per cent, US 82 per cent). In job aspects, Australian journalists are not too concerned about their pay, but much more so about their chances to advance. Like journalists in most other countries, very few Australian journalists would reveal a confidential source and, like most others, they are largely prepared to use personal or governmental documents without permission. Australia has the highest percentage of journalists as members of a journalist organisation (86 per cent, compared with 36 per cent in the US). It is more important for Australian journalists to be a watchdog on government (81 per cent) than to report news quickly — which is almost invariably the other way around with all other respondents.

However, here again arises the question of comparability. Given Australia’s geography and media concentration, journalists simply are not under the same pressure as many British or American reporters, who work in a far more competitive environment, to be the first with the news. David Weaver, in his summing up, is fully aware of the constraints on the comparisons he attempts to draw. Especially political system differences, societal influences and influences of media organisations cannot be neatly classified. As far as improved professional standards concerned, there is for him too much disagreement over how important it is to report accu-
rately and objectively, to provide analysis of complex issues and to be a watchdog on government, to come to a positive finding.

In his conclusion Weaver confines himself to the hope of having at least stimulated more comparative studies of journalists. He need not have been so modest. Even if the initial question of the global journalist and his increasing professionalisation could not be satisfactorily answered, the collection itself provides an extremely valuable fund of data and knowledge on journalists worldwide.

— Beate Josephi
Edith Cowan University

The Sociology of Journalism

Brian McNair,

At last an up-to-date theoretical consideration of the conditions under which journalism is produced and consumed. McNair’s The Sociology of Journalism has two aspects: the impact of journalism as an ideological discourse on “the workings of contemporary capitalist societies” (p.3), and the social determination of “those features of social life and organisation which shape, influence and constrain” (p.3) the production of journalistic texts. It’s refreshing to see such important and central aspects of journalism theory addressed in a no-nonsense, readable style.

The first part of the book examines the effects of journalism: its acceptance as a mode of communication with cultural, social and political ramifications for the intended audience. The second part examines the factors of journalistic production: the political and legislative environment; the economics of journalism as a commodity; the impact of new technologies and, finally, the sociology of sources and the concept of news management by the ‘actors’ themselves.

Two ideas raised in the first chapter define the core of McNair’s sociological approach. The first is his argument, against the grain of much existing media sociology, that contemporary journalism is “tending to produce social instability and political unpredictability”, rather than a system of “conservative political control”. McNair suggests that this tendency is producing among journalists a feeling of indifference to “the interests of
those in society’s elite positions” (pp.17-18). The second is more important in a critique of The Sociology of Journalism — McNair’s failure to deal with the social organisation of journalism as work as a fundamental economic determinant of news output. Instead he discusses the macro-economic environment — the issues of ownership and control, rather than the actual relations of production that govern the daily practices of the newsroom.

The first argument echoes the position of media studies theorists such as John Hartley and Catharine Lumby who celebrate the tabloid news values that are increasingly dominating the more traditional values of good journalism. The second ignores an important aspect of commodity production in advanced capitalist economies — the social relations of production — in favour of a more institutional and removed category of ownership and control. Despite this critique I find McNair’s arguments in favour of journalists being the “agents of instability rather than of control” (p.165) to be both compelling and convincing.

Part 1 is only 60 pages and ranges over the role of journalism in contemporary capitalist liberal democracies, which McNair says is to contribute “substantially to the maintenance ad reproduction of [the] environment and the social system which has generated it” (p.25). He takes issue with the two, hitherto, dominant sociological paradigms for discussing journalism and the media: the free-market model and what he calls the “dominance paradigm” (p.25). There are limitations to both models, but emotionally and intellectually, the latter, popularised by Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman under the rubric of ‘manufacturing consent’, has more appeal as an explanatory tool. The free-market model, in which consumer is “king” is no more than ideology and does not withstand serious scrutiny.

However, Herman and Chomsky’s “propaganda model” is based on a radical materialist sociology, and painstaking empirical work which underpins the political purpose of their work — to undermine what they call the “national security state” in favour of a democratised public sphere, that in turn can create the conditions for deeper and lasting social transformation. McNair makes it clear that he shares this vision and does not shy away from his Marxist roots. But having said this I must add that he tends to ignore other substantial critiques of both the free-market and the propaganda models. In particular there is only passing reference to the important work of Daniel Hallin and the “insider” criticism provided by John Pilger.
Hallin (1986; 1994, pp.53-55) has written extensively about what he calls the Spheres of Consensus, Limited Controversy and Deviance, a concept which implies that journalism has, at one level, a commitment to the core values of capitalism and liberal democracy, and at another level, a limited role in giving voice to “radical” alternatives. But only up to a point — the limits to controversy. In a complementary fashion Pilger (1992, p.13) suggests that these imposed (and largely journalistically respected) boundaries are those set by the limits of parliamentary debate: he represents this geographically as the precincts of London surrounding Westminster. We can assume that Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, and the few circular blocks around Parliament House in Canberra, represent similar physical and ideological boundaries.

McNair has no argument with this analysis, but in presenting his “chaos” theory as something totally “new”, he fails to acknowledge his own reliance on earlier critical models. The importance of the chaotic flow model is signalled in part one of the book, but it really comes into its own as a theme permeating the later chapters in part two, which deal with the factors influencing contemporary journalism. Each is given its own chapter, linked by the central theme that, in what McNair refers to (in passing) as “postmodern” capitalism (p.28), the climate is right for journalism to undermine the once seemingly unassailable power of the ruling class.

The changes in the political climate which sustain McNair’s thesis stem from the collapse of the Stalinist regimes of eastern Europe in the late 1980s which freed journalism from the straitjacket dictates of the Cold War. A decade later this is now an accepted fact of geopolitics for all except a few lunatic diehards, mainly on the far right. The consequences that flow from this lack of ideological certainty are evident in a number of examples provided by McNair — the destruction of the US presidency by the Lewinsky affair, and the election of Tony Blair’s “new” Labour in Britain following almost daily revelations of scandals (of both a political and sexual nature) in the Tory party. In our own region the collapse of the authoritarian Soeharto regime in Indonesia in 1998 and the ongoing civil unrest in Malaysia are important signs that the trend is global.

However, there is a downside, which also highlights the flaws in McNair’s position. Since the collapse of “communism” as a “threat” to “world peace”, the global “cop”, the United States of America, has been involved in a number of minor, but very messy, skirmishes: Haiti, Panama, the Gulf War against Iraq (twice), Somalia and the former Yugoslavia (under the cover of NATO). McNair describes the military intervention
against Saddam Hussein as a “just war” (p. 158) at the same time as he (rightfully) criticises the involvement of the multinational PR firm, Hill and Knowlton, in creating a climate in which public opinion would acquiesce, despite all the evidence that the war against Saddam was a purely commercial exercise, very similar in nature to the disastrous British expedition against Nasser of Egypt in the Suez crisis 40 years ago.

The contradiction inherent in McNair’s argument is basically that while correctly attacking the free-market model, and the assumptions of “liberal democratic” ideology underpinning capitalism, in the end he has no alternative but to fall back on it when he argues that “capitalism, in the communicative advances which it has facilitated, has manufactured the means of its own chaotic democratisation, [rather than] sown the seeds of its own destruction. . . . In reality. . . capitalism has produced — as the preconditions of its smooth reproduction — only relative poverty, relative powerlessness, relative exploitation” (p. 164-165). That’s all well and good for the relative few that live in comfort, but for the bulk of the world’s population exploitation, starvation and an early death are the horrible reality.

This leads to what I consider a dangerously naive conclusion in the chapter on technology where McNair argues that the Internet is inherently democratising because it is “uniquely difficult to police and regulate” (p.142). This is a popular (mis)conception about the WWW. Readily available proprietary software makes it very easy for parents to monitor what their children access (some “cybercop”-style programs also block many non-pornographic sites), and it’s just as easy for corporations or institutions to monitor the traffic generated through their servers. Electronic mail is not private and other forms of electronic eavesdropping are readily available to the politically and economically powerful.

More fundamentally, McNair’s argument privileges technology over social relations. The Internet is not “free from the commercialisation and elite control which have eventually subdued all other media forms in human history” (p.142) Commercialism is precisely an act of social control, in the same way (as McNair argues) that commodification of journalism in the 19th century depoliticised daily newspapers in favour of mass audiences for the advertising that surrounds the (shrinking) newsholes.

Overall, and despite my sometimes harsh differences with McNair, I find *The Sociology of Journalism* is a great book. While it doesn’t contain all the answers and sometimes lacks the level of sophisticated argument that I
would have liked, it is a good media theory text. As McNair says in the final chapter, it was “conceived and written principally as a teaching and learning resource, although one which would avoid the impersonal, catch-all cataloguing style of some textbooks” (p.162). In this the author has done well; it’s a book that I would highly recommend to students of journalism and media. He’s also suggested a useful model for further work in media sociology that touches on the contemporary debates in journalism theory — infotainment, new technologies, source-dependency, tabloidisation and the vexing question of postmodernity. I think, in the end, he’s right about “cultural communication chaos”; it’s an idea whose time has come.


— Martin Hirst
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**Breaking into Journalism**


The secret is out! When the editor asks why you want a job in journalism, the correct answer is not that you “like writing” but that you “want to know what’s going on in the world”. It’s a simple concept, but one that’s not always obvious to the thousands of young hopefuls seeking to break into the competitive world of journalism.

Mark Pearson and Jane Johnston have levelled the playing field for these would-be news hounds with 130 pages of insider tips and explanations in *Breaking into Journalism*. Tackling misconceptions head-on, they offer a no-nonsense understanding of what it is like to work in the media and, for those who choose to proceed, some suggested paths to reach their goal. David Conley’s *The Daily Miracle* and Sally White’s *Reporting in Australia* (now into a second edition) provide vocational insights on journalism, but Pearson’s and Johnston’s book is devoted entirely to answering the most fundamental questions of those considering a career in the fourth estate. Their easily digestible prose is interspersed with short,
first-person accounts of broadcast and print journalists who describe how they entered the industry.

The testimonials enrich a text that has an informal tone and offers a grass-roots view of a profession that extends well beyond capital city newsrooms. While readers can ponder the career trajectory of Walkley Award winner Phil Dickie they also can consider how someone can end up as news editor of 2BH in Broken Hill, a sub-editor for Farm Weekly in Perth or an information officer for the RAAF at Glenbrook, NSW. These accounts aptly demonstrate the multiple pathways into the media as they affirm the message that while tertiary training is not the only route, it is the best one. It's a pity, however, that these testimonials are interspersed throughout, rather than grouped at the end of each chapter, as they either disrupt the flow of the main text or force the reader to backtrack.

This career primer offers the basics: a concise review of journalism as a trade and a profession, entry to the profession through cadetships gained either as a copyperson or as a university graduate, the multi-media choices available and the essentials of CVs and self-promotion. Especially worthwhile is a list of 30 typical questions asked in entry-level journalism job interviews.

The authors even have a go at describing the “typical” cadet: a 17 or 18-year-old urban female who has wanted to be a journalist for more than two years, has a private school education and comes from an upper middle class family. The authors note, however, that journalists are rarely “average” people. They might have added that a newsroom filled with journalists fitting the socio-educational background of their “typical” cadet may not be desirable for a staff wanting to be attuned to the multiple world views of its readers and listeners.

The authors effectively canvass the cadetship system but could have flagged a trend by some media organisations to hire graduates as copypersons rather than as third-year cadets. It also could be argued that the text presents a view of the profession that is a little too rosy. Journalism, after all, is not for the faint-hearted and offers a quick and silent death to fuzzy idealism. On balance, however, the authors provide enough reality to indicate journalism is not for everyone including, it could be argued, some practising journalists.

There are lots of practical tips, from advice on the correct newspaper style for dates to a suggestion that letters to the editor be used to supplement portfolios of published work. Students are also urged to consider
graduating mid-year when there are fewer applicants on the market and to avoid taking post-study holidays which may see them miss out on jobs or become “rusty”.

The book treats seriously the debates about the value of a cadetship as opposed to a university degree, a single versus a double major in journalism, the appropriate balance between theory and practice, and the benefits of undergraduate as opposed to postgraduate training in journalism.

The authors, both experienced journalists currently teaching at Bond University in Queensland, exhibit a clear bias towards university training, describing the cadetship system as “borne of a bygone era when society had lower educational expectations” and based on a “fundamental ethos” of “trial and error”. They do, however, acknowledge the significant financial advantages of a cadetship when the cost of university and forgone wages are taken into account and they acknowledge that cadets are at a “head start in the information gathering stakes” because of the contacts established. Although the authors note that a cadet may only learn “that particular organisation’s style of journalism”, they might have expanded further on the typical newsroom’s lack of training in ethics.

Although Breaking into Journalism gives a good introductory overview it is short on specifics. Where this book leaves off, there remains a need for practical and detailed information about university and employment options. One can understand the desire not to hobble the book unnecessarily by the inclusion of information which would quickly date. However, its usefulness is limited by the absence of data on the locations, strengths and intakes of various courses, names of key employers and their annual cadet intake procedures and such things as the location of professional studios which can assist in the compilation of show tapes. There is also a bias against larger courses and a failure to acknowledge that in such courses students do not receive lecture contact only.

In future editions the authors also might like to consider providing more extensive references for further reading, for example on freelance journalism. With its emphasis on clarifying the role of journalists Breaking into Journalism seems particularly relevant to its target audience of high school students. The book takes a gentle approach to newcomers, recognising that there is plenty of jargon in journalism and addressing the problem with an eight-page glossary of terms bolded in the text. Definitions cover journalistic terms such as “nose for news” and “infotainment” as well as academic terms.
University students about to graduate and look for a job will find Chapters 3 and 4 of most value. Journalism educators, on the other hand, will appreciate the book’s ready source of answers to the questions they are asked time and again by current and prospective students.

— Jeanete Zanotto and David Conley
University of Queensland

**Newsroom Management: A Guide to Theory and Practice**

*Robert H. Giles*

*Detroit: Media Management Books Inc., 1995, 742pp. US$42.95*

This book is one of a half-dozen or so which have been published in the past three or four years dealing with news management practices — and specifically newsroom management practices.

A review of the literature reveals very little has been published by writers or researchers with journalism backgrounds on this subject — and that’s unfortunate, because newsroom management has a very real and significant impact on the content of newspapers and broadcasts.

In Australia, specific attention paid to newsroom practices is documented only in a chapter of the PANPA-sponsored publication by John Tidey and Rick Knowles, *Developing Tomorrow’s Newspaper Managers* (1986). So Giles’s contribution, with others like it, is a valuable contribution to our knowledge and perceptions of newsroom practices, despite its inevitable US genesis and references. While the US focus of the book also inevitably means some of its discussion — and perhaps conclusions — may not be directly transferable to the Australian environment, most of what it contains will have Australian newsroom “supervisors” or “managers” nodding in agreement or, at the very least, giving them pause for thought.

*Newsroom Management*, like most management texts, begins by canvassing a variety of management theories. It does this no better and no worse than the many general management texts that have gone before it, but it does it adequately and provides a clear context for management theory in a newsroom environment.

Perhaps one of the most interesting chapters deals with communication in the newsroom, because it deals with the process of interpersonal
communication among groups of people who are mass communication specialists — and sometimes the techniques of mass communication are inappropriate for interpersonal or organisational situations. In this chapter, Giles talks about barriers to good communication and goes on to show how organisational communication needs to be understood and carefully nurtured, to improve newsroom performance. It is a major irony that this issue is so poorly addressed in an industry built on the process of communication.

Some Australian editors and department heads would be familiar with the content of chapters dealing with styles of management, leadership and the wielding of power, because those issues have been addressed to varying extents by in-house management courses. But chapters on newsroom supervisors and newsroom management roles, with real-life examples, provide a peculiarly journalistic perspective not seen elsewhere.

Giles acknowledges an editor’s need to deal with a range of different personalities within a newsroom and a range of different personalities among the supervisors. He notes, for instance, that sports editors have staff who “tend to be sports junkies and who work odd hours”; features editors deal with creative people with strong egos; and photo editors deal with creative employees, some of whom are not trained as journalists (p.117). Although these are only a few of the various departments to be found in any daily newspaper, they give some indication of the range of creative personalities that a managing editor, executive editor or editor-in-chief must come to terms with in the execution of his or her daily duties. Because the individual functions of various editorial departments are often significantly different from each other (compare the functions of the Sports department with the Finance department, for example), the departments tend to evolve unique “personalities” and to attract individuals who conform to and are comfortable with those personalities.

When a newspaper’s organisation is under scrutiny, the newsroom tends to be conceptualised as just another department, to be planned like all other departments. Giles’s acknowledgement of the various creative divisions within a newsroom, however, goes some way towards conceptualising a different kind of organisation — one which might differ considerably in approach, goal-setting and budget control, among other issues, from other departments within the organisation.

Giles notes that the top editorial executive’s job is to develop “the editorial mission of the newspaper” and that this involves competency in the
five basic roles of management — planning, organising, staffing, directing and controlling. The chapter on newsroom management roles is quite extensive and develops discussion of the five basic roles in a news media context. It is probably the strongest and most useful section of the book for Australian journalism educators because the ideas espoused are universal, rather than US-specific.

Other general chapters on topics like Leadership and Power, Styles of Management, and Understanding Individual Performance, also are widely applicable but chapters like the one on Pay, MBO and Other Rewards, while deserving of attention in the Australian marketplace, will have limited applicability because of the nature of the Australian industrial relations environment. On the other hand, chapters on Managing Change in the Newsroom and Managing Conflict in the Newsroom, although they deal with concepts which might not be widely recognised or applied in Australia, treat their subjects exhaustively and Australia’s future journalists would benefit from being exposed to them.

Journalism educators, beset by dwindling tertiary institutional budgets and growing student numbers, also will no doubt welcome the chapter on Stress and Survival, which defines stress, provides a stress scale, looks at life cycles, discusses balance and sources of stress, and looks at stress reduction. Anyone who has ever worked in the news industry will want to read two sections in particular — Editor-Induced Stress: A Reporter's View, and Reporter-Induced Stress: An Editor’s View. Giles also provides lists for recognising stress and for dealing with it individually and organisationally.

Giles provides an extensive bibliography and a good index, both of which help to make this simultaneously a good research tool and a good classroom text. Its usefulness as a classroom text, though, might be limited by a lack of exercises to accompany each chapter, but this is already a weighty tome and any more detail would perhaps be impractical. Perhaps the best way to use this text as a teaching resource would be in conjunction with one of the software modelling packages, like NewspaperBudget or NewspaperCosts, produced by Prof Robert Picard, of Turku, Finland.

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Notes for contributors

Australian Studies in Journalism welcomes manuscripts from any disciplinary perspective on topics associated with Australian journalism and news media. The range of areas of interest and relevance is vast. Examples of areas in which submissions are welcome include: studies of news media performance; analysis of government policy as it affects or relates to news media; legal studies of news media; cultural studies approaches to journalism; historical or biographical notes on former journalists (including creative writers or public figures whose background was in journalism); examinations of media coverage of institutions or aspects of Australian society; historical notes on particular newspapers or broadcast organisations; studies (especially comparative) of news media content; studies of interactions between news media and media consumers; studies of news flow and newsroom environments.

Manuscripts will be assessed by selected members of ASJ’s editorial advisory committee or by other specialists. The final decision on whether to accept a submitted paper will be the editor’s. It will be assumed that no paper offered for publication is being simultaneously considered by another journal. If manuscripts are drawn from a thesis or another larger work, or if parallel papers have been published or presented, this should be made clear at the time of submission.

If a manuscript is accepted for publication, the author will be asked to submit a copy on disk, including any recommended corrections. The editor reserves the right to make minor editorial corrections and changes without reference to the author.

Referencing style: Sources should be indicated in the text by author-date method. For example,

According to Turner (1992) . .
Or

. . while others disagree (Turner 1992). [note no comma]
If more than one author is cited:

A page number must be cited if any material is quoted. For example:

. . Turner (1992, p.45) argues “it can be misleading to expect newspapers to fit exactly into a two-press model”.
All works cited should be listed alphabetically as References at the conclusion of the manuscript. The style is:


Note that the titles of journals are italicised, while the article is in lower case.
Newspaper articles should be cited in the same way as for journals:
Newspaper titles: Titles of newspapers and broadcast programs should be italicised, but not the definite article (whether or not it is part of the masthead). Thus, the Sydney Morning Herald, the Times, Four Corners.
Manuscripts should be submitted in duplicate to:

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