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# Trial by media: Anthony Trollope in Australia

Nigel Starck

The Australian press has long been fascinated by the opinion that visiting celebrities hold of Australia itself. This obsession has been excited by the written observations of Mark Twain and D.H. Lawrence, by Ava Gardner's verdict (actually invented by a journalist) that Melbourne was the ideal place for a film about the end of the world, and by Frank Sinatra's unflattering view of Australia's female journalists. In the airport and shipping terminal news rounds of the fifties and sixties, the standard list of questions included the feeble enquiry: "What do you think of Australia?" It is said, apocryphally perhaps, that Sammy Davis Jr replied: "Well, you've got great rooftops." Australia's first visiting celebrity of popular culture was Anthony Trollope: in 1871–72. Having just lodged a twenty-eighth novel (*The Eustace Diamonds*) at his London publishing house, he spent a year touring the six colonies. His arrival excited sentiments of welcome, leavened by the odd note of wariness, in Australia's newspapers. Trollope's subsequent two-volume memoir, *Australia and New Zealand* (Chapman and Hall 1873), offered overall a warm and sympathetic portrait; yet the colonial press responded by censuring the accuracy of his reporting, castigating his manners, and disparaging his facility as a writer. This hostility in the review columns was prompted in particular by two factors: in the 815-page Australian section of the book, he occasionally muddled the minutiae of his statistics and he had twice within the narrative branded Australians as braggarts. The consequent press attack was so pronounced that a mood of disquiet lingered when Trollope made a second visit in 1875. It was an early, and notably sustained, instance of trial by media. With the Trollope Society about to release in Australia a facsimile edition of the 1873 volumes, this episode now warrants revival and analysis.

Colonial journalists, right from the start, showed an inclination to prune this tallest of literary poppies. Though his Barsetshire chronicles had established Trollope's reputation as a novelist of a high order, there were fears that he might have inherited a talent for exercising the scalpel rather than the pen in composing a travel memoir. This disquiet owed its existence to a notorious, and wildly successful, book written forty years earlier by Anthony Trollope's mother, Fanny. Her *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, based on four years of personal anguish and commercial misfortune in the United States, had found fault with New World manners. This passage (F. Trollope 1997, first published 1832: 20), recalling a riverboat saloon encounter with a group of military gentlemen, demonstrates a recurring theme:

The total want of all the courtesies of the table ... the strange uncouth phrases and pronunciation; the loathsome spitting, from the contamination of which it was absolutely impossible to protect our dresses; the frightful manner of feeding with their knives ... and the still more frightful manner of cleaning the teeth afterwards with a pocket knife, soon forced us to feel that we were not surrounded by the generals, colonel, and majors of the old world.

Fanny had met her graceless Americans in January 1828, steaming up the Mississippi from New Orleans to Memphis, where she intended to join a Utopian community of emancipated slaves. Anthony Trollope's voyage, in 1871, was similarly ambitious. He had bought his younger son, Frederic, a sheep station on the Lachlan River, near Forbes in New South Wales, and was determined to experience for himself the pastoral life. Accompanied by his wife, Rose, and their cook, he sailed from Liverpool for Australia on the liner *Great Britain*. His commercial acumen had secured in advance a commission from his publishers for "a solid, informative book on Australia and New Zealand, conceived as an aid to young men and women wishing to emigrate to the Antipodes" (Pope Hennessy 1971: 309). The ship took sixty-four days to reach Melbourne; Trollope

spent sixty-three of them (he was ill on one day) writing a novel, *Lady Anna*, completing it as the *Great Britain* entered Port Phillip Bay.

As befitted this passionately clubbable man, there were sportive greetings from the *Punch* magazines of both Melbourne and Sydney. In the Melbourne edition (1871: 36–37), Trollope was accorded a full-page sketch along with a six-verse poem in which he was described as a “laurel-crowned romancer”. The Sydney magazine, though equally warm in the general tenor of its own verse composition, offered a touch of prescience too by asserting: “If we stooped to adulation, you’d crucify us on the first occasion.” (1871: 171)

After a brief stop in Melbourne and a tour of Queensland, he sailed into Sydney Harbour in October, and was met with a circumspect welcome – and a warning – by the *Sydney Morning Herald* editorial column. He carried a name, said the *Herald* (1871), celebrated as “being that of a lady who travelled through America and who became a severe critic of the American people”. Branding both Mrs Trollope’s book and a subsequent American memoir by Charles Dickens as “slipshod”, the leader expressed uneasiness at the limitations which visiting writers were likely to experience in their research:

They will only see, of course, its [a society’s] more prominent manifestations. They can never know the thousands of quiet families who are improving the country and their fortunes. They can never know of the numerous means of enjoyment within reach of their daily life.

This was a grossly unfair judgment on Anthony Trollope’s technique. While it is true that he was entertained by the leaders of colonial society, he also (at the age of 56) descended mines, spent a month with shearers and rouseabouts, rode his horse into the loneliness of the bush, toured lunatic asylums, penetrated the opium dens of Ballarat, and “roughed it” on the track from Albany to Perth:

I got up about five o'clock on a dark, wet morning, very damp, with the clothes and boots on which I was destined to wear for the day, with the necessity before me of packing up my wet blankets. (Trollope 1873, vol. 2: 126)

Before the appearance of the *Sydney Morning Herald* column, he had been subjected to some decidedly shaky editorialising in Queensland. Trollope, at a Rockhampton public dinner in his honour, had given an assurance that he would produce a “fair, just and true account ... that those at home may be enabled to form a correct impression of the colonies” (*Rockhampton Bulletin* 1871). In Brisbane nearly a month later, however, the *Courier* (1871) used this speech as the basis for an attack on Trollope, saying that he needed to be “rid of some of his English prejudices” before he could understand colonial life. In a lengthy editorial devoted to the novelist’s intended work, the paper engaged in some parochial chest-thumping and advised him to include in his itinerary the agricultural areas closer to Brisbane, without which “no writer could give an accurate description of Queensland as it is, or predict what it will be”. As Muir (1949) has pointed out, this advice was entirely unnecessary: the same edition of the *Courier* had reported Trollope’s tour of the Warwick district.

### **Impressions of loveliness and dissipation**

With press coverage continuing to offer an erratic but occasionally illuminating record of his progress, Trollope went about this odyssey by boat, train, coach, and horse. In his published text (1873), he found Perth “a very pretty town” (vol. 2: 128); Melbourne a “magnificent” city with hospitable clubs rivalling those of London and, at the other end of the social scale, a Benevolent Asylum which appeared palatial when compared with its English equivalents (vol. 1: 384–397); Gladstone was “beautiful to the eye”, with “green glades” looking down upon a “sea lake surrounded by wooded mountains” (vol. 1: 43–44); and Hobart blessed by “perfect air” and “delicious” summer weather, free of the mosquitoes which had so troubled him

during the warmer months on the mainland (vol. 2: 50). As for the “inexpressibly lovely” Sydney Harbour:

You may lie there prostrate on the grass, with the ripple close at your feet within a quarter-of-an-hour of your club. Your after-dinner cigar will last you there and back if you will walk fairly and smoke slowly.... Sydney is one of those places which, when a man leaves it knowing that he will never return, he cannot leave without a pang and a tear. Such is its loveliness. (vol.1: 210–213).

Less happily, Anthony Trollope thought it impossible to find anywhere “a river more ugly” than Adelaide’s Torrens (vol. 2: 181); condemned Bendigo as having been “scratched up violently out of the earth by the rake of some great infernal deity, who had left everything behind him dirty, uncouth, barren, and disorderly” (vol. 1: 418); and the colonial parliaments plagued by “wearisome and uninteresting” debate on trivial topics (vol. 2: 280–283). And in the Chinese quarter of Ballarat he was confronted by “opium-smoking and horrid dissipation”:

A more degraded life it is hardly possible to imagine.... Boys and girls are enticed among them, and dwell with them, and become foul, abominable, and inhuman. (vol. 1: 414– 415).

Trollope’s confidence in recording those experiences in such violent language had its origins in his aggressive empirical research. He could write with authority on New South Wales goldmining, for example, because of his determination to follow the rush through Sofala and Mudgee to Gulgong, to go down a shaft “150 feet deep, with my foot in the noose of a rope” (vol. 1: 288), to ask questions of the multinational prospecting force, and to mix with colourful characters. That eclectic cast included the Gulgong goldfield commissioner T.A. Browne (more widely known later as the novelist ‘Rolf Boldrewood’) and bank manager R.H.D. ‘Hoddle Duddle’ White, who carried a revolver on his hip after “being stuck up two or three times” and shooting “a would-be robber in Queensland” (Baldwin & Boyd-Davis 2001: 41). At a lunch to welcome Trollope, ‘Hoddle Duddle’

dropped his weapon, exploding a cartridge, “much to the alarm” of the party.

The mood by this stage had grown ripe with clubmanship, and the local press played along. The *Gulgong Guardian* (1871) reported the cheers which echoed around the hotel dining room as the gentlemen of the town toasted a guest whose name was “a household word in all English-speaking countries”. Trollope in his reply, said the *Guardian*, had noted that: “Nothing has impressed me more favourably, or struck me more forcibly, than the orderly manner in which business is conducted in the diggings.” For its part, the *Gulgong Mercantile Advertiser* (1871) found that the luncheon offered “a very imposing looking repast, of which the viands and sparkling wines would have passed muster in many an older settlement and pretentious apartment”. The applause for Trollope’s speech, said the *Mercantile Advertiser*, “lasted some time after the guest sat down”.

In his *Australia and New Zealand* (1873), Trollope reciprocated by devoting nine pages (284–292) to the goldfields of Gulgong and its environs. His recollections radiate the mellowness of those newspaper accounts: he had enjoyed an oyster supper hosted by “a munificent banker”, attended a spirited performance of the melodrama *The Colleen Bawn*, been impressed by the sobriety and “manly bearing” of the miners, and marvelled at the construction of a “gorgeously grand edifice” to replace the old Gulgong inn. But this cosy discourse was sandwiched between two passages accusing Australians at large, and Victorians in particular, of boastfulness. The book also offered some extensive statistical information: on mining, crops, government, and economic development. The Australian press then turned on Trollope, maintaining in two instances an editorial position that was to resurface even within the obituary columns.

## “Blowing” a national identity

The term applied by Trollope for this perceived Australian exercise in self-glorification is “blowing”. He introduces the theme early in his book (vol. 1: 117–118):

You are told constantly that colonial meat and colonial wine, colonial fruit and colonial flour, colonial horses and colonial sport, are better than any meat, wine, fruit, flour, horses, or sport to be found elsewhere. ... Now if I was sending a young man to the Australian colonies, the last word of advice I should give him would be against this practice. “Don’t blow,” – I should say to him.

Trollope composes a reprise, *con brio*, in his chapter on Melbourne (vol. 1: 382–401), marvelling at the populace’s self-adulation “in the way of riding, driving, fighting, walking, working, drinking, love-making, and speech-making”. Repeating his “Don’t blow” injunction, he adds:

You hear it and hear of it every day. They blow a good deal in Queensland; a good deal in South Australia. They blow even in poor Tasmania. They blow loudly in New South Wales ... But the blast of the trumpet as heard in Victoria is louder than all the blasts – and the Melbourne blast beats all the other blowing of that proud colony.

There were some hostile reviews, aimed as much at Trollope’s character as at his writing. On the New South Wales goldfields, the camaraderie of the dining room was forgotten; in its place was a *Gulgong Guardian* editorial (1873) dismissing the book, disputing many of its observations, and faulting the author’s manners. Branding *Australia and New Zealand* an exercise in “Trollopian twaddle”, the *Guardian* offered an account of the celebratory luncheon quite different in tone from that which had appeared two years earlier:

When he visited Gulgong a lunch was given to Mr Trollope at Selff’s Hotel, to which the honoured guest did ample justice, and in a manner that did not impress one with his perfect knowledge of table etiquette. There was very

little speechifying, and the very worst specimen of the oratory was that inflicted by the recipient of the public lunch – the voracious Anthony himself. ... He descended the shaft [of a mine] ... and his description of the circumstance is an amusing sample of twaddle. ... Our visitor seems to have had a foggy remembrance of the event, perhaps owing to the fact that he “shouted” several bottles of “battle-axe” [brandy], and set a liberal example at quaffing the contents out of a pannikin.

In Adelaide, the *South Australian Advertiser* (1873) grumbled about the book’s apparent errors in outlining the minutiae of land purchase regulations, disliked the “dull and heavy” section on agriculture, and announced that Trollope had been inaccurate in his statistics on parliamentarians, electorates, and ministries. The *Adelaide Observer* (1873) was similarly scornful, finding the book “very dreary reading” and “not to be trusted”. Accusing the author of lacking “the mental qualifications” for a work of this nature, the *Observer* added: “It is hard to believe that the brilliant author of *Orley Farm* and *The Last Chronicle of Barset* could have so completely mistaken his vocation.”

Tasmanians were upset, too. In Hobart, the *Mercury* (1873) accused him of distorting the colony’s economic health by selective and misleading emphasis on a single disastrous year. Its editorial column demanded an immediate correction: “A second edition will be required if these Colonies are to be fairly represented and justice done to them.” Melbourne’s *Argus* (1873), responding to those slights concerning Victorian aggrandisement, employed sarcasm in a three-column review on the front page of its Saturday supplement. The celebrated author, it suggested, was not averse to some bragging of his own:

In whatever other respects Mr Trollope’s work on Australia and New Zealand may have disappointed public expectation, in bigness it stands pre-eminent. It is not given to every tourist in these latitudes to be able to fill a thousand pages and upwards<sup>†</sup> with his opinions and observations concerning everything he saw, and some things which he did not see....

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<sup>†</sup> The complete text, including the New Zealand section and appendices, runs to 1049 numbered pages.

Nor is he the man to hide his light under a bushel.... [He] may entertain a very disparaging opinion of the things and persons he encounters in his travels, but he manifestly entertains the highest respect for Mr Anthony Trollope.

This judgment, delivered in that hostility of voice, represented an extraordinary shift in attitude by the newspaper: just eighteen months earlier the *Argus* (1871) had welcomed the presence of Anthony Trollope's "transfiguring power" at a public lecture in Melbourne.

A monograph by Muir (1949) on Trollope's personal and literary association with Australia discloses the existence of a pamphlet which repudiates some offending elements of the narrative. The author of this work (c1876)<sup>‡</sup> was Thomas Chuck, a professional photographer who had lived in Melbourne for twenty-four years. His little book, forty-eight pages in length, contains the text of a lecture which he gave on his return to England. It takes issue with the charge of "blowing"; rather, it says, the people of Melbourne were simply displaying a natural pride in what had been achieved in such a short time. Victoria, the photographer-author argues, had made a remarkable advance from the primitive conditions which had prevailed a few years earlier: "Mr Trollope's supposition is untenable. My recollections take me back to the time when the city of Melbourne was unpaved, unlighted, and all but unprotected." (Chuck 1876: 15).

Despite the hostile and carping Australian reviews, Trollope and his book did rather well. A definitive commentary by Sadleir (1927: 314) describes his return to England in December 1872, "carrying the immense manuscript ... weather-beaten, blustering but indomitable". Muir's study maintains the upbeat momentum: *Australia and New Zealand*, she says (1949: 87), was "extremely successful". It appeared serially in the *Australasian*, a popular weekly

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<sup>‡</sup>No date is indicated in the copy of this work held by the National Library, Canberra. However, its author refers (on p5) to Trollope's visit as having been made "a little more than three years ago".

newspaper, and there were three subsequent editions of the book itself. Significantly, it won a favourable notice in the *Times*. Though the reviewer found evidence of some “very wearisome” repetitions of fact, the *Times* critique overall was positive. There was no echo, in this appraisal, of the agonising over statistics which had so consumed the Australian press:

Mr Trollope has written the best account of the Australian colonies yet published. No other equals it in literary power and skill; no other is such easy and pleasant reading, or so full of the very information which English readers need ... even in its statistical passages, the general reader will find himself interested and amused, while to the intending emigrant Mr Trollope’s volumes are, of course, most valuable (*Times* 1873).

Muir’s monograph (1949: 92) also quotes an English journal’s rebuttal of the Tasmanian newspaper critic’s grumbling: “Of Tasmania ... the whole description is in the most charming style, and reads like an essay of Charles Lamb’s grafted upon the most reliable facts.”

### **Temporary forgiveness, elusive absolution**

Regardless of those supportive British reviews, within Australia itself Trollope remained afflicted by his choice of words. He conceded as much in a published despatch to the *Liverpool Mercury* (UK), following his arrival in Melbourne on a second voyage, in 1875. This visit was prompted in part by the continuing pastoral reverses of his younger son. Frederic had tried hard to make a success of the New South Wales sheep station; his long working days, with constant expenditure of physical effort, are vividly portrayed in *Australia and New Zealand*. But prolonged drought and the limited acreage of his property had, ultimately, brought the enterprise down. The failed investment cost his father nearly £5000 on the venture; Frederic abandoned sheep farming and became an inspector for the colony’s Lands Department.

When Trollope *père* sailed back into Melbourne, having completed another novel (*Is He Popenjoy?*) while at sea, he sensed immediately that the resentment created by his “blowing” accusations had not been forgotten. A despatch to Liverpool, the eighth of a series of letters entitled *The Tireless Traveller* (1875), contains an anecdote demonstrating the abiding pique:

Three years ago I wrote a book about the Australian colonies, in which I thought I praised them very much.... But, on reaching the colony again, I found myself to be regarded as rather a bad man.... I was shown an article in a newspaper in which my mendacity, malignity, and general fiendishness were dilated on with all an editor’s eloquence. The custom-house officer who passed my luggage heaped coals of fire on my head by allowing my things to pass through without examination, although I had accused the colony of “blowing”. He was very courteous, but full of wrath, and I felt the coals of fire (*Tireless Traveller*, Letter VIII).

Old friends, he added, continued to be kind; but “they generally whispered to me that others were offended with me”. Among the more unkind welcomes was that printed by the *Gulgong Evening Argus*. Gone was the mood of 1871, when the *Gulgong Guardian* had described the visit of “so distinguished an author” as “a red letter day in the annals of this goldfield” and the *Mercantile Advertiser* had reported the loquacious greeting by Commissioner Browne to “a gentleman who worthily occupies so high a position in the literature of Britain”. In its place was an *Evening Argus* column (1875) that lambasted Trollope for accepting Gulgong’s hospitality “only to abuse the host afterwards”. It called him “this historian of women’s tattle; this conservator of prebends’ gossip and bishops’ pompous idiocies” and found that when he “ventures to describe a country of which he has seen as little or less than his readers, even his audacity fails him”. That charge is singularly misplaced, as Trollope’s 1871–72 itinerary had been adventurous, embracing such diverse locations as South Australia’s Wallaroo and Moonta copper mines, Gympie in Queensland, the Riverina district of New South Wales, King George Sound on the coast of Western Australia, and Port Arthur in

Tasmania. All this, according to the Gulgong newspaper, was but a “dash through the country” by a writer of “very common clay” who was guilty of “slipshod English ... palpable extravagance and ludicrous misstatements”.

The comparative kindness of old friends, however, was reflected in the *Sydney Morning Herald*; its pages of May and August 1875 indicate that although the “blowing” epithet was not forgotten, the leaders of Sydney society were prepared to forgive the author. First, in May, Trollope was among the guests at a shipboard farewell ceremony, on Sydney Harbour, for William Macleay’s New Guinea scientific expedition. The *Herald* report (1875a) captures the spirit of gentlemanly camaraderie which prevailed that “calm and lovely morning”, quoting the New South Wales premier, John Robertson, as saying in his speech that the party as a whole “felt inclined to ‘blow’ a little”. Trollope’s response was conveyed in a style of journalism now long defunct, rich in fruity paraphrase and parenthetical interpolation:

Mr Trollope said he was very much obliged to them for drinking his health ... but the manhood had been suddenly taken out of him by the ‘side’ blow dealt by their distinguished friend, Mr Robertson. (Laughter.) In those words which he had incautiously written, and which now rose up in judgment against him, he had not been directly thinking of New South Wales, and most certainly not thinking of the Hon. John Robertson, Premier of the colony. (Roars of laughter.)

After spending some weeks at the doomed sheep station with Frederic, now married and the father of two sons, Anthony Trollope found further solace with the Sydney A-list of the day. The *Herald* (1875b) reported in late August that he was guest of honour at a picnic on the Warragamba River. His hosts selected “a lovely spot” for breakfast, they all admired the “magnificent scenery of the upper portion of the river”, and then the picnic accoutrements and servants were employed for a luncheon served by “Madame Dettman, of the Parliamentary Refreshment Rooms”. The Chief Justice, Sir James

Martin, offered an elaborate tribute to “the very best book on Australia that has ever been published”; the newspaper’s parentheses this time indicated “loud and long-continued cheering”. This bonhomie spilled into the *Sydney Morning Herald* editorial column (1875c), where Trollope was applauded for his “honest and wholesome” endeavour in taking “a foremost part in the business of the world’s literature”.

He had turned sixty, and was now plainly declining in popularity as a novelist – although, with his perpetual industriousness intact, he had begun *The American Senator* while on this second Australian visit, finishing it on the voyage home from Sydney via the United States. Michael Sadleir (1927: 332) has found him to be “at once formidable and pathetic. Like a great dog, he had strength and could use it; but beneath the strength was tenderness and, in the bright eyes, a something of appeal.” It is likely, therefore, that Trollope was genuinely discomfited by the “coals of fire” which those two inflammatory passages in his memoir had occasioned.

He died in 1882, and the obituaries of Sydney and Melbourne smouldered yet. The posthumous appraisal published by Melbourne’s *Argus* (1882) suggested that Victoria, identified as home to the loudest “blowers”, still harboured some resentment. Trollope, it said, had “reached eminence by patiently toiling up the hill of fame”; however, all his works were below those of “the first rank of novelists”. The *Argus* added that his Melbourne lecture, eleven years earlier, had been considered “rather dull and uninteresting” and his travel memoir was of a “surfacy [*sic*] character”.

With the Warragamba picnickers’ cheers long discontinued, the obituary published by the *Sydney Morning Herald* (1882) also resorted to a restrained acknowledgment of Trollope’s achievements:

He had no place in the front rank of the great English writers of fiction such as his contemporaries Thackeray, Dickens, and George Eliot, but as a novelist possessed of great imaginative power and skill in the construction

of narrative and the portrayal of human passion he won and maintained to the last a large measure of popularity.

And then, towards the end of this obituary, came the prickly relic of less happy memory. The *Herald*, after a few sentences conferring faint praise on *Australia and New Zealand*, remarked that the “now historical injunction ‘Don’t blow’ provoked some adverse criticism”. There might have been in life, just seven years earlier, those episodes of clubby ripostes on the harbour and forgiveness on the river, but – for Anthony Trollope dead – absolution in Australia remained elusive. The press had seen to that.

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# The framing of ATSIC chairman Geoff Clark in the *Australian*

Lauren Heinritz and Beate Josephi

This article looks at the frames used in the *Australian's* coverage of indigenous leader Geoff Clark, from his re-election as chairman of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) at the end of 2002 until the agency's demise in March 2004. The authors find two divergent ways of reporting indigenous issues. The Geoff Clark case highlights the ideological divide between proponents of the so-called "rights-based agenda" in indigenous affairs and those that favour the "responsibilities-based" agenda. This article shows that the *Australian*, as a leading proponent of the federal government's responsibilities-based policy agenda, in summary, framed the perceived turmoil in organisation's indigenous leadership and the perceived ineffectiveness of ATSIC as a failure of indigenous self-determination.

The complicated subject matter of indigenous affairs is never afforded the prominence required for contemporary indigenous issues to be explored in its full complexity. Since 2002, the future of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) dominated indigenous affairs reporting. When established in the late 1980s, ATSIC was viewed as a significant step towards Aboriginal self-determination and self-management in Australia. A fundamental shift in indigenous-affairs policy was instigated by the Howard Government between 1996 and 1998, in which time the government rejected the policy of self-determination as it related to indigenous-affairs-policy formation and replaced it with their "practical reconciliation" agenda (Jonas 2002).

When the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) was established on 5 March 1990 under a Labor Government, it was expected to usher in a new era of self-determination for indigenous people in Australia (Rintoul 2003). Self-

determination in this context relates to a policy approach to indigenous affairs first adopted in the 1970s. At the heart of this was a devolution of political and economic power to indigenous communities (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, 1990). Self-determination replaced the failed policy of forced assimilation, which for indigenous people dictated that they abandon their own indigenous culture, often under duress through policies such as forcible removal of indigenous children from their families (Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission 1997).

The creation of ATSIC was an adversarial process for Bob Hawke's Labor Government, whose insistence on underpinning the philosophy of the agency as self-determination sparked fierce resistance from the Liberal Party opposition (Brennan, 1990). Throughout its existence, ATSIC was often subjected to persistent criticism about its operation and performance, much of it stemming from fundamental misunderstandings about ATSIC's role in the wider government Indigenous affairs portfolio (Senate Select Committee on the Administration of Indigenous Affairs 2005: 20).

The central power structure of the ATSIC leadership was a board of 17 elected commissioners, headed by a chairperson and a deputy chair (Schubert, Rintoul, & Maiden 2004). In December 1999 Geoff Clark, an Aboriginal man of Tjapwurrong descent from the Framlingham Aboriginal community near Warrnambool in regional Victoria, became ATSIC's first elected chairperson (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission 2002). Clark's election as an ATSIC commissioner in 1996 provided him with a mandate to push a rights-based agenda through advocating the negotiation of a treaty and focusing on the advancement of native title rights.

His election coincided with the election of a conservative Liberal-National Party Coalition government at a national level. When the coalition took office in 1996, following 13 years of Labor Party rule, Liberal Party leader John Howard, in his first press conference as Prime Minister, cut \$470 million from ATSIC's budget (*Australian* 16.4.2004: 4). As well as cutting ATSIC's funding, the

Coalition also introduced significant amendments to the *Native Title Act 1993*, which were largely viewed as setting the scene for winding back gains made when the Native Title Act was passed (see Meadows 2000). Furthermore, the Coalition government instigated a fundamental shift in the indigenous-affairs policy between 1996 and 1998, rejecting the policy of self-determination and replacing it with their “practical reconciliation” agenda (Jonas 2002). Practical reconciliation is effectively a program of federal government funding that targets specific areas of socio-economic disadvantage in Indigenous communities, including health, housing, education and employment (Behrendt 2002).

Notwithstanding the federal government’s opposition to self-determination, Clark continued to campaign on rights-based issues throughout his term as commissioner and became the first elected, as opposed to government-appointed, chair of the peak Indigenous agency in 1999. During his first term as ATSIC chair Clark publicly built up a good rapport with political leaders, including Prime Minister Howard (Gordon 2002).

In June 2001, Fairfax’s *Age* controversially published legally untested allegations that Clark raped four women in the 1970s and 80s (Rule 2001). The article by investigative reporter Andrew Rule, entitled “Geoff Clark: Power and rape,” detailed allegations of rape against Clark by four women, the most prominent of whom was Clark’s cousin, Joanne McGuinness (Rule 2001).

The *Age*’s publication of the rape allegations in 2001 came only a month after Clark was involved in an incident outside the Criterion Hotel in his hometown of Warrnambool, described in the media as a “pub brawl” (Jopson 2002). It was widely reported at the time of his 2002 re-election to the ATSIC board that Clark was to face 19 criminal charges over the incident, but at the time he denied that the pending charges would make his chairman’s role untenable (Jopson 2002). In spite of the well-publicised rape claims, which the ATSIC chairman categorically denied (Gordon 2002), Clark was reinstated as the elected leader of ATSIC in December 2002.

The period from December 2002 to early 2003 was punctuated by a series of reports in the *Australian* about issues largely relating to accountability within ATSIC, which directly sought to implicate Clark and his deputy “Sugar” Ray Robinson in alleged financial mismanagement and highlight ongoing legal proceedings against the pair (*Australian* 19.6.2003: 4). In July 2003, Clark was issued with his first “show cause” letter by Indigenous Affairs Minister Philip Ruddock, requesting that he outline reasons as to why he should not be suspended as the ATSIC chair (Johnstone 2004), and on 13 August 2003, Minister Ruddock suspended Clark as ATSIC chair on full pay, on the grounds that his convictions were a form of misbehaviour (Schubert & Rintoul 2003a).

In October 2003, Senator Amanda Vanstone replaced Philip Ruddock as federal Indigenous Affairs Minister. As a result of Clark’s conviction on charges relating to the 2002 altercation at Warrnambool’s Criterion Hotel, Senator Vanstone issued Clark with a second “show cause” letter on 23 December 2003, which was more severe than the first as it demanded Clark detail reasons why he should not be altogether sacked from his position as the ATSIC chair (Johnstone 2004).

Despite sustained pressure from the federal Labor Party and a number of Indigenous leaders calling for Clark to be dismissed from the ATSIC chair, Senator Vanstone sought to reserve her position on his sacking until the Victorian Supreme Court heard Clark’s appeal against his conviction for obstructing police during the May 2002 incident (*National Indigenous Times* 14.4.2004: 7). On 8 April 2004, the Court upheld Clark’s appeal in relation to the charge of behaving in a riotous manner, but Clark was still found guilty of the charge of obstructing police, albeit with a reduction in the severity of his sentence with his fine reduced from \$2000 to \$750 (Johnstone 2004). The Federal Court case against Clark’s sacking continued, making it problematic for Senator Vanstone to sack Clark until the case, which resumed in April 2004, was determined (*National Indigenous Times* 14.4.2004: 7). Ultimately, Senator Vanstone was not forced to make a decision on Clark’s sacking, as this deadline would not pass before a

critical election policy announcement by the Australian Labor Party triggered a response from the Federal Government that spelt the end of ATSIC (Morris, Lewis & Hickman 2004).

On 30 March 2004, in the context of a federal election campaign, the Australian Labor Party announced that, if elected, it would abolish ATSIC and its administrative arm ATSIIS, and replace the agencies with a directly elected national advocacy body and devolve service delivery functions to regional bodies (*Australian* 16.4.2004: 4). Labor's policy was a "framework of principles" rather than a detailed plan, being similar to what ATSIC itself, the ATSIC Review and the probable federal government plan were suggesting (Morris, Lewis & Hickman 2004). The policy announcement by Labor leader Mark Latham was said to have provided the Howard Government with a mandate to abolish ATSIC (Grattan 2004). At a press conference on 15 April 2004, Prime Minister Howard and Indigenous Affairs Minister Senator Amanda Vanstone declared that ATSIC would be abolished with immediate effect and not replaced (Lewis, Maiden & Schubert 2004). In announcing the move, Howard said that the "experiment in elected representation for Indigenous people has been a failure" (Lewis, Maiden & Schubert 2004).

ATSIC was abolished on 16 March 2005; the Hawke Government had brought it into existence on 5 March 1990 (Osborne 2005). ATSIC's functions have since been "mainstreamed" (funded through other federal Government agencies), reflecting the Liberal Government's policy that Indigenous people should not be treated separately from the rest of the population (Rintoul 2004a).

### **Literature: Representation of indigenous people and issues in the Australian media**

Indigenous people in Australia have long held concerns over the ways in which they are reported on and represented in the media. The mainstream media is the primary source of information for the majority of the non-indigenous population on issues relating to indigenous people and also those of minority ethnic communities

(Meadows, 1988: 142). This has been underpinned by Trigger's study (1995: 118) of coverage of indigenous issues in the press and on talkback radio in Western Australia, which shows that of the more than 450 respondents were interviewed the most significant proportion (37%) indicated that their information on this subject is drawn from the mass media.

However, those who work in the mainstream media are predominantly part of the dominant culture and, as such, many can be assumed to have only limited contact and knowledge about minority and indigenous cultures (Eggerking, 1996: 23). Indigenous academic Marcia Langton, for example, argues that "inherited, imagined representations" (1993: 35) about indigenous people are shaped from early colonial stereotypes that have become incorporated into everyday dialogue and discourse in relation to Indigenous people. Journalists are frequently required to "cross cultural boundaries" (Stockwell & Scott 2000: 21) in order to report fairly on issues in the Indigenous community. A lack of Indigenous access to major news organisations, through employment and general participation in the media, is an ongoing issue and a major impediment to the fair and balanced reporting of Indigenous affairs (Meadows 2000; Meadows 2001; Burrows 2004, Mickler, 1998).

One of the recurring themes in the mainstream media is the representation of Indigenous Australians as "failures – unable to cope with the contemporary world" (Jakubowicz, 1994: 39). Brough's (1999) study of representations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health in three major daily Australian newspapers from 1988 to 1998, explores this theme and concludes that Indigenous people are framed by their poor health status as a 'national shame' and an ever-present problem for the government and the nation as a whole. Critically, indigenous health is framed within a media discourse of failure, which employs metaphors of shame and comparisons with third world countries.

This "failure" frame, somewhat contradictorily, is complemented by the "special privilege" frame. Mickler (1998) has shown that the daily routine reporting of, often banal, indigenous

issues results in the indigenous population being subjected to media coverage on a disproportionate scale. In conjunction with the visibility of perceived “special treatment” that indigenous people receive and routine reporting of targeted government assistance for Indigenous people, Mickler (1998: 211) suggests that the visibility in the media of Indigenous and government relations feed a discourse of ‘Aboriginal privilege’ that has become a prominent news frame in wider media discourses. The most overt manifestation of this discourse in recent times was in independent MHR for Oxley Pauline Hanson’s maiden speech to Federal Parliament on 10 September 1996. She alluded to “the privileges Aboriginals enjoy over other Australians” and her concerns that “a type of reverse racism is applied to mainstream Australians by those who promote political correctness” (Hanson 1996). The mainstream media perpetuate a myth that indigenous people receive special or privileged treatment, despite social indicators demonstrating unambiguously that these same people are the most disadvantaged in Australian society (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2002).

### **Methodology: Framing analysis**

Framing is emerging as an alternative theoretical framework to media racism and bias paradigm that has dominated studies of the representation of indigenous people in the media and the reporting of Indigenous issues. Schudson (2003) notes that a consideration of framing, rather than bias, makes it possible to examine the ways in which journalists draw on routines and established frames to report issues, rather than just reading evidence of selection as evidence of intentional bias or the prejudices of individual journalists (Schudson 2003: 37). Framing analysis, writes Reese (2001: 9) deviates from the objective standard of a focus on bias in media studies to consider the “ideological character” of news.

Frames play a key role as interpretive structures to construct meanings and make sense of what is at issue:

The absence of Aboriginal voices interpreting ‘news’ about Aboriginal issues does not leave a vacuum of interpretive guidelines for audiences. Several powerful and persistent ‘frames’ of expectation about what news relating to Aborigines will be about are evident in how stories about Aboriginal politics are constructed, and how they are interpreted varies from audience to audience (Jakubowicz 1994: 85)

A consequence of the reinforcement of historically grounded race-based stereotyping of Indigenous Australians throughout the nation’s mass media is the institutionalisation of common frames to interpret Indigenous issues in the media.

McCallum (2003) identified a shift in the framing of Indigenous issues in the media at the conclusion of the statutory life of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (CAR) in the year 2000, which signalled the finalisation of a ten-year formal reconciliation process in Australia. Reconciliation in a symbolic sense had disappeared from media coverage by 2001 and was replaced by the Howard Government’s “practical reconciliation” agenda, which instigated a move away from symbolic reconciling of issues to a focus on the everyday issues that affect Indigenous communities (Ruddock 2002). Arguably, the void left by the shifting of the symbolic reconciliation agenda has been replaced in the media by scandals surrounding the perceived failure of the Indigenous leaders within ATSIC to operate effectively both within and outside of formal government structures. Critically, government responsibility for Indigenous affairs is symbolically absolved by virtue of ATSIC’s existence and failures in the ATSIC administration and leadership are framed by the media as wider systemic failures in the improvement of the lives of Australia’s Indigenous population. This study will examine whether reporting of Clark’s problems has increased reporting of perceived Indigenous failure in a wider sense.

### **Case study: The *Australian***

The year 2004 marked 40 years of the *Australian* newspaper. In a series of supplements published in mid-2004, prominent

commentators reflected on the social, political and economic changes that have shaped Australian society since the newspaper was established. In the 'Identity' supplement, prominent Indigenous lawyer and regular contributor to the *Australian's* opinion pages, Noel Pearson, wrote a commentary that proposed that, during the *Australian's* lifetime, there have been two "stories" of Indigenous affairs in Australia (Pearson 2004).

The first of these stories, he termed the "liberal-progressive story of positive advancement," the second aspect of this interpretation was the advancement of Indigenous culture and society, "as being as valuable as Australia's British institutions and perhaps morally superior," most prominently through the incorporation of indigenous culture in official government policy and the establishment of bodies like the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (Pearson 2004). Pearson's interpretation lays out, in summary, the ideological divide that exists between proponents of the "rights-based agenda" in indigenous affairs and those that favour the "responsibilities-based" agenda.

The *Australian* has been highlighted as leading public debate in recent years in reassessing Indigenous affairs policies in a period which has seen a fundamental change in approach to Indigenous affairs, led by the conservative Howard Government. This change is defined by a move away from the so-called 'symbolic' focus on Indigenous people's right to self-determination, to a perspective dominated by a rejection of the rights agenda through the language of "practical reconciliation" and a discourse of 'equality', underpinned by the central idea that Indigenous people should not be treated as separate to the mainstream Australian population:

The liberal-progressive interpretation of indigenous affairs is not standing up to scrutiny. The *Australian*, warts and all, is the main national forum for this painful reassessment in terms of in-depth analysis and coverage not merely fed by the indigenous leadership debacle (Pearson 2004)

While Pearson's analysis highlights the significant role of the *Australian* as a forum for debating indigenous issues, it is the

ideological underpinnings of the *Australian's* coverage of indigenous people that require further examination.

## Findings

### December 2002: ATSIC's 'suicide election'

In October 2002, about 50,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australia voted in the first stage of the ATSIC elections for regional council candidates to fill a total of 388 positions on 35 councils (Rintoul 2002a). The *Australian* framed the leadership race as a contest between the old order of former Northern Land Council chief executive Galarrwuy Yunupingu, Clark and Robinson, and the "new guard" led by youthful Northern Territory ATSIC commissioner Kim Hill (Toohey 2002). Conflict was exploited to the fullest possible extent as a news frame in the reporting. In a feature article profiling Kim Hill, journalist Paul Toohey wrote that in electing a chairman,

the ATSIC board will usher in a new guard or they will send a message that bitterness and divisiveness is [sic] the way Australia's peak indigenous body likes to do business; and that the most fundamental issues plaguing Aboriginal Australia, of sexual and domestic violence, are of no concern to the board (Toohey 2002).

Contrary to the *Australian's* expectation, Clark was reinstated as the elected leader of ATSIC in a December 2002 meeting of the ATSIC board. Clark told the *Australian* that he might shun the mainstream media due to their inability to accept the ATSIC leadership, "I'm seriously thinking about a media ban...where I'd just talk to the black media, and if you guys [the mainstream media] want comment, you'd have to get it from them" (Schubert, Rintoul & Wilson 2002). Stuart Rintoul's analysis, under the headline "ATSIC's 'suicide selection'", suggested ATSIC "might very well have committed suicide by re-electing a national leadership with crippled credibility" and called ATSIC "a house not just divided but collapsing" (Rintoul 2002b).

The editorial position of the paper changed abruptly. The *Australian's* position was made clear in an editorial that appeared immediately following Clark's re-appointment (*Australian* 20.12 2002: 8). ATSIC was framed as being in crisis mode in the immediate aftermath of the Clark-Robinson re-election, with the coverage stating that "if either man held as elected position in a publicly funded agency of ATSIC's power in the general community, the weight of public opinion would have compelled the board to dismiss them both" (*Australian* 20.12 2002: 8).

The *Australian's* coverage was largely reflective of the views expressed in other major daily newspapers. Clark's comments about indigenous people going to extreme lengths to gain native title rights – "Don't put us in the situation where Aboriginal people are strapping bombs to themselves" – were widely condemned in the editorials. The *Herald Sun* said Clark's "transparent effort to exploit fear of terrorism in a community reeling from the Bali [terrorist attack] tragedy is contemptible" (*Herald Sun* 21.12.2002: 30). It concluded that "progress for the Aboriginal people will stagnate until Clark is removed and ATSIC reformed — or scrapped" (*Herald Sun* 21.12.2002: 30). The themes in the editorials are essentially consistent and make reference to the 'missed opportunity' that resulted from the re-election of Clark and Robinson.

Critically, the editorial that appeared in the *Australian* following the re-election of Clark could be said to have framed media coverage of both him and ATSIC from that point to the time ATSIC was abolished, given that one or two references to a particularly powerful concept can frame great quantities of content and information during the course of a debate (Hertog & McLeod 2001: 52). The editorial, importantly, signalled a change in the position of the newspaper from a debate about ATSIC's future with a potentially new leadership to whether the organisation should exist at all, as indicated by the title of the editorial "Time for the end of ATSIC". From December 2002 onwards, the *Australian* sought to report ATSIC as failing indigenous people and Clark as being responsible for these failures because of his disengagement from his constituency.

## **April 2003: ATSIC – ‘It’s war’**

In April 2003, the war in Iraq was dominating national media coverage, leading to a constriction of the news agenda. However, Clark and ATSIC were still reported prominently at this time, as the issue complied with the broader conflict frame prominent in the coverage of war and incorporated the main news values of conflict, and more broadly proximity and prominence.

In the context of the Iraq War, the *Australian’s* editor-at-large Paul Kelly reported the Howard Government was “flexing its muscles on the home front” in a “political war” against ATSIC over “Aboriginal self-management” (Kelly 2003). Under the headline “ATSIC: It’s WAR,” the report summarises the political war between the Howard Government and the ATSIC leadership:

A showdown between the elected Aboriginal body and the Howard Government has put the quality of indigenous governance in Australia on the line. As Australians were fixated on Iraq this week, there was a political war at home – a bitter, conspiratorial, changing battle over Aboriginal self management. (Kelly 2003)

The timing of the report coincided with moves by the Howard Government to introduce a ‘separation of powers’ arrangement into ATSIC’s governance structure, thereby curtailing the ATSIC board’s power to make funding decisions. The article frames the conflict as a stand off between Clark and Minister Ruddock, reflected in the conflict-laden terminology employed in the reporting, which talks of a government that had “exhausted its tolerance for ATSIC’s financial abuses” and a minister who has “sent a public signal about his private threat” to Clark by setting the scene for using the 2003 federal budget to strip ATSIC of control of its \$1.2 billion budget (Kelly 2003). The “clash over Aboriginal governance” is said to follow “the collapse of relations between Ruddock and Clark,” as evidenced in reported “palpable” tension between the two figures (Kelly 2003).

The terminology in the report highlights the “battle over Aboriginal self-management” as the salient aspect of the story, yet the baseline issue is the financial accountability of individual members of the ATSIC Board (Kelly 2003). The reporting is consistent with Reese’s findings that a story framed episodically, complete with real social actors in a news event, is more accessible to an audience than “the more accurate, perhaps, but duller thematic, ‘baseline’ story” (Reese 2001: 12).

The media, in Tiffen’s (1999) view, does not have the capacity or the imperative to explore in-depth issues far beyond the surface conflict, with the media being more likely to focus on uncovering individual culpability than on institutional inadequacy, as news values place a higher premium on securing scalps than exploring system failure (Tiffen 1999: 250). Given the preceding events, it was indeed easier for the media to seek to secure Clark’s scalp than to delve into the wider and more complex question of Indigenous governance. In reiterating that the mantra of self-determination, or self-management, was linked to conflict and failure in Indigenous Australia and attributing responsibility to ATSIC for this, the concept would lose wider community support if it failed. The debate was disingenuous, as the only alternative to self-management put forward by the government was mainstreaming indigenous affairs, which is simply delivering services through existing agencies.

### **May 2003: Travel rorts – ATSIC’s last slip?**

The *Australian’s* attention intensified on Clark in May 2003, with revelations that he had allegedly misused taxpayers’ money to fund an official overseas trip for himself and his wife. On 31 May 2003, the Weekend *Australian* reported that it had obtained documents under Freedom of Information legislation that indicated that Clark had misled the federal government by taking a \$31,000 taxpayer-funded trip to Ireland (Schubert & McKinnon 2003). The *Australian* questioned whether the alleged travel rorts were the ATSIC leader’s “last slip” on the way to his possible sacking (Schubert &

McKinnon 2003). The editorial – “Clark’s choice: explain or resign” – outlines two choices for Clark – explain his actions or resign as ATSIIC chair (*Australian* 31.5.2003: 16a).

The editorial on the letters page of the *Australian* was accompanied by a Leak cartoon showing Clark and Prime Minister Howard seated at a table strewn with holiday pictures of Rome and Dublin, fine wine and champagne. The Prime Minister and Clark both hold their Australian Tax Payer “Gold Card” up to a waiter, but Howard in a speech bubble says “No, no, mate...I insist...” (*Australian* 31.5.2003: 16b). The Prime Minister was under intense media scrutiny at the time for spending \$42,680 for a Rome hotel room and a bill for staff room costs that totalled \$22,722 (King 2003). Comparatively, Clark’s costs pale in comparison to the Prime Minister’s, yet the level of scrutiny applied to Clark is significant under the circumstances.

Notably, some of Clark’s closest supporters referred to him as the “indigenous equivalent of the Prime Minister” (Rintoul 2004b) and Clark was undeniably one of the most highly paid indigenous bureaucrats in the country. Cowlshaw theorises that in general indigenous leaders are placed in “two mutually exclusive positions” as the “objects of worry” and as “the consultants to their own problems”. In addition, they are asked to “counsel the nation on issues such as the “worrying level of violence in indigenous communities” (Cowlshaw 2003). Unfortunately, these same “articulate, educated and vocal indigenous people can be dismissed as having very little to do with their own communities” (Behrendt 2002: 27). In Clark’s case, the *Australian’s* view that he was out of touch with his constituency was specifically highlighted in the reports about his travel activities, but the same was not said of John Howard, whose broader constituency also includes both indigenous and non-indigenous people suffering levels of extreme disadvantage in some cases.

## June 2003: ‘Corrupt shambles’

On 12 November 2002, Indigenous Affairs Minister Philip Ruddock appointed a three member panel to review ATSIC’s role and functions. The panel was expected to recommend key sweeping changes to the body (Schubert 2002). The review panel consisted of indigenous academic Jackie Huggins, former Labor senator Bob Collins and former New South Wales Liberal John Hannaford. In June 2003, the ATSIC review panel released a public discussion paper to canvass issues and discuss them in the second stage of consultation.

The *Australian* seized upon remarks about the lack of credibility of the ATSIC leadership. The ATSIC review panel reportedly wrote that “poor standards of behaviour (on the national board) were seen as contributing to increased negative media attention towards ATSIC and damaging the efforts of the organisation” (Schubert 2003). In the lead paragraph, the article also implies that only the fact that ATSIC was not a “white organisation” prevented it from being regarded as a “corruption-riddled shambles” (Schubert 2003), but the *Australian’s* report left out the context in which these comments were made. It is important to note that this statement was not explained, leaving open the interpretation that this dichotomy should be viewed primarily through the “Aboriginal privilege frame” and, in this case, an abuse of that privilege and a failure of self-determination.

The *Australian’s* editorial – “To empower Aborigines, end ATSIC” – was an unequivocal statement that the *Australian* did not support the ATSIC model, but it was less clear on what should replace the peak indigenous body. The editorial speaks of an ATSIC leadership that “staggers from discredit to disgrace” but says “the failure of ATSIC’s leadership does not make a case for passing responsibility for indigenous health, education and welfare to other government agencies (*Australian* 19.6.2003: 10). The idea of “passing responsibility” for “health, education and welfare” to mainstream government departments highlights an error of fact potentially deliberately made by the *Australian* – that ATSIC was solely “responsible” for both the funding and outcomes in these policy

areas – without taking into account the significant role that other mainstream government departments. The *Australian* routinely concluded that ATSIC’s inability to make any progress on advancing the life chances of indigenous people was directly related to the agency’s focus on ‘symbolic’ issues:

The [ATSIC review] report, quietly and carefully, also indicates that the established wisdom — that Aborigines are desperate for land rights and a treaty between Australia’s original inhabitants and the national Government — is plain wrong... Communities cursed with appalling health and housing and where life expectancies are decades beneath other Australians face problems that symbolic solutions will never fix. (*Australian* 19.6.2003: 10)

What is implicit in the editorial is that the *Australian* views Indigenous affairs policies that are tied to a focus on rights, rather than taking responsibility, as failures. This general theme is found throughout the reporting phases and demonstrates that the ‘attribution of responsibility frame’ is applied in relation to ATSIC, resulting in a view that the agency had failed Indigenous people through inaction and incompetence.

### **August 2003: Ruddock suspends Clark**

On 13 August 2003, the front page of the *Australian* reported that Indigenous affairs Minister Philip Ruddock had suspended Clark on the grounds of misbehaviour, five months after Clark was convicted of obstructing police and behaving in a riotous manner in an incident outside of a public bar in the Victorian town on Warrnambool in 2001 (Schubert & Rintoul 2003b). The front page report was dominated by government voices whose availability and perceived credibility makes them the press’s sources of choice (Bennett 2000: 211). Citing unnamed “government sources,” the report states “it was a Freedom Of Information request by the *Australian* seeking details of the trip that accelerated greater scrutiny of Clark’s conduct” (Schubert & Rintoul 2003b).

Cited in the reports is a reference to both “outrage and relief” in Indigenous Australia at the decision to suspend Clark: “For some

indigenous leaders, Clark's suspension as ATSIC chairman couldn't come soon enough. Others were outraged at what they saw as a denial of natural justice and an affront to self-determination" (Schubert & Rintoul 2003c). The oft-quoted sources employed in reports to convey this relief and outrage are drawn from a narrow pool of prominent Indigenous people. On balance, the reactions are pragmatic and sensible individual views that express views both for and against Clark. In common though is the shared view that the federal government had allowed ATSIC's reputation to be tarnished by not acting sooner in moving to dismiss Clark.

### **March 2004: Latham puts ATSIC out of its misery**

On 30 March 2004, then Australian Labor Party leader Mark Latham announced that, if elected, Labor would abolish ATSIC and ATSI and consult with Indigenous people about an adequate structure to replace the peak body (Morris, Lewis & Hickman 2004). In its editorial on 1 April 2004, the *Australian* praised Mark Latham's moves to abolish ATSIC, reporting the announcement as the opposition leader putting ATSIC "out of its misery" (*Australian* 1.4.2004: 10). The *Australian* was largely supportive of Latham's move, as it represented a major departure from the rights-based politics so prominent in the days of the Hawke and Keating Labor governments. An opinion piece by editor-at-large Paul Kelly, published after the Labor announcement, observed that the political consensus that resulted from Mark Latham's plan to abolish ATSIC would have been unimaginable in previous years (Kelly 2004).

Following the Labor Party's announcement that it would abolish ATSIC, a lengthy feature article by journalist Stuart Rintoul introduced the 'dead and buried' theme in relation to ATSIC, most prominently employed in the article title – "Few lament death knell" – and reinforced by Rintoul's opening paragraph: "[ATSIC]– the Hawke government's answer to Aboriginal poverty and alienation – is dead. The body might twitch for a while, but the life support system has been switched off" (Rintoul 2004a). Clark figures

prominently in the report, saying he does not accept the blame for ATSIC's demise, because he was the victim of "a deliberate campaign of vilification and deception" (Rintoul 2004a). A picture of Clark, alongside two smaller images of Latham and Howard, captioned as showing three figures, "divided on the future," is a prominent aspect of the report. Clark is cast as somewhat of a pariah, with Rintoul stating that his "career has been silently condemned by parliament as the Government's intention to dismiss him has sat in the two houses without demur" (Rintoul 2004a).

### **April 2004: Howard buries ATSIC**

An announcement on 15 April 2005 by Prime Minister Howard that ATSIC would be abolished with immediate effect came within weeks of the Labor Party's announcement that it would do the same if elected.

The theme "Death of ATSIC" is used as a strap-line in the extensive analysis on Page 4 of the 16 April 2004 edition, with the most prominent of five discrete reports covering the abolition canvassing prominent indigenous people's reactions to the announcement under the headline: "Few mourn last rites of failed body," again evoking the "dead and buried" theme (Schubert, Rintoul, & Maiden 2004). The report notably draws on frames of social protest, to warn – in threatening terms – of a "new era of black radicalism", specifically highlighting comments by ATSIC's first chair Lowitja O'Donoghue that the decision to deprive Indigenous people of democratic representation "may push us [the Indigenous community] to where were fighting for our rights on the streets" (Schubert, Rintoul, & Maiden 2004). Clark makes a similar comment in the front-page report: "We will keep fighting. We will fight by whichever means necessary to get it (ATSIC) back" (Lewis, Maiden & Schubert 2004).

In an analysing the government's announcement in a comment piece – "Clark the beginning of the end" – Stuart Rintoul repeats John Howard's comments in 1989 about ATSIC's establishment being "an

act of national lunacy” that “struck at the heart of the unity of the Australian people” (Rintoul 2004b). In commenting that “elected representation for indigenous people has been a failure”, Rintoul said Howard was returning to core principle he had espoused at ATSIC’s creation that Indigenous people “should not be treated differently” (Rintoul 2004b). This rhetoric carried over into wider opposition to ATSIC by framing the agency as an institutionally sanctioned form of separatism and indigenous self-government that ascribed special and exclusive rights to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Arguably the ideological approach to indigenous affairs by the Howard Government, underpinned by a discourse of equality and a push for integration and assimilation, has risen to become the dominant paradigm in which indigenous affairs is reported in the *Australian*.

In declaring that the move to abolish ATSIC and administer indigenous programs through mainstream departments takes indigenous affairs “back to before 1989”, Stuart Rintoul acknowledges that mainstreaming in the pre-ATSIC environment was also a failure and the areas of most abject indigenous disadvantage, health and education, were not ATSIC’s responsibility (Rintoul 2004b). This report is one of many examples that highlight the lack of consensus in the reporting of Clark and ATSIC in the *Australian*, where on the one hand the paper was seeking Clark’s scalp and ATSIC’s abolition for their respective failings, while on the other hand being of the view that mainstream federal government approaches offered no better alternative. The debate in the *Australian* had come full-circle by advocating the reversion of indigenous services to mainstream departments. The debate on indigenous self-determination was more or less closed from that point onwards, though the immediate period following ATSIC’s demise, it could be said that the articles in the *Australian* were characterised by “post-mortem” reporting, by discussing where the ATSIC model went so wrong and finally posing the question as to what the replacement for ATSIC could be. This question, interestingly, was never canvassed to any extent while the calls for ATSIC’s demise were made.

## Conclusion

Looking at the frames used in the *Australian* newspaper in coverage of indigenous leader Geoff Clark, from his re-election as chairman of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) at the end of 2002 until the agency's demise in March 2004, one finds two ways of viewing of Indigenous issues on either side of an ideological divide. One can be called "rights-based agenda" in indigenous affairs and the other the "responsibilities-based agenda".

This article concludes that the *Australian* was a leading proponent of the responsibilities-based agenda, which has sought to highlight the shortcomings of the rights-based agenda by championing the Howard Government's practical approaches to indigenous affairs and rejecting symbolic approaches as failures, particularly through ATSIC's final chairman, Clark.

During the final years of the organisation's existence, Clark was the central figurehead of the agency and individually was framed to personify everything that was wrong with indigenous Australia in the eyes of the mainstream media and society. Considerations of an alternative structure, a devolution of ATSIC to the regions, or a long-term plan to see the agency evolve from a government bureaucracy to a self-determining advocacy body were lost in the abolition agenda.

By virtue of his prominence and unrelenting opposition to the Howard Governments policies, Clark provided an alternative view, or counter frame in the media to the government's agenda of mainstreaming indigenous affairs. There are other prominent indigenous Australians that advocate a continued focus on issues like reconciliation, but did not have the prominence in the media that Clark attracted due to his controversial actions and radical approach to issues.

If it is accepted that the self-determination paradigm has gone with ATSIC, framing a lack of progress on social and economic indicators for indigenous people as a failure of self-determination can

no longer be sustainable. For comparative purposes, an evaluation of the scrutiny afforded to mainstream government agencies, now that ATSIC does not exist, could be a future direction for studies.

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# Redfern: the ‘riot’ and the reporting

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It is increasingly difficult to accept the notion that journalism can survive only if it “reinforce[s] the identified consumer’s pre-existing worldview with all its imbedded cultural values and prejudices” (Burns 2001: 23). For this reason, this paper, which has particular reference to the representation of indigenous Australians, this paper goes back to the more fundamental issue of the role of journalism in helping people make sense of the world, instead of tackling the economic and technological dilemmas associated with modern journalism practice.

This paper will discuss how newsgathering and reporting methods in the mainstream media operate not only to “define events in society [but] offer powerful interpretations of how to understand these events” for people who have little or no direct contact with indigenous people (Meadows 2001: 164). It will not concentrate on the rise of indigenous publications as a way of helping the general public to understand indigenous issues since, as Graham suggests, ‘consumers of indigenous media already take an active interest in Aboriginal affairs’ (2005: 13). In comparing the coverage of the 1994 Redfern “riot” in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Daily Telegraph*, this paper will examine whether media reports of the riot served largely to advance the perspectives of people in powerful positions within society and in many instances ignored the other “truths” that could be told. Further, the author will propose some realistic strategies to assist journalists in reporting indigenous issues, acknowledging that it is largely through the media that our “ideas and assumptions about indigenous people” are formed (Meadows & Ewart 2001: 116).

## **Case Study: The 2004 Redfern riot**

On 15 February 2004 Thomas ‘TJ’ Hickey, an indigenous youth, died after he was impaled on a fence in the inner Sydney suburb of Redfern. This case study analyses the reporting in two mainstream metropolitan dailies, the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Daily Telegraph*, to compare the representation of his death and of the subsequent riot. The case study will compare the news angles applied, the sources used, and the images and language featured in reports published between 15 February and 11 March 2004.

### **Angles/news values**

Relying on standard news values can often lead to a simplistic presentation of events rather than a broader, more contextualised examination of the issues underpinning them. As observed by Jakubowicz et al. (1994: 160), reporting incidents without any background information can distort audience impressions of events and “aggravate social misconceptions”.

While both the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Daily Telegraph* presented the initial news story concerning Thomas Hickey in terms of standard news values such as timeliness, drama and conflict, subsequent stories in the *Sydney Morning Herald* were broader in their interpretation of the events surrounding his death. For example, an article written by Aboriginal director of Crossroads Ray Minniecon attempted to contextualise the event in terms of the daily experience of Redfern for indigenous Australians as one of “survival, struggle and existence” (*SMH*, 17/02/2004). Another article juxtaposed the intentions of the area for self-determination against its current dereliction and also described Redfern in terms of its indigenous heritage stating: “This is Gadigal country, part of the Eora nation” (“Dress it up, knock it down, but Gadigal will always be the same”, *SMH*, 17/02/2004). The author believes some of the articles in the *Sydney Morning Herald* balanced reactive reports based on conflict and

drama with a degree of analysis and varying perspectives. Despite this, the standpoint of powerful institutions dominated the information flow.

In contrast, the *Daily Telegraph* focused on the standard news values of conflict and drama for most of its reports. An article on 16 February 2004, headed “Posters put up of wanted police – Redfern erupts” concentrated on rising tensions, while another article “Barricades, bottles, bricks and defiance” described the actions of an “uncontrollable mob” and the “unleashing of nine hours of terror”. The article further framed the event in terms of war and conflict with the heading “battle lines” followed by quotes from key sources (19/02/2004). Evidence of the media fuelling the conflict was evident in an article titled “Walgett braced on eve of TJ’s burial”, indicating Walgett had “gone into shutdown mode” with police on standby in case “mourners let their grief turn violent” (23/02/2004).

It should be noted that there were some exceptions to the *Daily Telegraph*’s focus on conflict and drama. One article on page 22, titled “Illiterate and without a hope”, gave an “educational perspective” to “TJ’s” demise (18/02/2004), and the funeral proceedings were reported sympathetically. But articles were framed largely in terms of chaos and the re-establishment of order. This tactic is described by Garrgett who referred to the Redfern riots as a situation in which the police were “constructed as neutral characters in the lead-up to the riot [and] during the riot this neutrality was replaced with victimisation – police sacrificing their well-being to return order to the streets” (2005: 10). In fact, as reports progressed, rather than suggestions of ways to improve the social conditions and morale of Redfern’s indigenous community, plans were implemented for a \$2 million “six-storey [police] station” and an increase in police numbers as a way of solving the “problem” (“Redfern to get new police station”, *SMH*, 29/02/2004).

## Sources

Jakubowicz et al. (1994: 159) argue that news “tend[s] to be presented in a manner which reinforces the existing social and moral order”. This is particularly relevant when considering which sources are used when writing a news story. Relying on authoritative, so-called “reliable” sources can significantly impact on the way indigenous issues are represented in mainstream media. This concentration on authoritative sources is evident in representations of the Redfern riot. A line count of attributed sources in the *Daily Telegraph* for articles published between 15 February and 11 March 2004, indicated that 70 percent of quotes were attributed to police/law enforcement agencies and politicians (see Table 1). For the *Sydney Morning Herald* this percentage was approximately 50. Interestingly, a far greater emphasis was placed on political sources in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and there was also a tendency to interview a greater cross-section of the community. For example, the *Sydney Morning Herald* quoted a range of community and medical associations. There were also more interviews conducted with Thomas Hickey’s family in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and an attempt to gain the perspective of some of the “rioters”, though the author finds the newspaper’s decision to interview 13-year-old boys problematic, particularly if the boys were told they would appear in the paper, in which case their comments could have been tainted by bravado.

A further point of interest revealed in the concentration of particular sources was a focus on the opinions of Lyall Munro. Munro made quite explosive statements following the riot, such as “violence begets violence, and if that’s the only way to save our kids, so be it”. While the *Daily Telegraph* suggested other activists “were more restrained in their comments”, Munro’s statements took precedence, further fuelling the state of conflict (“Barricades, bottles, bricks and defiance”, 17/02/2004).

The concentration of sources described by Meadows and Ewart (2001: 119) as “authorised knowers” in reports of the Redfern riot can give a distorted impression of events. By highlighting the perspectives of law-enforcement agencies and political representatives, the concerns of indigenous groups are hidden. Gargett (2005: 10) supports this view of the Redfern riot, stating: “When indigenous views were included, they were generally placed toward the end of the article. With no support, no evidence...this indigenous protest, although technically voiced, is actually muzzled”.

### **Images and language**

Scott suggests that “media representations can cultivate and legitimise ways of understanding people, places, issues and events” (2001: 131). The use of certain images (constructed through descriptions and language) can provide audiences with a way of perceiving and understanding events and people they have no direct contact with. This paper has concentrated on the language and descriptions used to describe Redfern and its residents. Further analysis involving the accompanying photos would be worthwhile though beyond the scope of this paper.

While there were exceptions, patterns emerged in the presentation of Redfern and its community as beyond help. In the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the State Opposition Leader John Brodgen was quoted as saying he would “bring the bulldozers in” (“Alcohol, heat, grief triggered the riot”, 17/02/2004). In a direct example of the newspaper’s perceived community of readers, a further article suggested Redfern was “regarded by most of *us* as sight unseen, as scary and squalid (“Will bulldozers make it better?” 18/02/2004). Another report, though sympathetic to the plight of the local community described the area as “a film-set ghetto with cluster of junkies and pushers doing business [and] burnt remnants of demolished buildings...” (“It takes a riot to care about these kids”, 21/02/2004). The *Daily Telegraph* juxtaposed the image of white resident Bev Baker’s “tidy home decorated with a small palm tree”

against the “ghetto-like surroundings” (“No place like home for Bev on the Block”, 23/02/2004), and also described the area as a “virtual no-go zone, plagued by poverty, drugs and violence” (“Barricades, bottles, bricks and defiance”, 17/02/2005).

Though Mickler (1998: 193) suggests that negative depictions “can have positive effects” such as highlighting social disadvantage, another possible interpretation is that audiences will assume that “a derelict and neglected house or street infects the inhabitants with a kind of moral pollution” (Anleu 1995: 100). Rather than foster understanding or concern for Redfern’s indigenous community and its complex history, images may simply reiterate the view that Indigenous people deserve their plight.

Criminality and worthlessness were highlighted in the newspaper reports, not just in relation to the riot but to the residents in general. It was noted that before “TJ” was impaled he was going to the shop to buy “cigarettes and chips” (“Chased or not, TJ had reasons to run”, *SMH*, 17/02/2004), and also that he was the victim of “his own tragic stupidity” (“Abandon a policy of just pandering”, *DT*, 17/02/2004). Other descriptions of Redfern’s youth included “under-employed black urban dwellers” (“It takes a riot to care about these kids”, *SMH*, 21/02/2004) and “a tide of intractable, unemployable youngsters” (“Abandon a policy of just pandering” *DT*, 17/02/2004).

Further, the quotes from members of the indigenous community and TJ’s family members were generally emotive and highlighted their lack of education. Gail Hickey was quoted as saying: “these dogs here...killing my son. These dogs up here done it.” (“Police deserve all they get: dead teen’s mum”, *SMH*, 16/02/2004), while another article started with a quote from a 13-year-old schoolboy saying: “I knocked a copper out with a brick” (“Rage, boredom and peer pressure fuel Redfern’s youthful violence”, *SMH*, 18/02/2004). These quotes were in stark contrast to prepared statements by police which were rational, well-articulated and

therefore somehow more acceptable as the “correct” interpretation. As Gargett suggests, the continual reinforcement of police as both the restorers of order and the “victims” of violence served to remove any consideration of a history of “systematic over-policing and harassment of Indigenous communities by the police” (2005: 10).

### **Suggestions to improve reporting of indigenous issues**

While non-indigenous Australian journalists will always fall short of understanding the minutiae of indigenous culture, those who rely on “simplistic, “commonsense” explanations” (Meadows 2001: preface) and standard news values undermine journalism as a profession worth pursuing. As Burns suggests, journalists can rationalise the practice of simply giving audiences what they want or they can attempt to “make some sense of what they learn” (2001: 37). One area where improvements can be made is in journalism education. Bice indicates that about 50 percent of practising journalists are graduates (2003: 4). In view of this, universities should incorporate practical training in representing indigenous issues in their journalism degrees. It could be argued that while students discuss theoretical aspects underpinning cultural awareness, this does not translate to the ability to confidently research and write about indigenous issues. As a minimum, Aboriginal studies should be a compulsory unit of training in journalism degrees. This could be complemented by a component of third-year journalism requiring students to investigate and report on a regional issue involving Indigenous people.

A further suggestion stemming from education is to develop a network of people conversant with Indigenous issues from governing agencies and Aboriginal community services. The perpetuation of stereotypes and generalisations will reduce if journalists are aware of the correct protocols involved in contacting community spokespersons. Publications such as *Cultural Protocols for Indigenous Reporting in the Media* ([www.abc.net.au/message/proper/culturalprotocol.pdf](http://www.abc.net.au/message/proper/culturalprotocol.pdf)) provide

comprehensive information regarding research, making initial contact with a community and dealing with culturally sensitive situations. The recommended procedure for interviewing Indigenous community representatives is to initially contact the relevant community council for example the Indigenous Land Corporation or the NSW Aboriginal Land Council or alternatively access the media unit attached to a community such as the Central Australia Aboriginal Media Association. The protocol guidelines suggest a further method of gaining interviews with suitable spokespersons is via medical or education centres such as the Muru Mittigar Aboriginal and Education Centre in Western Sydney. As an adjunct to this, employed journalists could attend cultural-awareness seminars run by Indigenous people. This would allow staff to familiarise themselves with cultural differences as a way of avoiding misinterpretations. For example, “some indigenous people may not look at you while you are talking”; this does not mean they are not listening (Burns & McKee 1999: 109). Building networks and cultural awareness would allow journalists to develop relationships prior to a news event rather than the more reactive approach of finding a spokesperson on the day.

The representation of the Redfern riots demonstrated the willingness of journalists to accept the perspectives of authority figures. People in positions of authority are expressing subjective opinions just like any other individual. A reliance on media releases may suit a busy office environment, but it will not do justice to the profession of journalism. Press releases regarding news events associated with Indigenous groups (or any under-represented group for that matter) should be viewed as a starting point, not a story in themselves. Also on this point, simply interviewing a member of the Indigenous community does not mean their story has been told. As Burns & McKee (1999: 112) suggest, there can be vastly disparate views within Indigenous communities, balance does not mean relying on one spokesperson.

Another suggestion for representing indigenous people is to try to contextualise the story rather than rely on basic news values. This

is a point raised by Burns and McKee (1999: 112), who suggest that, while there may not be the opportunity to place the story within an historical framework, allowing for the “perspective of an indigenous community member explaining mitigating factors” can provide a more balanced account. This did occur in some reports of the Redfern riot, but more often than not the news value of conflict took precedence. Placement of other points of view is also critical in terms of their perceived value. To provide an alternative perspective only at the end of an article is to significantly reduce its significance. On this note, however, the desire to improve representations of Indigenous people should not impact on the basic principles of journalism. As Scott (2001: 135) indicates, in the Hindmarsh Island case “journalists were prepared to create positive representations at the expense of fair and accurate journalism”.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has explored the role of journalism in representing indigenous Australians. The case study of the reporting of the death of Thomas Hickey and the subsequent Redfern riot using two influential daily newspapers shows there is still a long way to go for journalism to achieve ideal representations of such events. While it is easy to rationalise journalistic decisions based on perceived audiences, news values and the need for “credible” sources, if “a journalist is someone who wants to know, who believes there are answers, and who wants to find them” (Burns 2001: 39) then these justifications are a little harder to swallow. In offering some realistic suggestions for reporting indigenous issues, this author does not imagine that deeply entrenched practices are easily countered. But the author would like to think that tenaciously chipping away and uncovering the multiple truths that exist in a world beyond savvy publicity officers and powerful institutions is more than just a noble ideal; it is the journalist’s role.

**Table 1 – Sources quoted**

<i>Sydney Morning Herald</i>		<i>Daily Telegraph</i>	
<b>Source</b>	<b>No. of lines</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>No. of lines</b>
Superintendent D. Smith (Police Commander)	22	Superintendent D. Smith (Police Commander)	16
Unnamed police spokesperson/statement	2	Unnamed police spokesperson/statement	40
Inspector B Emery	5	Inspector B Emery	11
Police Association president Ian Ball	2	Police Association president Ian Ball	7
Prosecutor Sergeant G Collette		Prosecutor Sergeant G Collette	1
Sergeant P Huxtable	10	Sergeant P Huxtable	
Superintendent S Single	3	Superintendent S Single	
Police Inspector Sullivan		Police Inspector Sullivan	2
Solicitor H Maarraoui	2	Solicitor H Maarraoui	
Solicitor R Mathur	1	Solicitor R Mathur	
Magistrate Kennedy	1	Magistrate Kennedy	2
Magistrate Moor		Magistrate Moor	
Commissioner K Moroney	1	Commissioner K Moroney	
Police Minister John Watkins	5	Police Minister John Watkins	
Ass Commissioner Bob Waites	1	Ass Commissioner Bob Waites	
Police liaison G Bracken	1	Police liaison G Bracken	
John Howard		John Howard	2
Bob Carr	16	Bob Carr	1
Mark Latham	2	Mark Latham	
Aden Ridgeway	4	Aden Ridgeway	
John Brogden	16	John Brogden	2
Sydney City Council Administrator T. Pooley		Sydney City Council Administrator T. Pooley	1
Aboriginal Housing Company Manager P Valilis	7	Aboriginal Housing Company Manager P Valilis	2
Minister Gary Smart		Minister Gary Smart	1
Rev Gary Stuart	1	Rev Gary Stuart	
Pastor Bill Simons		Pastor Bill Simons	3
“White” community member Bev Baker		“White” community member Bev Baker	6
Community activist Lyall Munro	12	Community activist Lyall Munro	7

Aboriginal activist Kevin Smith	1	Aboriginal activist Kevin Smith	5
Unnamed community member (1)	4	Unnamed community member (1)	3
David Hickey		David Hickey	2
Gail Hickey	11	Gail Hickey	6
TJ's sister		TJ's sister	1
Aborigine Ralph Townsend		Aborigine Ralph Townsend	2
Mick Mundine	2	Mick Mundine	
Pat Dodson	2	Pat Dodson	
Marie Bashir	1	Marie Bashir	
Bill Glasson – AMA	1	Bill Glasson – AMA	
Education Coordinator V Dunbar	8	Education Coordinator V Dunbar	
D Webb cousin	1	D Webb cousin	
Resident J Munro	1	Resident J Munro	
TJ's aunt	2	TJ's aunt	
Virginia Hickey	12	Virginia Hickey	
Resident M Jose	2	Resident M Jose	
D Cargill	2	D Cargill	
Roy Hickey	2	Roy Hickey	
Opposition for Aboriginal Affairs B Hazzard	2	Opposition for Aboriginal Affairs B Hazzard	
Spokesperson for B Carr	3	Spokesperson for B Carr	
Mourner M Kennedy	2	Mourner M Kennedy	
Rev Bill Crews	5	Rev Bill Crews	
Lumbu ICF D. Godwell	6	Lumbu ICF D. Godwell	
Dep Head Aboriginal Medical Service P Fernando	1	Dep Head Aboriginal Medical Service P Fernando	
Ray Menniecon Crossroads	1	Ray Menniecon Crossroads	
13 yr old schoolboys involved in riot	4	13 yr old schoolboys involved in riot	
Youth/Alcohol worker J Munro	2	Youth/Alcohol worker J Munro	
Charity worker witness	3	Charity worker witness	
Community member S Phillips	4	Community member S Phillips	
TOTAL	199		126
Police/Law enforcement	57	Police/Law enforcement	82
Politicians	43	Politicians	5
Council	-	Council	1
Aboriginal Housing Mgr	7	Aboriginal housing Mgr	2
Minister	6	Minister	4
Community member (white)	-	Community member (white)	6

Aboriginal activist/community member/representative	24	Aboriginal activist/community member/representative	14
“Rioter”	6	“Rioter”	-
TJ’s family	28	TJ’s family	9
Unnamed community member	4	Unnamed community member	3
Community/Medical Assoc.	22	Community/Medical Assoc.	-
<b>Total lines</b>	<b>199</b>	<b>Total lines</b>	<b>126</b>

\*(This refers only to directly attributable quotes used in articles and does not take into account opinion or editorial)

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NB: Twenty-four articles from the *Daily Telegraph* and 36 articles from the *Sydney Morning Herald* were referred to in this paper. Only those from which direct quotations were drawn have been included in the list of references.

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# The ethic of ‘free advertising’ and the Fourth Estate

Anne Ferguson

As public relations practitioners increasingly use new technologies to advance their agenda, could journalistic ethics and the role of the journalist in society become compromised? This paper explores the use of internet technology – in particular the emailing of media releases – by public relations practitioners, examining the gains for both public relations practitioner and journalist. This paper highlights increasing pressures faced by journalists that may allow public relations practitioners to achieve more than merely free advertising. Where do journalistic ethics come into play? This practice could not only challenge the media’s role as the Fourth Estate it could also allow public relations practitioners to become pseudo journalists and perhaps allow the news agenda to be set by public relations practitioners and those they represent.

**T**echnology has changed the way we look at the world. It has also changed the role of the journalist and just who is a journalist. There has always been an issue about what constitutes a journalist but today anyone can write a blog, produce a video stream or even just post ideas on the web. Blurring an already grey area, Channel 9 has recently coined a new phrase: “citizen journalists”. A citizen journalist sends the channel either information or photos for consideration for broadcast or publication. These citizen journalists have the ability to influence a story and set their own agenda. This practice does nothing to define the role of the journalist. According to Merrill, Gade and Blevins (cited in Richards 2005: 102):

We have never been really sure just who is a journalist but with the coming of public relations, then radio, then television, and now the Internet, determining just who is a journalist becomes next to impossible.

Journalist Mike Carlton says the public is finding it increasingly difficult to work out who are entertainers and who are journalists (cited in Lumby & Probyn 2006). This blurring will continue to grow and, as Carlton states, “now employers are there for the advertisers and the ratings and so on”. This trend of placing more importance on economics than journalistic integrity will continue, forcing journalists to look for ways to “shortcut” the news.

Mark Pearson, journalist and communications academic, has found that journalists now face the prospect of some 169 new tasks as the result of technological advancement (cited in Richards 2005). Perhaps this new technology is more a hindrance than a help to the working journalist. Are email, the cut-and-paste facility on computers, and online (virtual) media rooms making the journalists’ role harder rather than easier?

Faxing and sometimes mailing the media release were considered the “norm” until the past few years. Faxing the news release meant that it went to a central area of the news room and depended on someone picking it up and finding the intended recipient. Email, however, has changed the mode and speed of delivery. A number of public relations practitioners, in a yet unpublished paper, state that by emailing a media release:

- It will go directly to the journalist(s) they are targeting. While they know that the email box might contain up to 300 other emails they believe this gives them an edge.
- Journalists will not have to re-enter the information as they had to when they received a media release by fax; they can merely cut and paste it into another document.

Technological advances mean it is now much easier to plagiarise and it can at times be much harder to detect. Plagiarism is always frowned upon by the media industry with a number of

journalists' voluntary ethical codes of practice clearly stating "Do not plagiarise" (Media Entertainment Arts Alliance; Richards 2005). Although using the media release verbatim is currently considered by public relations practitioners and journalists a trade-off for "free advertising", sometime in the future the use could be considered plagiarism or copyright infringement. It may be that the humble media release when used verbatim may become a news item, "editorial" or advertorial piece; or it might simply maintain its current role of free advertising.

If using the media release becomes accepted as free advertising the media industry may be dragged into something similar to the "Cash for Comment" scandal which rocked the radio industry in Australia in the last decade. Although in that instance the "jocks", not journalists, were being paid for their services in what can only be described as editorial comment, the issue could raise questions for other forms of media. Although cash may not change hands, favours in the form of free advertising could be viewed as a type of payment.

Normally editorial is not up for sale at any price. Just because someone advertises with an organisation does not necessarily mean great coverage in other areas of the media. However, sometimes integrity is cast aside for pragmatic reasons. Sometimes, particularly in regional areas, the editor of these media organisations is both editor and advertising salesperson (Macnamara 1996). They have to meet two distinct deadlines: the creating of the paper and the sales profits. There are now more advertorials, a type of hybrid cross between editorial comment and advertising, in all papers. Many weekend supplementaries within papers are nothing more than advertorial pieces which have their origins from media releases.

The ABC news critique *Media Watch* continually mounts a crusade against the unethical practice of passing a media release off as a news story or advertising. The episode "Keep on trucking" aired 16.5.04 (*Media Watch* 2004) highlighted just how easy it is to pass a media release off as a story. A News Limited journalist had used

media releases from Hino Motor Sales, Moreton Institute of TAFE, Isuzu Truck Power and Jack Daniel and presented them verbatim as news stories to the consumers. All four were used simultaneously. Other than changing the tense of a few verbs the releases were word for word. According to *Media Watch*, this was not a phenomenon for the News Limited journalist; it was commonplace. *Media Watch* also stated that News Limited did not care because the stories had sold ads. It is a theme unfortunately that occurs throughout the media industry (Blyskal 1985; Denton 2000; Garis 1979; Macnamara 2006b; *Media Report 1999*; *Media Report 2002*; *Media Watch 2005a* and *2005b*).

In 1980 the *Columbia Journalism Review* reviewed the 4 October 1979 edition of *Wall Street Journal* and contacted a number of companies that had appeared in that edition in an attempt to track how the media releases produced by them had appeared in the *Wall Street Journal*. Of the 70 companies that replied, 53 reported that news stories had been written based solely on the press release, and 32 of these stories used the media release content verbatim. Twenty-one respondents said the media release had been used as the basis for the story but additional information was included (Blyskal, 1985).

Research conducted in Australia by Clara Zawawi in her ongoing PhD thesis on the 'Interactions between Australian Public Relations Practitioners and Journalists' found that public relations practitioners claimed they had high coverage rates of material sent to journalists (Macnamara 2006b). Zawawi followed 1163 articles published in the *Courier-Mail*, *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Age* to identify the origins of each article. Her research indicated that "47% of articles in these three major metropolitan media" (Macnamara 2006b) were the result of public relations activity i.e. media releases.

Although a relatively new phenomenon, the video news release can be run "as is" with no editing. One example of this recently occurred in the United States of America where public relations practitioner Karen Ryan produced a video news release which was played in its entirety on television stations. At no time during the

piece did Ryan identify herself as a public relations practitioner. Instead she used phrases commonly used by journalists such as “I’m Karen Ryan *reporting*” (Griffe 2006). Although criticised by media for this, Ryan found that her piece ran verbatim on a number of American channels without any editing.

This practice also happens in Australian regional stations. Government public relations practitioners often create video news releases as a means of providing information. Laurie Oakes, a senior member of the Canberra Press Gallery, says this practice means the government minister is not questioned, and the public receives “straight-out propaganda” (Richards 2005: 104). Oakes also suggests this practice could become more commonplace because of technology. The video news release could be uploaded onto the internet and then simply downloaded by media organisations and put them on the air (Richards 2005).

Of course, this technology is not limited to political parties. Most, if not all, organisations or corporations have access to the internet. By video taping the news release managers and others will provide both information and answers without the questions. Media organisations are continually growing and becoming more business orientated. Business places the shareholders and profits before all else which might be in direct conflict with the priorities of journalism (*Media Report* 1998). As with any business restructuring, retrenchments usually occur. The media industry is no exception with journalists possibly being the first “out the door”. If they survive the takeover or merger journalists will no longer be participants in a small structured organisation, they may become just a small fish in a big pond. This pond may actually feed into a larger stream with many of the media organisations having financial interests in other corporations or organisations. Working for one organisation may now mean journalists are working for several organisations all with their own agendas.

In Australia, the federal government was moving in the second half of 2006 to allow media organisations to have ownership over a number of different forms of media within the one area. This monopoly of news will may mean that the Australian public might receive only a sanitised form of the news. And journalists may be caught in the middle.

These new changes to a more business structure also highlight a decline in the more expensive forms of news reporting, such as investigative reporting. It also illustrates a shift towards a growing trend of lighter and, therefore, less expensive forms of journalistic stories (Lumby & Probyn 2006, Richards 2005). According to Richards (2005: 85), this corporatisation of the media is one reason why the public relations practitioners “appear to have become more influential with journalists in recent years”. However, this growing reliance on both public and corporate public relations practitioners means that the journalists may become nothing more than mouthpieces for the corporations and public relations practitioners who represent them. Journalists may thus be more likely to accept the claims of the media release and “regurgitating what ever spin has been placed on the information” (Richards 2005: 90) without checking out any other source or sources.

As yet unpublished research indicates that because of a lack of resources journalists are being forced to use more of the media releases than previously. The whole media release may not be used verbatim as the complete story but a number of journalists admitted that the media release or quotes from the media release were often used verbatim as the main body of the article. Resources are so badly stretched that many journalists no longer get out and about especially in regional areas. Rounds people may never actually get around anything but their desks!

This reliance on media releases is not necessarily a new phenomenon. According to one participant in the unpublished study,

Sir Frank Packer is reported to have ordered that no more media releases were to be used in his magazines; he wanted all articles written “from scratch” by the journalists. This lasted a week as the quota of news stories needed to fill a magazine could not be met. However, this example is from the 1960s and corporatisation was not as prevalent as it is today.

Media personnel are often forced to seek out information from public relations practitioners. In 2001 an email was sent from a leading national TV program, Good Medicine to 86 public relations firms who had health, medical and pharmaceutical clients. The email read:

“Hi all,  
just a quick reminder. If you have any suitable health/medical stories, please let me know  
Cheers  
(name)”  
(dated 31 July 2001). (Macnamara 2006b)

Although this is only one example, it highlights how the media and public relations practitioners rely on each other and how they interact professionally.

Business thrives on favours. And as media organisations become more business orientated they may become forced to look at the issue of favours. There can be pressure on journalists to promote or cover other sections of the corporation or “friends” of the corporation in a more favourable light. Close alliances play an integral part of today’s business. Today’s business enemies can be tomorrow’s business partners and with acquisitions happening almost daily a media organisation may find it has strange bedfellows and these bedfellows may want favours. The Publishing & Broadcasting Limited (or Packer) empire is one example of this as it has interests in a number of not just Australian businesses e.g. television and casino ventures – it also has interests overseas.

Boardroom decisions to focus on corporate profits (Lumby & Probyn 2006; *Media Report* 1998) and self interests of the corporation or organisation may have to come before the story. As Ben Bagdikian, a media analyst with a journalistic background states, "...the larger the media company the greater favours it can ask for, and the more likely it is to have 'friends' who are given preferential treatment in the news" (Richards 2005).

Although journalists may attempt to distance themselves from these favours in their writing it may be something they are unable to do or more importantly something their readership may not be able to do. If they deny these requests for favours journalists may face the very real prospect of retrenchments. According to Norris (Norris 2000) journalists in Sweden enjoy the privilege of a "conscience clause" where a journalist is allowed the luxury of following their conscience without fear of recrimination.

Marxist theorists view the media as a tool used by the institutions of society to maintain the status quo by convincing them into what is considered a false consciousness. Through this manipulative process the media may become mere pawns in convincing the public that the thing they don't really need is the thing they desire most (Berger 2005; Gikandi 1996). According to Baudrillard (Felluga 2002) :

We therefore no longer acquire goods because of real needs but because of desires that are increasingly defined by commercials and commercialized images, which keep us at one step removed from the reality of our bodies or of the world around us.

If, as Marxist theory suggests, the media has the ability to shape the consciousness of much of today's society and these same media organisations claim they have the "power when they sell advertising space or time" (Berger 2005) the media organisation is in an extremely powerful position. The idea that such large organisations are owned by a small group of people raises the

question of manipulation. Is it an issue of whether the media are becoming manipulative in their roles or is it more about who is manipulating the media?

## **Journalism**

Journalism has the role of presenting society to itself. For many people, the shape of their country and their world comes from the words a journalist compiles whether they are in printed, audio or visual format. The journalists, as gatekeepers of information, select the events which will be conveyed to the public through news reports.

With this role comes responsibility. The role of the Fourth Estate is one of trust and the public has high expectations for journalists and the work they produce. The public believe that the news provided by journalists will be written in an unbiased yet accurate fashion. Compassion is also viewed as desirable when the need arises. Not only are journalists suppliers of information, but they also maintain the public's right to know through the concept of free speech, something considered to be the cornerstone of a democratic society. Journalists do not exist in a vacuum: they often do not remain totally neutral in their communities and can often shape both cultural and political practices either intentionally or unintentionally (Jary & Jary 2000; Ward 2005).

Just how much they shape their communities can depend on their role in the society. As society has evolved so has the role of the journalist. Authoritarian theory has its roots in the seventeenth century when it was unlawful to criticise the ruling monarchy or government. The role of the media in this theory is to support the actions and policies of the ruling government; this should promote unity and solidarity amongst citizens while maintaining the status quo. This theory also advocates that government intervention in the media does not actually cause problems - rather it can prevent problems. Freedom of the press is extremely limited and censored

under this theory. As liberties were granted to society, media theory evolved. Under libertarian theory the role of the media is to protect people's liberties through information which will enable them to participate in a democratic society. The media should be free to express itself without government intervention. Libertarian theory evolved in the twentieth century into social responsibility theory. This theory attempts to balance the freedom of the press with its social responsibility. For discourse to occur between various publics media should provide the public with a forum to enable this process to occur.

Today's Australian media industry is self-regulated and follows the social-responsibility model. This self-regulation is conducted through a number of agencies including the Australian Press Council and the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA). As the code of ethics and practice for these organisations is voluntary, there is no formal requirement for the journalist to follow any guidelines. If a journalist fails to adhere to the organisation's code of conduct and ethical guidelines s/he can still work. The professional code of conduct for journalists and code of ethics for journalists will mean nothing if there is a lack of personal ethics. Immanuel Kant – an advocate of teleology – believed that you should just do the right thing; however, that is not always possible as many of today's journalists face pressures from within the media organisations for which they work.

The 1977 British Royal Commission on the Press (cited in Jary & Jary 2000) found advertising can structure media content. The media are considered to be the independent third party needed to make acceptance of the information real in the eyes of the consumer. By using a media release verbatim journalists may unintentionally be legitimising the product or information contained within the media release. Media will no longer support the needs of a democratic society; instead they will become mouthpieces for capitalism. Members of lower socio economic groups may become marginalised and feel disenfranchised from society.

## Public relations

Although the public relations industry **has been around for centuries** it was not actually recognised as a distinct practice until the early twentieth century when Edward Bernays, who was a former journalist, presented himself as a public relations professional. Bernays believed that being a former journalist gave him an insight into what made a good story. This idea is still in practice today with many public relations practitioners either coming from a journalistic background professionally or academically (Denton 2000; Heath 2001).

Is it possible that this background allows the public practitioners to set the news agenda? Public relations practitioners are very much aware that their media release has to be something that will appeal to journalists, something journalists will consider newsworthy. If it does not have that appeal then they will often add children or an animal to the story because those additions will have human interest appeal and newsworthiness. Another tactic is to plan the timing of media releases, waiting for a slow news period so the release may have a better chance of publication.

Today's public relations industry is considered by business as an important marketing tool because traditional forms of advertising are struggling to maintain the public's attention. According to Baudrillard (Ward 2005) the advertising industry may be cancelling itself out. The public are becoming so saturated by advertising that they now just tune out.

Hans Bender, manager of external relations at Proctor and Gamble (cited in *Economist* 2006) stated that often the return from a public relations campaign is better than past traditional advertising practices. A typical advertising budget for Proctor and Gamble is approximately \$4 billion annually (*Economist* 2006). Using public

relations campaigns rather than traditional advertising is becoming part of the changing advertising strategy for business in America.

Tools used by the public relations industry include media conferences, setting up and making available interviews for journalists, providing photo opportunities and providing media kits which often contain complimentary gifts from clients to media. Public relations offers value for money because of the diversity of services offered. Each client can choose a number of services or just one, making the public relations industry both versatile and economical. Public relations practitioners can skilfully steer the media to the right person to interview within an organisation or company, this skill can have more than one reason; it can allow the journalists to identify the correct source for further information while limiting the access to other individuals within the organisation.

There are ethical concerns about manipulation of the media in this way. Teleology and deontology are theories that offer some insight into the ethical concerns of the public relations industry. Teleology is an ethical approach where the ends justify the means. Although this may seem potentially unethical it is intended to provide the greatest good for the greatest number. This utilitarian approach will work only if everyone adopts the same principles and applies them to society where it will achieve the greatest good for the greatest good (Heath 2001; Jary & Jary 2000). However not all public relations practitioners will adhere to these principles because each practitioner will be guided by their own or companies agenda.

Deontology is another ethical approach which describes situations where decisions are made mainly by considering the rights of others. Deontology also suggests people need to live by a set of clearly defined principles that do not change when circumstances change. In deontology the ends do not justify the means. Each situation in deontology is usually dealt with on an individual basis for the rules can not always be followed. Immanuel Kant was an advocate for deontology theory because he believed just do the right

thing and that all people should live for the universal good of all (Heath 2001; Jary & Jary 2000). For Kant, public relations practitioners should adhere to a set of moral principles at all times provided it is in the best interests of everyone: this includes the company, organisation and their stakeholders. The people should be given the information, free from interference and be able to decide for themselves.

Although there are a growing number of ethical theories that are appropriate to public relations, Kohlberg (Heath 2001) states there are six stages of ethical decision-making for public relations practitioners:

- Stage 1, where the public relations practitioners do exactly what is asked of them for fear of reprisal by others, usually a superior.
- Stage 2, where the public relation practitioner undertakes a particular action for a personal gain.
- Stage 3, where public relations practitioners place the goals of their organisation or company above all else. This reasoning may include aspects of both the teleological and deontological approaches, provided they produce a positive result for the corporation or organisation they represent.
- Stage 4, where public relations practitioners obey the letter of the law.
- Stage 5 is universal teleology or utilitarianism where not only is the decision made for the benefit of the corporation or organisation it also considers the public benefit.
- Stage 6, which is a form of act deontology where each decision made by the public relations practitioner is considered because of its advantage to society based on equality, justice and fairness.

Kohlberg does not believe that any stage is better than the other, unlike the models presented by other public relations theorists Grunig and Hunt. Grunig and Hunt believe that their two-way symmetrical model offers the best way for communication to take

place between corporations and their publics (cited in Johnston & Zawawi 2000). This two-way symmetrical approach is similar to Stage 5 of Kohlberg's theory. Although different in their approaches, Grunig & Hunt and Kohlberg agree that many public relations practitioners and the companies or organisations they represent use a combination of these stages to achieve the end result (Heath 2001; Johnston & Zawawi 2000).

Using a combination of these stages allows the media release to be a versatile tool for it can be adapted to the public relations practitioner's client.

The co-orientation model is consistent with Kohlberg's Stage 3 model. Using this teleological approach means public relations practitioners aim to achieve the "convergence of perspectives between an organisation and its key publics" (Heath 2001). The key publics, in relation to this paper, are journalists. Although performing different roles from journalists, in this model the public relations practitioner is judged by the same standards and codes of practice as journalists. Although some public relations practitioners come from journalistic backgrounds they should not be judged by the same codes for they perform very different roles (Heath 2001).

The social-responsibility model of advocacy has its roots in Greek philosophy and is similar to the social responsibility model used by journalists. Edward Bernays was a follower of this model of public relations where persuasion is the key to successful public relations practices. In this model the public relations practitioner supplies the information and the public then have the ability to make an informed choice. In other words public relations practitioners will supply the information and then it is up to the journalists, in their role as gatekeepers, to make their own choice about if they use that information or discard it. Persuasion, or the advocacy model, is not considered an unethical practice by public relations practitioners unless it is used to distort the truth or prevent information.

The media release is considered an advocacy tool because it provides information about a company or organisation in a persuasive format. However, responsibility to the organisation or corporation that they are representing means the public relations practitioner writes the media release from one side. If the journalist decides to use the media release unchanged they might provide an unbalanced article therefore limiting the free choice concept.

Professionalism is the rule of deontology or Stage 4 of Kohlberg's model and consists of a number of codes and accreditations. This generally means that there is an ethical standard maintained by members of professional associations. Today the public relations industry is self-regulated, and professional associations provide codes of ethics which offer guidance to their members. Membership of these organisations is voluntary and, although it usually contributes to a professional attitude, there is no evidence that practitioners who are not members are any less ethical in their professional life (Macnamara 2006b). Associations such as the Public Relations Institute of Australia, International Public Relations Association, and the Public Relations Society of America provide guidelines about what is acceptable. However, they have omitted guidelines to identify unacceptable behaviour.

Should the public relations industry be moving away from self-regulation to one where there is some form of regulation similar to lawyers and doctors; where if guidelines are not adhered to the practitioner cannot work? Any changes to this form of regulation are likely to be met with a mixed reaction and the question remains would it change ethical conduct or merely promote a more professional image?

There are four main elements to the "mechanics of public relations" (Blyskal 1985; Macnamara 2006a). These stages allow a carefully engineered manipulation of consumers to occur (Blyskal 1985; Macnamara 2006b). These stages are:

1. A message to be transmitted.
2. An independent third party to convey the message.
3. A target audience.
4. A media through which the message can be transmitted.

Of these four stages the most important is the independent third-party endorser. The media fulfil the criteria needed for an independent third party to convey the public relations message to the public.

## **Advertising**

Because of advertising's potential to be a powerful tool and influence consumers, it is under the control of two distinct forms of regulation in Australia (Gibson A. & Fraser D. 2001):

1. Self regulation – by the agencies of Australian Standards Bureau Ltd and the Advertising Federation of Australia as well as a number of voluntary codes of conduct which are directed towards things like types of media and the content
2. Law statutory regulation – through the Commonwealth Trade Practices Act 1974 and state and territory Fair Trading Acts as well as the law of torts.

Self regulation is handled by more than one organisation:

- The Advertising Federation of Australia is a voluntary organisation which asks its members, as a condition of entry, to commit to a statement of ethics and a code of practice. If members fail to adhere to the code of practice they face reprimands, fines and even expulsion from the Advertising Federation of Australia.
- The Advertising Standards Bureau of Australia Ltd manages the self regulation of advertising for the Australian Association of

National Advertisers which represents marketing and advertising agencies and their employees. Its code is voluntary and advertisers must adhere to the relevant Commonwealth and State legislation.

- The Advertising Claims Board. This agency is concerned with the truth and accuracy in advertising and has the ability to refer the complaint to the relevant government body for further investigation and possible penalties if they are found to be in breach of any advertising regulations.

### **Government regulation**

As in many countries, Australia has legislation to protect consumers. Special care has to be taken by the advertisers or advertising agency to ensure that any advertising is accurate. Although it can often be difficult to determine just who may be liable for any breaches of this legislation it could include:

- The creator of the advertisement.
- The agency that created the advertisement.
- The person doing the advertising.

There are a number of defences that can be used including reliability of information and a reasonable mistake.

Is it possible for public relations to be masquerading as advertising? Although it can be said that both traditional advertising practices and public relations practices are different, they are both intended to persuade the consumers to believe they need something, often something they did not realise they wanted. However, advertiser and advertising companies pay to have their produce displayed in the media while public relations practitioners do not. Or do they? Public relations practitioners already recognise they give up their right of ownership of their media release.

This common goal of achieving the best publicity for their clients means that often public relations practitioners and advertising practitioners are considered to be one and it is easy to understand why. However there is one major difference between the two and that is the types of regulation. Although both have self regulatory bodies with a code of ethics, only one is governed by statute; the advertising industry.

Could it be that if companies or organisations spend more on public relations campaigns, which include the use of media releases rather than the traditional forms of advertising, they can achieve the same purpose? Is it a possibility that the media release will achieve the advertising requirement of many corporations or organisations while bypassing the legislation which exists to protect consumers? For public relations practitioners and advertising practitioners this would be an unintentional issue rather than an intentional one it has to be considered.

To avoid this imbalance and legitimisation of media-release information, journalists must return to the values of journalism. They must return to doing their own leg work and to checking any information supplied; they must probe behind the story. Otherwise, journalists may face the prospect of becoming translators of information rather than disseminators of information.

Rather than denigrate the public relations practitioners and the role they play perhaps journalists need to acknowledge the role played by public relations practitioners. If, as journalist John Lloyd (2006) states “dogs are journalists and public relations practitioners are lamp posts” then perhaps journalists need to be selective about which lamp post they use.

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# The key hiring criteria used by journalism employers

John Austin and John Cokley

Hiring executives and newsroom managers at seven national journalism employers are surveyed to collect data on how decisions are made to employ new journalism staff, particularly those exiting tertiary undergraduate and graduate programs. The data show that so-called traditional journalism practice traits such as a candidate's ability to spell, parse and construct grammar correctly in Standard Australian English, the ability to take notes in shorthand, and even the ability to meet deadlines, are not ranked highly among employers' recruiting priorities, but have been supplemented and in some cases replaced by candidates' ability to satisfy employers' internal corporate requirements for workplace and task-assignment flexibility, and risk minimisation.

Opportunities for journalism graduates are being shaped by the continuing decline in the number of permanent journalism positions brought about by staffing cutbacks and reduced local news services, and by employer recruitment policies, methods and preferences. However, every year more and more school leavers arrive at university campuses around Australia and line up seeking information about study and careers in journalism. The number of entrants ranges from 20 at the smaller universities to more than 400 at institutions such as the University of Queensland, where the current authors are based. Since the "entrant season" for universities now almost universally includes mid-year as well as the start of each calendar year, a review of industry practice in the middle of 2006 is likely to be relevant to current and future discussions.

News media employers are forging new recruitment pathways that are having a significant impact on graduates, students planning entry into the industry, and on journalism educators, as they prepare

graduates for junior entry into the industry. Graduate recruitment is being shaped by ongoing changes in the industry as it responds to changes in technology, products, distribution channels, the industrial environment and the market. The introduction of individual Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs) since 1996 has also had an impact on recruitment practices.

Traditionally, graduates have entered the industry through apprentice-like “cadetships” run by individual news organisations but this cadetship system is now under significant pressure as organisations respond to increasing numbers of applicants, declining numbers of available jobs, human resource management priorities and a new industrial relations environment. As the industry introduces new recruitment arrangements, in 2006, cadetships are just one of a number of pathways available to graduates wanting to enter the industry. With that in mind, we have approached and interviewed key executives from some of the major journalism employers, as well as some students at this transitional stage of their tertiary career, and then assessed their responses in the light of traditional, current and more forward-looking trends in journalism education. The results allow us to posit a simple proposition to journalism aspirants and newly-graduated workplace hopefuls which will be more useful than the tired old rubric of the past.

## **Hypothesis**

Having judged that, in general, junior entry pathways into the journalism industry are predicated on successful selection and passage through formal industry recruitment and training arrangements such as cadetships, we examined the hypothesis that many so-called “traditional journalism” practice traits – such as a candidate’s ability to interview, spell, parse and construct grammar correctly in Standard Australian English, the ability to take notes in shorthand, write in inverted pyramid style, and meet deadlines – take priority among employers’ selection criteria and recruitment processes when hiring new graduates and junior journalists.

## Methodology

The researchers adopt a triangulated methodology of participant observation, literature review, case study employing selective interviews, and discourse analysis of the interview results. The industry interviews conducted for the case studies, from February to June 2006, included talks with executives (named in relevant sections of this article) at ABC News, ABC News Online, News Limited, Australian Provincial Newspapers, Southern Cross Radio, the Australian Radio Network, and the Ten television network.

Questions asked of the industry subjects covered the following topic areas:

1. Describe your organisation's recruitment pathways for graduate and undergraduate entry.
2. What qualities and skills do you look for in junior/graduate/undergraduate applicants?
3. Do you prefer applicants with journalism degree qualifications?
4. Do you have a work-experience system? If so, how does it operate?
5. Do you have an internship arrangement with journalism educators? If so, how does it operate?
6. What changes across your business are impacting on your employment processes and policies?
7. How are you managing these changes (if any) and how has your recruitment process for junior-entrants been shaped by these changes?
8. Specifically, how have these changes affected your internship arrangement?
9. Do you have a cadetship system?
10. If so how does it operate?
11. How has it changed?
12. What are the main drivers in your selection process for junior entry recruitment?

13. In recruiting juniors, what emphasis does your organisation put on interns?
14. Do you prefer interns to non-interns?

### **Literature review**

Newsroom executives have long preferred to hire people based on personality and work habits over any professional characteristic except language skills (Hollifield et al 2001: 1). As long ago as 1974 Harless and Collins (1974: 1) surveyed television news directors in the United States about their hiring practices, university journalism training they thought was helpful, and the specific reasons they had for hiring personnel during the previous year. News directors presented a shopping list of news courses such as broadcast reporting, local and state government, but stressed the social characteristics of each new employment candidate “without making reference to educational background” (Harless & Collins 1974:1). It is likely this observed practice works hand-in-hand with another in which “hiring and retention in journalism has to do with informal ... methods stemming from social contacts and interactions” (Rhodes 2001:3). While Australian television news chiefs reportedly prefer recruits with “old fashioned” news gathering skills, they also say they want them to have a “passion for news” and to be “thinkers with inquiring minds”, “hungry journalists” and “the ability to hunt down information that’s paramount” (Nankervis 2005: 5,6,9). This challenges the position proposed by bosses such as News Ltd chief John Hartigan (MacLean 2004, in Crowley-Cyr & Cokley 2005) who have questioned the relevance of “hard-earned degrees” that in their opinion teach too much theory and too few “real skills” to equip graduates for the “cut and thrust of a newsroom”.

Internal organisational processes such as (1) division of labour, (2) images and discourses, (3) interactions and (4) identity work also have worked towards excluding women and non-white journalists from certain sections of newsrooms (Claringbould et al 2004:709) and male hegemonic dominance (Louw 2001: 156; Cokley 2004: 29) operates

when management looks to promote individuals to management and middle-management roles, at least in newspapers. Such dominance has also been reported in television news output (Cann & Mohr 2001: 1):

Content analysis of 450 news stories broadcast by five Australian television networks over a period of one week indicated that men were generally over-represented as presenters, reporters, and expert sources. Female reporters predominated only in low-frequency lower-ranked subjects.

Organisational theory suggests that these internalised patterns will be replicated more generally at the hiring door.

An earlier study (Bales 1992) identified a tendency among newspaper editors with journalism degrees to be more positively predisposed towards university journalism graduates, including in actual hiring habits, than to applicants without journalism degrees, and the hegemonic dominance identified by Louw (2001:156) and Cokley (2004) supports this observation. Alysen's study (2005: 11) further supports this, by noting that "there is a clear preference for the 'known commodity' over the untried one" and suggests that the implementation and expansion of journalism-themed degrees at Australian universities since the 1970s is having a noticeable impact, since "graduates of courses which include journalism still take the majority of available places (in the news industry)" (Alysen 2005: 10). It is likely that one reason for this is the "confident practice" among graduate employment candidates (O'Donnell 2006: 23) developed by the combination of training by the journalists-turned-academics who are common in Australian universities, and training picked-up, as if by osmosis, during on-the-job work-experience or internships. It is also noted, however, that this same implementation and expansion of university journalism programs has tended to flood the market with graduates to the degree that at one point there was an estimated 900 graduates available to fill 300 industry entry-level positions (Patching 1996: 56, 58).

## The studies

### *The overall picture*

Of the news media organisations studied for this article only the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and the APN News & Media's *Sunshine Coast Daily* masthead had a formal cadet recruitment program. The ABC program in 2006 was largely centralised in Sydney although final-round applicants are normally interviewed from their capital cities by the news editors of individual states by a video conference link from the ABC boardroom in Sydney. APN leaves recruitment to its individual papers. For example, while the *Sunshine Coast Daily* recruits cadets, its stablemate the *Toowoomba Chronicle* does not, preferring instead to hire journalists at a level called "trainee" and as required.

Recruiters said they preferred to engage university graduates, whether as cadets or through other entry level pathways. The preference was not necessarily for graduates of themed journalism programs; some employers such as the ABC accepted graduates from a broad educational background which might include journalism. The increase in the number of graduates with journalism qualifications being produced has already forced changes in the relationship between the industry and journalism educators. Previously, informal "work experience" arrangements whereby students gained experience at media organisations came under such pressure that a more regulated "internship" system was introduced. This is an arrangement between the journalism education providers and the industry to formalise work-related visits to news organisations and to regulate the number of those students attending an organisation at anyone time. The point is that the number of university students with journalism in their degrees has further increased to the point where the internship system is coming under pressure as industry recruiters introduce new ways to manage the number of journalism students seeking the internship experience and looking to convert that experience into permanent employment.

Recruiters interviewed for this article said their hiring strategies emphasised merit and aim to select the most vocationally suited candidates. There are other drivers shaping the selection process, including the development of systems that:

- manage the processing of large numbers of graduate entry level applications so as to limit the workplace time and resources expended on cadet/trainee selection,
- reduce the employer's risk of hiring graduates that do not work out, and
- maintain the corporate and employment flexibility to respond to industry change including the flexibility to 'hire and fire'.

### ***Managing graduate applications***

In 1998 when Heather Forbes, now manager of Staff Development at the ABC, first took responsibility for the ABC's cadetship program, the application process involved writing a letter to the ABC with an accompanying show-reel. This attracted some 3000 applications a year and according to Forbes, short-listing was cumbersome and it was difficult to judge applicants fairly. There was no cadet intake in 2000 and for the 2001 intake Forbes streamlined the selection process by introducing an application form. The number of applicants dropped. She said the new selection program was more efficient, took some strain off ABC resources and personnel and put in place a fairer, more equitable selection process. As well as an application form, the changes included substantial supporting evidence from the applicant, and imposed written and audio tests and interviews.

Applicants dropped from 3000 to 700 and the new demanding application form itself weeded out those applicants who were half-hearted and not willing to do more than just write a letter (Forbes 2006, personal communication).

Other employers said that a formal cadet-hiring system based on an annual intake of recruits was beyond their recruitment capabilities and needs. While recruiting cadets and providing them with a training

program, the *Sunshine Coast Daily* did not advertise the positions or hold a special cadet intake. The paper's editorial manager, Andy Kippen, said cadets were hired on a "needs basis" according to the turnover of staff and the availability of junior positions. Cadets were offered only AWAs and went onto a six-month probation. Whilst Kippen maintained this was a cadetship system, it mimicked the graduate-entry level options of other employers who resisted using the term "cadet" in favour of "trainee" or "junior reporter".

One of the region's biggest employers of journalists, News Limited's *Courier-Mail*, has dropped its cadetship program in favour of engaging graduates on short-term contracts and on an as-needs basis. The editor, David Fagan, said the traditional cadetship program was too resource-demanding, did not allow enough flexibility to hire and fire, and was inconsistent in identifying good trainee journalists.

### ***Reducing the employer's risk of hiring graduates***

Under the new trainee recruitment system introduced by the *Courier-Mail*, trainees, of which up to six are usually hired annually, were treated industrially like other entry-level journalists and a probation period applied. Fagan said the flexibility of short-term contracts was especially attractive. "If it doesn't work out then we part ways knowing that the experience (of working at the *Courier-Mail*) has probably helped the reporter find a job elsewhere," he said.

All of the employers studied hired entry-level reporters on a contractual or casual basis. They argued that this arrangement enabled both the reporter and the employer to part ways if desired. Most employers said that given the abundance of graduates available, as well as the number of junior and experienced journalists on the market looking for employment, they were in the position to pick and choose and test new recruits through probation and casual engagement.

Toowoomba *Chronicle* editor Jason Purdie (who has since become the editor of Burnie's *Advocate*) said he identified potential

recruits from graduates and juniors who took up work-experience opportunities at the paper. Those whose performance impressed the editor would be invited to undertake paid work on a casual basis. He said engaging juniors as casuals enabled him to monitor their performance and development with a view to considering offering a permanent junior position, depending on the paper's staffing needs while at the same time maintaining the paper's hiring flexibility and minimising the possibility of a poor selection posing risk and liability to the organisation.

Brisbane radio stations 4BC, 4BH, 4KQ and 97.3 FM had graduate entry journalists in their pool of casuals during the period of study. Peter Van Hoovan, general manager of the ARN network which runs 4KQ and 97.3 FM, said the network's decision to locate one of its Brisbane-based permanent reporters in Sydney, combined with the imminent retirement of icon newsman, John Knox<sup>1</sup>, would on the one hand mean fewer permanent journalism positions in Brisbane, but could on the other hand lead to the need for more casuals to supplement the networked product if required.

### *Exception proves the rule*

Among all the subjects of this study, Ten News in Brisbane chose not to hire casuals. News director Cathie Schnitzerling explains this is because the commercial television media in her region is so competitive that she did not want journalists who could also be working for competitors. Graduates who demonstrated competence and a variety of other professional qualities could be invited to fill short-term vacancies at Ten that became available as a result of staff sickness and leave issues. These positions were available as short-term contracts.

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<sup>1</sup> This eventuated in August 2006

### *Operationalising the process*

Schnitzerling said she recorded the performance details of interns with a view to future employment. However, she said non-graduates could also enter if they were persistent and demonstrated commitment and talent. She recounted a story of a Townsville-based high-school student who took work experience with the network several years ago, and although her voice was “not great” she demonstrated an ability to learn, was enthusiastic and available at short notice, and eventually was offered a reporting position. The student is now a permanent reporter with the Ten Network in Sydney.

The *Courier-Mail's* David Fagan said his chiefs-of-staff<sup>2</sup> monitored the performance of interns assigned to the paper and formally made a note of interns who impressed through their hard work, commitment, ability to “get and break news” and who “go the extra mile”. Those interns might then be contacted to fill junior level positions, as they become available.

This view was supported by senior *Courier-Mail* journalist, Anna Reynolds, who said the newspaper valued juniors who knew how to “break news stories”. She said hirers valued this quality above writing skills: “Writing can be taught later, but breaking news is what it is all about”.

Unlike its mainstream news counterpart, ABC News Online does not have a formal cadetship program and hires junior recruits on an “as-needs basis”. Bob Johnston from ABC News Online said he was keen to hire outstanding interns and 80 percent of his graduate entry recruits are university interns. Johnston said the intern arrangement offered graduates an opportunity to “get their foot in the door”. Over the past five years (2001-2006), 25 junior recruits (at staff position point-11) had been engaged. Johnston said interns who

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<sup>2</sup> At the time this job was shared by two journalists under a full-time joint appointment

impressed could be asked to become part of the pool of casual workers, who were called in to work as required:

We're interested in interns who are enthusiastic about working in the online medium and who bring a young person's knowledge of multimedia to the job (Johnston 2006, personal communication).

Interns could be hired as casuals and they were then eligible for permanent positions, which were advertised, and for contract work as it became available (which are not advertised).

Although senior ABC News managers in Brisbane said interns did have some recruitment advantage, national staff development manager Heather Forbes said the ABC cadetship selection system did not favour interns. She said the selection process deliberately treated non-interns the same as interns, with demonstrated merit as prescribed by the application process being the overriding selection criteria. Forbes emphasised what she described as a non-discriminatory process that provided flexibility in the management of administrative issues such as complaints from applicants and the public generally.

Graduates enter the ABC through pathways other than cadetships. As described earlier, the ABC maintains a pool of casual journalists, some of whom enter as interns, having impressed management. Interns that fall into this category but who do not qualify for cadetships can be appointed as casuals and also as permanent journalists in regional newsrooms which historically experience a higher staff turnover rate than the metropolitan offices. These positions are at a "junior entry level" and might not be advertised. Interns are appointed on a needs basis and usually from the news editor's "book" of available casual journalists.

In fact, industry practitioners interviewed for this article emphasised the entry level "country" pathway for graduates. Graduates who work in regional newsrooms have the opportunity to

function across a range of positions and acquire experience and skills possibly in less time than can be achieved in a metropolitan news room. Country-skilled graduates compete for cadetships and other entry level positions in metropolitan newsrooms. “Country” graduates offer a range of benefits to employers including continuing junior salary costs, superior workplace experience and skilling which minimises recruitment and operational risk.

Chris Adams, news editor at Brisbane radio stations 4BC and 4BH, manages a staff of eight journalists, half of them casuals. He accepts interns from university journalism programs and – like his industry colleagues – keeps a record of those interns he thinks could be useful as industry-ready junior recruits. He said such interns were hired as casuals and depending on their performance and the network’s staffing needs could be employed as permanents.

## **Discussion**

There is no question that news media organisations in Australia are continuing to hire entry-level university journalism graduates. However, the traditional and once ubiquitous cadetship recruitment programs are being modified and dismantled as news managers introduce a variety of recruitment strategies in response to significant industry change across the board, including corporate management priorities, human resourcing and staffing strategies, administration, risk management, industry operations, journalism education and commercial imperative, supported by Oakham (2006: 183).

Industry is increasingly placing a greater emphasis on what has become known as “workplace flexibility” which in turn gives employers greater flexibility in the selection, hiring and firing process and reduces the risk to, and liability of, the employer in the case of engaging entry level staff who do not deliver on employer expectations.

As the number of journalism graduates who exit journalism programs continues to significantly surpass the number of available industry jobs (Patching 1996), employers will be in the position to continue to shape the management of the entry level recruitment to their benefit. New workplace industrial laws offer additional flexibility to employers, whilst for graduates the new workplace environment could put them in an increasingly vulnerable employment position of having to accept junior casual or non-permanent positions instead of cadetships that once provided permanency and stable and sustainable career entry opportunities.

Employers said they would continue to engage graduates as casuals on the understanding that they, the graduates, “work out”. In turn casuals could be in line for permanent or more securely contracted positions if and when those opportunities arise.

The journalism “internship” continues to offer graduating students the prime opportunity to demonstrate their credentials in the workplace and maximise their chances of being recruited into the industry, on a permanent, contracted or casual basis. Most news editors said that they were more likely to offer a position to an impressive intern than to a non-intern. They said interns that demonstrated practical skills, general knowledge, enthusiasm for the job, and were willing to “go that extra mile” on the job had “a foot in the door” to take up possible future recruitment opportunities including cadetships.

## **Conclusions**

The data collected in this study do not support the original hypothesis, that so-called traditional journalism practice traits – such as the ability to interview, spell, parse and construct grammar correctly in Standard Australian English, the ability to take notes in shorthand, to write in inverted pyramid style and even the ability to

meet deadlines – take priority in employers’ selection criteria when hiring new graduates and junior journalists.

Instead they support a revised ranking of selection criteria, such that the main drivers in this new recruitment environment are (1) employer human resources requirements and (2) the maximising of administrative and operational workplace flexibility.

Responses to the skills-focussed questions – 2, 12 and 13 – in the study almost never mentioned specific traditional journalism practices skills such as those within the hypothesis. Instead their criteria included “performance” and “working out” and juniors being available and committed to fitting in with and satisfying employer’s recruitment demands. We conclude this suggests those specific trade skills rank lowly on the actual selection criteria which is enacted in the recruitment environment.

Both the study data and the literature also tend to support the proposition that personality, social networks and social behaviour are also more highly placed in selection criteria than trade skills.

### **Implications for further research**

Casual employment has become the new “cadetship” for graduates looking to enter the industry and it is suggested this would offer fruitful research opportunities. Most news media organisations maintain a pool of casual journalists who can be called on at short notice according to the employers’ daily staffing needs. These pools included graduate-level journalists, and were one of a number of alternative entry-level paths into the industry. Employers liked what they described as the resourcing and cost flexibility of casual engagement. And for their part, while some journalists preferred casual work for a variety of reasons including family life and lifestyle, for others the casual arrangement was the only employment available and they looked to convert it to permanency at the first opportunity.

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# Perspectives on assessment practices in Australian journalism education

Janine Little

This paper highlights the tension between the journalism education environment and media industry demands for graduate recruits who are “job-ready”.

Claims from both educational and industry sides about what journalism students should be learning are not new, and not confined to Australia. European debates on the nexus between practical training and theoretical capacity extend to those by American journalism educators, who share concerns about how journalism schools can accommodate both theory and practice (Adam 2001; Bjork 1996; Bromley & Servaes 2006; Dickenson & Brandon 2000; O’Donnell 2001-02; Rosenbaum 2002; Ricketson 2005). These discussions merge coherently with initiatives undertaken by Australian universities to ensure graduates from any discipline are equipped with a set of measurable skills (or attributes) appropriate to the international context of higher education. The paper explores this tension through the lens of assessment in journalism education, and does so by drawing mostly upon education theory. It suggests some possible ways to cater for media industry pressure on universities to cut theory and concentrate on practice, while accounting for the educator’s responsibility to promote learning in line with graduate attributes such as the capacity to function as a global citizen, a capacity for critical evaluation, and a deep knowledge of the field of study.

Two articles relating to learning and teaching practices in journalism education in Australia, compared with two approaches taken by American journalism educators will be discussed. Even if

left at the superficial level, the value of such a discussion is to highlight the concerted efforts of journalism educators, in both countries, to reconcile “traditional” journalistic industry training with contemporary educational best practice. This paper does not attempt to overview and analyse the broader history of these efforts in either the Australian or American literature, but approaches that history from the angle of assessment theory. Its application of such theory to a small sample of publications acknowledges, as Frank Sligo (2004 p191) observes in relation to New Zealand’s parallel discussions of journalism education, that “one indicator of health in any field of human endeavour is the extent and quality of debate that occurs on how its new and developing practitioners should be educated.” The annual instance, in itself, of the Journalism Education Association Conference, where educators and industry practitioners meet to debate that open-ended question, indicates an overarching concern for the future of Australian journalism. In their introduction to an earlier issue of *Australian Studies in Journalism*, Bromley and Servaes (2005) map the discursive terrain of “... the anxieties: What should journalists be doing? What should they be learning? What are they good for?” (Cokley as cited in Bromley and Servaes 2006: 2). These are questions about preparation for journalistic practice which have continued, as Bromley and Servaes note, “since the establishment of the first modern journalism courses (at Illinois in 1904 and Wisconsin in 1905).

In Australian universities, the questions are often motivated and informed by external pressures on journalism programs to demonstrate outcomes and “graduate satisfaction”<sup>1</sup>, while negotiating the realities of fewer media industry jobs, students who often have no interest in news as a practice (Bromley and Servaes 2006), and recruiting editors who, at least in the metropolitan setting, have shown inclinations toward graduates without journalism majors.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, Australian journalism educators are no different from other higher education teachers on the contemporary campus: required to ground classroom performance in sound pedagogy, while keeping pace with what industry wants graduates to be able to do.

These sometimes competing tensions suggest that discussions centred on assessment could help to find shared concerns and aims. The following comparative reading of four articles relating to journalism education demonstrates how this might occur.

The articles are:-

- Wanda Brandon (2002), “Experiential Learning: A new research path to the study of journalism education.”
- Dianne Jones (2004), “Problem-based learning and critical analysis of online news media.”
- Gary Rice (2005), “A revolution in writing instruction: Journalism to the rescue.”
- Matthew Ricketson (2005), “The slow-release fertiliser theory of journalism education.”

Selected for their relative proximity in terms of publication date, and for the pedagogical discussions they attempt, these studies explore how future journalists, and journalism students, might be assessed. In comparison, they enable some further suggestions on a practice – grading – which has a purposeful, dual connotation. In both assessment terms and Australian media employment of journalists, grading measures levels of achievement, ascribes competency, and determines the wage dollar value of a practitioner’s work experience. While it is every cadet’s dream to be *graded*, it is probably a dream of many students in journalism to comprehend more fully how their marks translate into what it means to practise and learn journalism.

In relation to the competing tensions described earlier, this means university journalism programs in Australia are under increasing pressure to account for assessment practices beyond more than the skills competency-based approach which has characterised journalism sometimes as vocational training. Assessment in the contemporary, higher educational context must, as Grant Wiggins (1998)

emphasises, promote understanding as well as knowing. This is another version of one media industry employer's nomination of the ability to find a story and write it to connect with readers of a specific newspaper as holding more value, for their publication purposes, than rote-learned reconstruction of the inverted pyramid.<sup>3</sup>

## **2. The Purpose of Assessment**

Assessment is interdependent with curriculum and pedagogy, and the tension between media industry demands and educational contexts highlights this three-part relationship (Klenowski 2002). Assessment is the process of enabling learning through gathering, evaluating, and applying evidence of learner achievement but, as discussions in journalism education make clear, this means course development and delivery should be matched with justifications for decisions about the way journalism is taught (Pratt 2005). Assessment aims for improved performance of both learning and teaching. For journalism, however, Wiggins' (1998 pp80-81) emphasis on understanding as underlying assessment aims has a much wider import than the tertiary campus. Assessment needs to promote the acquisition of basic reporting and writing (cognitive) skills, but has to encourage learner development of an affective embrace of their own vital role as social agents. The characteristics of ethical responsibility, scepticism, curiosity, and integrity, cannot be developed just through standardised and formal testing of skills competency, or through completion of a discrete course on journalism ethics. As the four selected articles show, they can be developed by combining standard competency testing with formative assessment throughout courses and programs because this method fosters ongoing reflection.

Ricketson (2005: 4-5) identifies reflection as the key to aligning theory and practice in journalism education. He states that journalism students given a chance to reflect on processes of story submission, as summative assessment, experience assessment as authentic, and are more likely to remember their learning when they

start work as journalists. Ricketson's account foregrounds the need for learners and teachers in journalism to build a shared learning community, since it is this sense of participating in something larger than the tutorial, or writing test, that carries through to journalism practice. This is in line with Brandon (2002: 62), who argues that journalism educators do well when they apply their own experiences as journalists in learning activities where "a person experiences an event, acquires competencies, and then compares the knowledge gained with knowledge gained in similar situations".

Journalists who discuss university journalism education might agree that this experiential cycle embedded into assessment processes would improve graduate "job-readiness" and accommodate the interdisciplinary learning (including critical capacity) important for reflective professional practice. Dickson and Brandon (2000) note, however, that journalism education "must prepare graduates for a variety of media and non-media jobs as well as for graduate school", which is why assessment programs at journalism schools across Australia (and the United States) have been compelled to rethink the way assessment information is recorded and reported.

Brandon's experiential approach applies Lewin's (1951 as cited in Brandon 2002: 63) model of the experiential learning cycle, which "begins with a concrete experience that leads to observation and reflection. According to Ricketson (2005: 5), these are opportunities working journalists mostly do not have. Graduates from RMIT journalism school, he states, note reflection as lacking in daily work but central to their appreciation of what it is they actually do. Senior *Age* journalist John Schaube (as cited in Ricketson 2005 p1) states that "what school leavers and graduates of other disciplines do not have is a broad understanding of the news media and its role in society (2005 p4; Dickson and Brandon 2000).

This is generally evident with first-year undergraduates at the journalism program at The University of Southern Queensland, who may perceive no difference between public relations and news, nor

make a critical connection between social justice and journalistic practice.<sup>4</sup> Because assessment should be developmental, however, the author would not expect first-year learners to have this prior knowledge or experience, though this may be one of the fundamental points at which trade-based journalism education in universities has faltered. From the selected articles, this would appear to be the case in the USA, as much as Australia, owing more to a shared cultural experience of corporate media dominance of information dissemination paired with a correspondingly dominant, conservative worldview.

Journalism educators have started to consider how to negotiate the practice of teaching why good journalism matters, in a world where there is so much *non*-journalism ventriloquising “traditional” journalism. Brandon’s (2002 p63) study of experiential learning in journalism (based on Gibbons and Hopkins research on experiential learning environments) suggests educators could rate “work, internship, and classroom experiences ...differently on the experience-based scale of a learning environment” to give students a clear idea of the actual relationship between industry and classroom. The purpose of assessment in the first-year journalism context would, then, account for the learning environment, and would aim to document, rather than measure, student performance on a range of foundation skills. This creates the ideal learning situation Brandon describes because it allows for development *into* journalistic practice: firstly by offering students the room in which to confront “new information”, and then the opportunity to reflect upon it for future action. The experiential learning cycle described in Brandon, and advocated in the selected literature, supports assessment “as part of a cycle of educational improvement” (McMillan 2000).

For journalism education, validity and reliability of assessment in this context involves prior communication to students of the learning objectives, the skills to be taught, and the ways in which their achievements translate into summative assessment scores, or marks. Thus, Brandon’s (2002 p63) observation that an “ideal learning

situation should have a process to identify development needs, have jobs that grow and expand, encourage initiative, and have processes for setting objectives” looks like a succinct mission statement for curricular planning from first to third-year journalism. Tasks and experiences in the first-year classroom should have a diagnostic character, so that teachers know what students *cannot* do. Good quality assessment at this stage involves timely and criterion-referenced feedback so that students make a cognitive connection between mastery of core skills and their methodical development into critical, effective journalists. The teacher, not the student, has to recognise that this will not occur in first-year but should be an objective of third-year learning. This objective will be linked to a suggested appropriate assessment strategy in the third part of this paper.

Assessment that is analytical, informative, and ongoing needs to be paired with an allowance for uncertainty and error in judgement, especially in a socio-culturally diverse learning environment (Griffin and Nix 1991). This is the same principle underlying journalistic Codes of Ethics, where journalists are required to apply fairness and balance to their reporting. These skills (or attributes) are acquired by experience, rather than rote testing – and any former newspaper cadet can attest to the *rote* aspect of on-the-job training. John Dewey’s view of “experience as a great liberating force for people ... an individual is not merely a property of nature, set in place according to a scheme independent of him ...but he adds something... he makes a contribution” describes a principle held in common with journalism practice, and education. (Dewey as cited in Brandon p62). Good quality assessment in our discipline would, therefore, draw upon this confluence *and* perhaps respond to some industry concerns about graduate “job-readiness”. In this way, journalists who are educating could offer more of why accuracy and fairness means something to *them*, and less of those unexplained red lines drawn through students’ work, judged as not making the grade.

USQ journalism's Dianne Jones (2005) and California State University journalism's Gary Rice (2005) support this pedagogical philosophy based on experience, albeit in contrasting applications. Jones states that "teachers need to work out how they can help their students transfer their learning to real world situations". She demonstrates how problem-based learning was applied as formative assessment in the on campus mode of the capstone journalism course at USQ, by "organising curricula content around problem scenarios rather than around subjects or disciplines" (Savin-Baden 2001 as cited in Jones 2004). Noting how "learning is achieved by the conjunction of knowledge acquisition and competence development", Jones' approach itself reflected upon how understanding allows students to connect knowledge and competence with their social worlds. The PBL, formative assessment method trialled by Jones involved a group online content analysis, which provided feedback in a peer learning dynamic.

According to Jones, a significant component of the PBL process was reflection: students provided written comments about their experiences. Jones reports adjustment of her teaching approach arising out of experiencing how testing for understanding may mean *not* testing at all. She states, "I had mistaken the students' interest and conjecture for understanding ... On reflection, a better coach would provide more freedom for the students to set their learning agenda and decide how to pursue it" (2004: 6). These findings support Brandon and Ricketson in their emphasis on allowing students to make mistakes, and to see that assessment of their work on those terms is reliable: everyone makes mistakes, but these are part of authentic learning.

Rice (2005: 6) focuses on mistakes as part of the experiential learning cycle with his take on writing instruction. Like Jones, Rice advocates formative assessment culminating in summative tests, but insists that feedback should be detailed and immediate. His assessment method is competency-based, where he argues that:-

Returned papers should look like the professor sliced a vein. Cut no slack on any mistakes, whether factual, grammatical, organizational or otherwise. Grade tough. Give a zero for any misspelled name. If the story doesn't make sense, if the words are jumbled or misused, if the comma is misplaced, mark up the paper wildly and tell the student how to fix the mess.

While this “zero tolerance” approach is tried and tested in the newspaper industry training ground, it risks students’ cognitive dissonance without adequate pre-test instruction to ensure the validity of the instrument, and to preserve the cooperative quality of assessment as part of the learning cycle. Ricketson, Brandon, and Jones all acknowledge the importance of scaffolded tasks and reflective opportunity for mastery of skills in such learning scenarios.

Rice’s approach may preserve the notoriety of the “tough city editor or assistant city editor” (ibid.), but students in undergraduate tertiary journalism programs do not have the benefit of prior experience to gain from such feedback, as they would in the newsroom training environment. This supports Brandon’s call for attention, by journalism educators and professionals, to the learning environment in which assessment occurs.

Griffin and Nix (1991) show how invalidity in tests such as those advocated by Rice could result from rater drift, between rater inconsistency, inconsistency in individual student performance, and differences between test items. While Rice’s argument that journalistic writing methods should be used across curricula and learning stages to respond to deficiencies in writing skills is sound, Jones, Ricketson and Brandon show how assessment of learners in specific contexts must be devised with reference to corresponding, clear criteria, and opportunities for independent reflection and decision-making.

### **3. Journalism assessment – what works and what does not work**

Media industry criticisms of university journalism programs, and educator responses to those criticisms, show us that some of our methods are not working.<sup>5</sup> One symptom may lie within the realm of Dickson and Brandon's (2002) observation that journalism, today, means more than just newspapers, TV, and radio. For this reason, assessment relying upon summative, standardised tests in the skills competency mode is inappropriate to the contemporary Australian educational context because it is not an authentic measurement of broad-based graduate attributes. Matching our learning objectives with learning outcomes measured by assessment requires ongoing, formative, community-based assessment measures with ample opportunity for reflection, and learner-centred experience.

Following Ricketson, Brandon, and Jones, journalism course assessment could shift toward the kind of reflection-in-action approach that allows the teacher-journalist to become at once mentor, and fellow learner. Assessment instruments which would enable this shift centre on the Reflective Portfolio, where no one story test makes or breaks an overall mark, but students make their own decisions about their best work, choose the stories that will count toward their final grade, and give reasons for their choices.<sup>6</sup> One of the merits of the Reflective Portfolio approach is its capacity to function as a bridge between what journalism students do at university, and the stories they will need to find, write, and tell as the essence of journalistic practice. Trainee journalists and, indeed, those who engage with news media could be offered assessment-driven course content requiring critical thought about what it means to choose one source over the other, that angle over the next, or the loudest voice over the whisper. It is then more likely that we are grading journalists and journalism, rather than PR practitioners or stories of another name.

To encourage "understanding as well as knowing" (Wiggins 1998) in future journalists and media audiences, course content driven by assessment looks a lot more formative than stop-start news

writing tests, and offers time for extended thought about skills application. This reflective process is precluded by test instruments - like the news writing test, and the multiple choice quiz -- but such instruments could function well as part of an overall assessment portfolio. The rewritten third-year, capstone journalism course at USQ, JRN3001 Journalism Publication<sup>7</sup>, is an experimental example of how curriculum redesign can instil reflective practice into course content in a way that applies and extends beyond isolated tasks like tests, encouraging students to forge their own journalistic identities even, indeed, as they may be unaware at the start that they are doing so by *doing* journalism online.

The major assessment instrument for this course is now a Web Blog and Critical Evaluation, supported by a WIKI on which learners build their own blogs through a series of posts linked to six course content modules. Posts must reflect upon set readings, course materials, and current issues in journalistic practice. Students select their “best four” posts as the basis for a final report on their own chosen aspect of journalistic practice. They participate in an online community with a specific journalism education identity and aesthetic. Here, they initiate and respond to discussion in peer-assessment of collective stories about journalism, which constitute both formative work, and a gradual development of the *willingness* to explore social responsibility, critical engagement, and cross-disciplinary connection. Taking a pedagogical step away from journalistic ideals and designing assessment to foster *willingness*, instead of assuming it pre-exists in students, may help bridge the gap between knowing and understanding described earlier.

For connecting curriculum with assessment, this approach seeks to energise what Hugo de Burgh (2003: 96) sees as “journalism’s academic knowledge probably drawing most from the social sciences but steal(ing) from elsewhere, for it is essentially cross-disciplinary”. In this example of how the author used reflective portfolio assessment, a key part of the encouragement of a capacity in student journalists to sift through, select, and make meaning out of

different knowledge is the way that the courseware itself mimics such hybridity and versatility. Knowledge-building is assisted by the use of computer-marked quizzes built into the course CD-Rom, which hook into learning exercises leading to, and through, feature reporting and writing assignments, with a sense of reflective practice consolidated at the course WIKI when students from Toowoomba, Wide Bay, other Australian states, Malaysia, Singapore, England, United Arab Emirates, and the USA, post to their blogs. The design approach was aimed at addressing student evaluation survey data indications that some percentage of a final mark has to be attached to online discussion activities to ensure participation (Jenkins 2000). Willingness generated by a mark incentive is still willingness.

## **Conclusion**

Journalism as professional practice, in Australia as much as other places, relies upon participants who realise what it means to use the tools of a profession to formulate a discourse of power. Realisation of this kind or, in other words, awareness of what it means to be a global citizen, is formed over time, never in an isolated instance of competency testing. In formative class contexts like tutorials and lectures, students in journalism respond well to activities where they interact with “the lecturer” and hear journalism “war stories”.<sup>8</sup> This suggests assessment activities devised around experiential activities in a journalism learning community facilitate the movement from cognitive, to affective learning, where we understand why we could practise journalism this way, rather than another. These are the experiences recalled when journalism classes are over. Such experiences, as this discussion of four views on journalism education shows, may contribute to enhancement of the chances of newly recruited journalists retaining some reflective consciousness about their own power, in the less reflective world of corporate media employment.

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<sup>1</sup> See Jackson, Sally (2006), "What makes a good school of journalism", *Australian*, 21 September: p17.

<sup>2</sup> See Alysen, Barbara (2006 p9-10).

<sup>3</sup> Australian Provincial Newspapers (APN) Executive Editor, Peter Owen, conversation with the author, 20 July 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Both tendencies were observed in discussion exercises with the author in JRN1000 Introduction to Journalism, this semester.

<sup>5</sup> UQ journalism, for example, has started a process of redesigning its first-year curriculum to account for 21<sup>st</sup> century shifts in young adult use, and comprehension of, convergent media. Its first-year course does not set a news writing assignment (as at USQ), but requires students to complete a Media Log of their personal experiences with news via newspapers, TV, radio, and online.

<sup>6</sup> This assessment method is part of a redesign of the capstone course, JRN3001 Journalism Publication, for hybrid, flexible delivery. A Web Log and Critical Evaluation form 50% of assessment to support third-year journalism students in describing their development as "job-ready" practitioners.

<sup>7</sup> USQ Learning and Teaching Support Unit lecturer and multimedia education specialist, Michael Sankey, collaborated with the author on the course redesign for hybrid delivery. He created the CD's function and aesthetic, while the author rewrote curriculum and assessment content. The new course, featuring the use of online reflective portfolios in the form of blogs, was trialled in Semester 2, 2006, in on campus and external modes.

<sup>8</sup> USQ SET scores and written feedback from students, JRN2003, semester 2, 2005.

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## Book Reviews

### **Sports Journalism: Context and Issues**

**Raymond Boyle**

*London: Sage, 2006, 198pp.*

**How** often do you say: ‘Where was this book when I was writing my lectures last semester?’ While it would be difficult to recommend it as a text, given its almost exclusively British view, it is certainly very useful for the handful of journalism academics interested in teaching the coverage of sport. It will be mentioned often when this reviewer next teaches sports journalism.

It would have been a useful reference when colleagues John Cokley, Paul Scott and this reviewer were combining to make the case for a strand of research in sports journalism within the wider journalism research framework for *ASJ*'s sister publication, *Australian Journalism Review*, earlier in the year. And it will help this reviewer with a few international references to use in conjunction with his paper on the dominance of sports coverage in Australian media, to be delivered at the Journalism Education Association conference in New Zealand in December.

While the book looks at the state of sports journalism in the United Kingdom (with a couple of passing references to the United States), many of the issues Boyle raises are universal and will add depth to the debate among students and lecturers in Australia and New Zealand.

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There are a number of major themes to the work – sport as part of the entertainment industry; the combination of big money for sports stars and TV rights, promotion, and the rise of the “protective” public relations consultants; sport as business and sports stars as celebrities; the impact of the 24/7 news cycle and the advent of pay-TV sports channels; and the multi-faceted problem of sources for sports stories.

Boyle mounts a strong defence of the sports journalist against the common perception within the media that they are a ‘law unto themselves’, work in what colleagues call the ‘toy department’, and are little more than a cheer squad for sport in general, and its media-created heroes in particular.

He discusses the myriad of problems facing the modern sports journalist – mainly from the view of the print journalist. Another central theme of his work (and one popular with this reviewer) is the dilemma of what to write about a sporting contest when all your readers have already watched it live on TV, or heard a radio commentary, or heard the results on the hourly radio news, or checked either a media or club website.

Boyle draws what is for this reviewer a rather long bow when he strongly suggests similarities between the problems associated with sources for sports journalists and those covering politics. He returns time and again to the dilemma of not ‘biting the hand that feeds you’, and while this reviewer has often been accused by students of ‘talking in bumper stickers’, he provides his latest favourite. In reference to how sports journalists need sports heroes and access to their coaches, managers etc, and they in turn need the media to promote their “product”, be that a sports star of contest, Boyle describes it as ‘mutually beneficial inter-dependence’. (Well, I liked it.)

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As is the case in Australia, where a couple of networks and a pay-TV operator chip in \$780 million for the rights to five years of Australian Rules football (AFL) coverage, Boyle points out that TV rights financially underwrite the costs of major sport.

Ironically, this review is being written on the biggest weekend for football in Australia – the weekend of the AFL and National Rugby League (NRL) grand finals. And on the day when two new 24-hour sports channels were added to the offerings on pay TV in Australia. If you wanted any further proof of the huge interest and investment in sport by Australian media, consider the NRL situation: The final is between the Murdoch-owned Melbourne Storm and the Murdoch-controlled Brisbane Broncos, in a code half-owned by Murdoch's News Limited.

One minor criticism of Boyle's work is that virtually all examples are drawn from British football (still soccer in Australia, despite local attempts to change it). There were a couple of examples drawn from the "sport of Kings", horse racing, but where were the examples from that other bastion of British sport, cricket?

This is not a "how to" book, but it does discuss at length many dilemmas facing sports journalism, and the sports journalist. Like my colleagues and this reviewer, he deplores the relative lack of research into sports journalism, given its dominance of space and time in the British media. Between a quarter and a third of the space in the major daily British tabloids is taken up with sport, and in the Sunday tabloids it rises to as much as 38%.

He touches on the difficulties journalists now experience in getting one-on-one access to a sports star. Time was when the top sportspeople supplemented their meagre incomes with a ghosted column and were only too happy to have long chats with sports writers. Nowadays sports stars are multi-millionaires and don't need the media as much (ever though it was the media that created them

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by reporting their performances) and surround themselves with PR operatives to protect ‘their image’. As an aside, this reviewer has established that the golfer who wins the weekly PGA event (not a major) in the United States, gets more than 40 years’ of average weekly earnings by an Australian. Boyle records cases where sports stars have demanded – and received – copy, picture and headline approval for anything written about them before they agree to be interviewed. This reviewer found British sports journalists he interviewed during the 1998 Commonwealth Games in Kuala Lumpur lamented the relative unavailability of sports stars, except in set piece media conferences open to all.

Boyle also highlights the growing relationship between commercial sponsorship, the media and content providers and the conflict that may cause for a sports journalist. He cites a sports star Australians love to hate after he ‘rained on our parade’ at the 2003 rugby world cup final in Sydney, Jonny Wilkinson. He wrote a column for *The Times*, could be seen in person at *Times* events and appeared in their television advertising. Because of this close relationship between the paper and the star, does that make criticism of him more difficult for staff of *The Times*?

The book also looks at sports journalists in the digital age, when writers are called upon to work “across platforms” as they call it, writing for the paper, perhaps offering commentary on radio or TV, and appearing on pay TV sports chat shows.

Boyle makes passing reference to women in sports journalism from the twin points of how few female journalists can be found covering sports for the major outlets in the UK, and how little women’s sports gets a run in the nation’s media.

While we could debate much of what Boyle says, and enjoy the experience, this reviewer feels there’s a chapter missing in the book – one which looks at some of the major issues facing sport itself.

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Issues like racism (mentioned very briefly), drugs, sport and politics, and all the controversies that surround the Olympic movement could be addressed from the perspective that they provide many of the headlines that take sport from the back page to the front page. How do you handle such touchy subjects, and still keep your sources?

But that's a minor criticism of a work that is a welcome addition to an area of journalism education and research that this reviewer feels is under-represented in the literature.

-- **Roger Patching**  
Bond University

## **Life After Death**

**Nigel Starck**

*Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2006.*

**Anthony** Allard Pettit jun. was the owner-editor of the *Warragul Guardian* in the 1950s and 1960s. He attended all the meetings of the local council and other public bodies, reporting them in detail. He also reported the football matches each Saturday, but his specialty was the obituary. When it dealt with a public figure, as much as a full printed page might flow, including expressions such as “he walked with kings but kept the common touch” (Clark 2006). Half a century ago the *Bulletin* (1957) highlighted this wonderful verbosity of small-town newspapers, but suggested: “Those trite clichés and pompous platitudes have become, from long use, almost a technical language, as formal as any used in science, business correspondence, ritual or legal documents.” They helped the owner-editor-printer-and-publisher to promote the social harmony as well as the business welfare of the

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community in which he was usually a prominent figure. The *Bulletin* continued:

People get the local news they want, and they are happier to have it phrased in the well-known way, nothing startling or hard to swallow. After the first 10 years or so, the typesetting of these phrases becomes completely instinctive – in fact, they almost set themselves. When our Mr Inkspot dies, I shall expect the type to leap unaided out of the cases to form his obituary notice. The last words are sure to be “mourned by all”. They will never have been more apt – or more true.

Over the past 15 years obituaries have made a comeback in metropolitan newspapers in Australia. The *Sydney Morning Herald* and Brisbane’s *Courier-Mail* are among the papers that have a daily section devoted to obituaries. The *Australian* ran daily obituaries for about eight years from 1993 but over the past four years has published obituaries much less regularly. On the day that I wrote this review, as though trying to redeem itself, the *Australian* published obituaries for Anna Politkovskaya (1948-2006), the award-winning Russian investigative journalist shot dead in the lift of her Moscow apartment block; and for Solomon Rufus Davis (1917-2006), political scientist, born Ukraine, died Melbourne. As David Bowman, a former editor-in-chief of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, suggests: “In the English-speaking world, a newspaper of quality hardly seems complete these days without a regular obituary page.” For, as Nigel Starck says in *Life After Death* (p.ix), death “can make a good story”, and it has done so for nearly 400 years. Journalism’s vocation for acknowledging lives that have concluded began, as Starck notes (p.x) with the obituary of Captain Andrew Shilling, of the East India Company, in 1622.

Starck’s book, subtitled *The Art of the Obituary*, is a remarkably good read, especially for a book that arose from a PhD thesis. He is unafraid to inject himself into the quest for the fascinating information that he provides, whether it is his arrival at the British Library, St Pancras, London, in a quest to discover “in this cathedral of print” the first obituary published in an English-language

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newspaper (p.1); his meeting in Salt Lake City, Utah, with the “square-built and hairy” Jay Black, an American professor of journalism ethics (p.85); or his chat with Valerie Kimble, who writes obituaries for the paper with the “most romantic masthead in America”, *El Defensor Chieftain*, of Socorro (p.159). And the superb quotes and extracts from obituaries roll on throughout the book, demonstrating Starck’s keen journalistic eye for what will grab and hold the reader. There are titbits of information, too, that provide an entrée to savour and delight: London’s *Times* marked Queen Victoria’s death with an obituary of 60,000 words, still comfortably the longest in its 221-year history. All this is woven together with a keen eye for the development of the obituary form over the centuries.

Starck contends that “obituaries – when they are done well – assume the finest and most mature expression of newspaper publication” (p.xvi).

They demand some persistent (if, of necessity at times, gentle) interviewing, incisive research, intelligent assessment, handsome storytelling, and a sense that the exercise in itself is the verdict of the moment. They offer, in short, a critical rite of passage. And they can be wondrous to read.

It is, notes Starck (p.46), through the obituary that an insight is obtained of what it was like to be a citizen of a particular community at a particular time, for it offers a sustained, often dramatic reflection of prevailing mores. Starck communicates his excitement about what the obituary can achieve. In his view (p.160), it can instruct its readers, as well as teach its writers. It delivers that persuasive first verdict of history and offers enlightenment on prevailing manners. It has the capacity, too, to “nail down a candid character study, engage with eccentricity, and chronicle an individual triumph over adversity”. And so Starck presents a connoisseur’s collection of ten obituaries from three different continents to reveal different aspects of the obituarist’s art. One of the ten was Jack Waterford’s tell-all obituary

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for his former *Canberra Times* colleague, Bruce Juddery (pp.184-187); another was Alden Whitman's obituary for the blind and deaf writer, Helen Keller (pp.188-201).

*Life After Death* celebrates the obituary constituting, ideally, a well written report about a life lived rather than a death died. For, as Bowman puts it (p.x): "The best obituaries, after all, capture life; they are not about death." Starck traces the evolution of the obituary from the times when much detail was given about the actual death of the "subject" to the current practice of giving that the briefest mention (unless the manner of death is newsworthy in itself). It is not only the detail that has changed, but also the style, the tone, the language. Starck notes (p.x):

The writing in those formative years was often of a pious kind, then showed an obsession for the circumstances and graphic detail of death, and finally grew confident enough to engage in authoritative biographical portrait enlivened by anecdote.

The subjects, too, have changed: the people whose lives are remembered in obituaries. In the late nineteenth century, the major newspapers published obituaries about landowners and clubmen, political and military leaders, eminent churchmen, scientists and inventors, explorers and adventurers, and editors who themselves had written majestic editorials. When the obituary art had attained its nineteenth-century maturity, the *Times* demonstrated some thundering proof that these columns were the province of celebrated lives within the Establishment (p.109). Now, far more ordinary lives are captured in obituaries. Some of those lives might be regarded as having been misspent. Witness the British novelist Simon Raven, whose obituary began with this character sketch, the more devastating for its understatement (p.xv):

Simon Raven, who has died aged 73, set himself up convincingly, as a bounder ... yet retained the discipline, wit and intelligence to become the author of 36 books and several television scripts. Raven the cad attained his

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finest hour when his wife sent the telegram: “Wife and baby starving send money soonest.” He replied: “Sorry no money suggest eat baby.”

If you are female, you are far less likely to become the subject of an obituary. The ratio of male to female subjects is four to one (p.105). But if you are female and the mother or wife or same-sex partner of a famous male, you may well win an obituarist’s attention, as did Manoly Lascaris, the partner for fifty years of the novelist Patrick White (p.111). The indigenous populations of both Australia and America were largely disregarded as potential subjects for obituaries, certainly until recent years (p.55).

Those who have died in the terrorist strikes of the twenty-first century – for example, on American cities on 11 September 2001, the Bali bombing on 12 October 2002 and the July 2005 London bombings – have won special mention in *Life After Death* because of the way newspapers have responded to reporting their lives. On 15 September 2001, the *New York Times* made “a seminal shift in obituary publication” by publishing vignettes of 150 to 200 words summarising the lives of those lost in 9/11 under a heading “Among the Missing”. A day later it changed the heading to “Portraits of Grief”. Little more than a year later, Australian and British editors had their chance to respond to deaths in terrorist acts. After the 2002 Bali bombing, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, *Age* and *Australian* each published a series of vignettes of some of the 88 Australian victims (the *SMH* published fifty-three and the *Age*, forty-one). As was the case in “Portraits of Grief”, there was a departure from the customary principles of the obituary. The accent instead was on brief but evocative character sketches, free of chronology (p.143). In London, the *Times* did something similar for the British victims of Bali, running them as “Lives Remembered”, and for the victims of the July 2005 London bombings, running them as “London Lives” (pp.144-145).

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When I moved to Bathurst in 1988 to join Mitchell College of Advanced Education (now Charles Sturt University), I found that each year journalism students were asked to write an “obituary” of someone who was still alive. The students were warned, on pain of death (well, almost), not to interview the subject of their obituary. Yet Starck tells (pp.79-80) of Alden Whitman, a *New York Times* obituarist, who had been “licensed to travel the world in search of interviews with the famous living before they became the famous dead”. His “precursory tactics” and his habit of wearing a French police cape won him the soubriquet, “The Angel of Death”. And so the arts of the reporter, the oral historian and the obituarist can happily converge – if a newspaper is prepared to budget for that convergence. All of which causes me to suggest that it is from oral history resources and techniques that the obituarist could draw most usefully to improve the quality of “the first verdict of history”.

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University of Queensland

## Notes for contributors

*Australian Studies in Journalism* welcomes manuscripts welcomes manuscripts from any disciplinary perspective on topics associated with Australian journalism and news media. The range of interest and relevance is vast. Please note that the emphasis is on **research** rather than teaching.

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- studies of legal issues impacting on news media;
- cultural studies approaches to journalism;

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- historical or biographical notes on former journalists (including creative writers or public figures whose background was in journalism);
  - examinations of media coverage of institutions in 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;
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According to Turner (1992).

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If more than one author is cited:

... disagree (Turner 1988; Williams 1990).

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

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All works cited should be listed alphabetically as *References* at the conclusion of the manuscript. The style is:

Lacy, Stephen, Frederick Fico & Todd F. Simon (1991), “Fairness and balance in the prestige press”, *Journalism Quarterly*, 68: 363-370.

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Turner, Geoff (1992), “Information underload: recent trends in the *Courier-Mail* information news content”, *Australian Studies in Journalism*, 1: 43-72.

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:

Porter, Henry (1992), “Royals and the rat pack”, *Australian*, 11 June: p.11.

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