Branding documentary: New Zealand’s minimalist solution to cultural subsidy

Mary Debrett
La Trobe University, Australia

Background

This article looks at the impact of industry changes on social documentary production in New Zealand, and draws on a series of interviews with producers, broadcasters and representatives of funding agencies about the funding process, exploring the interplay of tensions that influenced what documentaries got made under the New Zealand system. Documentary outcomes for 1998 are discussed from the perspective of both broadcaster and film-maker, with contemporary developments set within the historical context of the social documentary. At stake in this discussion is the relationship between social agency and cultural subsidy in the global era.

In 1984 the New Zealand electorate ejected the National Party government of conservative protectionist, Robert Muldoon, in favour of Labour under the leadership of the charismatic David Lange. Elected on a platform of social reform the new cabinet, apparently swayed by the arguments of the Treasury and the extent of national indebtedness, embarked instead on a programme of deregulation, privatization and radical public sector reform.

By the late 1980s three events had transformed the nation’s broadcasting system. Television New Zealand (TVNZ), the state-owned monopoly broadcaster which had hitherto operated in a quasi-public service mode, funded by a mix of licence fee and advertising revenue, was made a state-owned enterprise (SOE) and directed to return a dividend to government. Second, the country’s first commercially-owned television service, TV3, was launched, sparking intense competition for audience share in New Zealand’s limited marketplace. Third, there was the Broadcasting Act of
1989 which, among other changes, instituted a unique solution to that area of market failure – local content – which had been particularly problematic for this small, English-speaking nation. The solution was the Broadcasting Commission, which was later renamed New Zealand On Air (NZOA). Among other duties the commission was to administer a minimalist system of public subsidy for specific genres of local content under a competitive grants scheme. The finance for this scheme came from the television licence fee which had in the past been directed to TVNZ, the state broadcaster, for expenditure on in-house production. Under the new system these funds were contestable by both the privately-owned TV3 and the state-owned TVNZ.

The deregulation of broadcasting and the reorganization of Television New Zealand as a state-owned enterprise removed documentary production as an in-house public service activity. Under the new arrangement, NZOA was directed to ‘reflect and develop New Zealand identity and culture’, to promote Maori language and culture, and to cater for certain other minority interest audiences (Broadcasting Act 1989, section 36). Criteria for programme funding also included potential audience size with drama and documentary noted as programme categories for support. NZOA subsequently interpreted its role as ensuring the provision of programmes reflecting New Zealand identity in prime time. This decision complicated relations with broadcasters who had editorial control, and whose written agreement to broadcast was a condition of NZOA funding. In order to secure funding, applicants had to meet both the national/cultural requirements of NZOA and the presale, prime-time requirements of a commercial broadcaster, either TVNZ or its foreign-owned competitor, TV3. While this raised the profile of New Zealand content on television, the policy proved controversial, with minority interest, non-commercial projects failing to meet the broadcasters’ requirements for prime time. The latter were deemed better served through special interest programmes in ghetto time-slots.

The new funding system was widely hailed as a democratizing move, freeing documentary from the bureaucratic constraints of public service broadcasting and what had come to be seen by many outsiders as an ‘elitist old boys’ network of in-house documentarists’. It was particularly welcomed by the independent sector.

A decade later, NZOA boasts of putting an unprecedented 60 documentaries a year on to New Zealand screens. Negotiating two strands of local documentary in prime time on both TV One and TV3, traditionally the territory of high-rating quiz shows and sitcoms is deemed NZOA’s greatest success. Documentary proved the most cost-effective means of delivering local content, drama being not only more expensive in terms of cost per hour, but also carrying far higher risk in terms of ratings. The diversity of origin and content inherent to a series of independently produced documentaries offsets the risk of failure. Pragmatism permeated the system with
documentary, the cheapest genre of screen culture eligible for subsidy, providing a bottom line for local content, a term which conflated national culture and local industry, promoting the national in opposition to imported cultural products.

The new funding system brought significant changes to television documentary. The ‘public knowledge project’, which the public service broadcaster had previously serviced via documentary, was all but overlooked in the role prescribed for the Broadcasting Commission, with the phrase ‘to inform, educate and entertain’ omitted from the Act. Other contributing factors in the decline of documentary as ‘public knowledge project’ were the exclusion of political issues, which were deemed the preserve of current affairs, and the exclusion of more costly documentary forms – the historical and the investigative, and those covering a longer time-frame.

On the other hand, while the Broadcasting Commission was specifically directed to serve that other aspect of the public service remit, ‘to reflect and develop New Zealand identity and culture’, its interpretation of the Act and its subsequent relationship with broadcasters meant documentary as ‘national culture project’ was also curtailed. Making prime time the key criterion for funding, the Commission imposed considerable constraints on what could be achieved under the wholly commercial system, virtually precluding the more demanding sub-genres – the essay form, experimental documentary and ‘high-culture’ subjects. By prescribing a minimal budget for documentary in order to maximize quantity, the Commission excluded longer-form documentary, along with subjects requiring a longer time-frame, thereby imposing more creative constraints on documentarists. By changing its name to NZOA and embarking on its own programme of self-promotion, building brand awareness, the funding agency showed broadcasters the value of ‘local content’ in winning public approval. To more fully understand the impact of these changes it is necessary to know a little of the system that was replaced.

**Television documentary in New Zealand**

Television broadcasting was established in New Zealand in 1960 under the New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation (NZBC) and initially modelled on the BBC. Its pragmatic hybrid funding structure of commercial and non-commercial days was uniquely New Zealand, and limited funding from the licence fee meant local content was rarely more than 20 percent of the weekly schedule.

A monopoly broadcaster, the NZBC began producing documentaries on a regular basis in the 1970s and screened its first documentary series in 1974. This included the work of independent film-makers, most notable of
which was the ground breaking *Tangata Whenua* series, which attempted to explain Maori culture to non-Maori viewers, breaking with past official discourses of romanticism, cultural decay and ‘otherness’ to present a Maori viewpoint (Blythe, 1994: 16–18). By the 1980s documentaries were a well-established part of the television schedule, but were now produced primarily within the state broadcaster’s in-house documentary units.

During the 1980s, the NZBC had a problematic relationship with the independent sector which had grown up around the government filmmaking institution, the National Film Unit (NFU), and the television advertising industry. Independent producers hankered for greater access to television production funding and to the airwaves. Recurrent restructuring of television from 1970 onwards periodically raised and dashed their hopes. This sector expanded, in response to government initiatives aimed at developing a local film industry. When changes to the broadcasting system were mooted in the late 1980s, the independents lobbied tenaciously for access to the licence fee monies and to prime-time television, and thus, indirectly, for closure of in-house television production which had been subsidized by the licence fee. It was a cause that meshed neatly with the government’s market-liberal agenda for deregulation. Their victory led to the disbandment of the documentary units which they cast as elitist, hidebound and out of touch with the times.

The resultant union, of market liberalism with the social democratic discourse of access, has parallels with the broadcaster-publisher model of Britain’s Channel Four. Sylvia Harvey (1994) recounts how that attempt to maximize diversity through access faltered in the competitive enterprise culture of 1990s Britain, when the plethora of small companies which had served it found themselves struggling to survive. There, what had initially promised to be a more democratic system became less so as the effects of market-driven policies drove programme budgets down. While the main advantage was a reduction in programme costs, this didn’t necessarily improve the viewing experience. Independent producer, John McGrath, claims the Channel Four process of contestable independent commissioning promoted slot culture, with programme ideas tailored to fit documentary strands (quoted in Keighron and Walker, 1994: 211). Harvey concludes that pluralism is unlikely to be well served by a such a system (1994: 125–6). In the New Zealand context this is a prescient finding for, lacking the differentiated markets of more populous nations, market competition proved particularly punishing.

**A documentary industry**

The unlikely popularity of local documentary in New Zealand’s highly competitive commercial television scene is the product of cooperation
between the funding agency NZOA, the two broadcasters, and ex-
documentary maker turned commissioning editor and executive producer,
Geoff Steven, who has worked for both broadcasters. Steven’s contribution
is the creative origination of the two strands *Inside New Zealand* on TV3
and *Documentary New Zealand* on TVNZ, both dedicated to local
documentary. By applying the national brand to these time-slots and
monitoring the subjects and styles of the documentaries made to fill them,
Steven successfully delivered consistently good audience ratings to adver-
tisers and consolidated local documentary within prime time in the weekly
schedule. In 1998, NZOA was contributing two-thirds of the budget with
the proviso that the proposal meet its cultural requirements and that a
broadcaster agreed to put it to air. The broadcaster provided the final third
of the budget, sometimes as facilities rather than cash.

One might imagine the increased quantity of documentaries made in
New Zealand would gladden the hearts of documentarists, however many
are surprisingly critical of the arrangement. The following comment
encapsulates the general disenchantment, ‘The individuality is gone from
the approach to making documentaries . . . you do things by rote because
you know that this is the way that guy and that channel wants it’ (Hunter,
1998). In effect, the two prime-time documentary strands reflect a very
limited diversity.

The branding of local content on New Zealand television was first noted
by Avril Bell in two articles published in 1993 and 1995. Bell queried why
the New Zealand government, so bent on neoliberal reform, supported
cultural subsidy, and why commercial broadcasters acquiesced in a system
which, given the cost differential of local and imported productions,
incurred avoidable financial loss. Bell found the system a political strategy
for the government since, in helping to sustain national identity, it serves to
legitimate the state in the face of encroachment from globalization, while
also providing a means of manipulating public opinion and action. For
broadcasters, she found this loss maker was primarily a public relations
strategy, aimed at winning hearts and minds, and warding off potentially
more punitive measures of government interference (Bell, 1993: 40).
Discussing the symbolic value of New Zealand as signifier, Bell compares
its use in export marketing drives, promoting goods as the product of clean
green New Zealand, noting how attempts by overseas companies to patent
the New Zealand brand led to the establishment of NZ Way Limited to
protect and oversee its application. The ‘Buy New Zealand made’ cam-
paign piggybacked on the publicity and patriotism sparked by this export
drive and subsequently also served to win prime-time audiences for local
programming on television. The brand reminds viewers as both consumers
and the public of the special status of the programme, constructing them as
New Zealanders (Bell, 1993: 36). Bell’s concluding point is that the
national is increasingly used as a brand to sell the local in both domestic
and global markets, with the nation on television ‘equated more and more with consumerism and less with citizenship . . .’ (Bell, 1995: 197).

National branding constitutes a stage in the commodification of documentary, and the corporate take-over of public space. A unique aspect of this development in New Zealand is that the corporate take-over is a collaborative venture, a Faustian contract, between two commercial broadcasters, one state-owned, and the state funding agency NZOA. Naomi Klein, in her account of the rise of branding and its displacement of production as the pre-eminent purpose of the corporate world, describes brand identity as ‘corporate consciousness’ (Klein, 2000: 6–7). Discussing recent developments in corporate sponsorship she observes, ‘the effect if not always the original intent of advanced branding is to nudge the hosting culture into the background and make the brand the star. It is not to sponsor culture but to be the culture’ (Klein, 2000: 30). A fusion of corporate expectations from both broadcasters and NZOA, the New Zealand-branded documentary strands curtail the role of documentary as a site for contestable notions of national identity and culture, asserting a persuasive, promotional or celebratory mode, primarily servicing the survival requirements of the sponsoring bodies.

The New Zealand documentary strands

*Inside New Zealand* was the first strand, devised by Steven when he was commissioning editor for TV3. The newly launched TV3 was trounced in the ratings war that began in 1989, and slid into bankruptcy within 157 days, but was subsequently revived when Canadian broadcaster CanWest Global took control, initially purchasing a stake of 20 percent but which later increased to 100 percent when broadcasting legislation was changed to allow it (CanWest Global, 1998: 3). The struggling network, originally conceived as a community broadcaster, went downmarket and targeted a younger demographic to attract advertisers. Thus tabloid values and youth appeal were to the fore in the conception of the documentary strand *Inside New Zealand*. In its early years, a documentary on dominatrixes, which followed lurid media coverage of a scandal surrounding a sex-related death, drew record numbers of viewers, proving documentary didn’t have to be dull. When Steven moved to a similar position at TVNZ he created a lookalike strand *Documentary New Zealand*. Although the two networks initially programmed these strands head to head on Tuesday night, NZOA challenged this and negotiated a scheduling change on TV One. It was one of the few times that NZOA got the better of the broadcasters. However, the victory also lends support to Bell’s theory that these strands are primarily public relations exercises for the broadcasters.
The strands rate well in prime time and Steven, understandably proud of his achievement, claims he has created a ‘documentary industry’ whereby film-makers are able to support themselves solely by making documentaries. The strands provide a practical solution to the problem of how to schedule and promote independently produced documentaries originating from different sources, finding a balance between diversity and predictability, and thus help in winning an audience for documentary.

Repetition and visibility, key attributes of branding, are evident in the ways in which the broadcasters use the national brand in the titles of these two strands to identify their stations as patrons of ‘endangered local content’ and diverse social concerns. The two documentary strands are widely promoted on television and in other media with the series title getting equal coverage alongside the film-maker’s title, promoting the network as a benefactor of local content. Each programme begins with the series opening titles followed by an introduction from the front person, a well-known station identity in each case, keyed against a freeze frame of the series titles. At each return from a commercial break, the series title/station logo is featured and the programme ends with an outro from the front person and brief reference to the topic of next week’s documentary, finishing with the animated NZOA logo.

The New Zealand-branded documentary strands enable the broadcasters to position themselves as representing the nation, rather than being merely profit-driven; something which was particularly important for TV3 as a foreign-operated broadcaster. The association also helps to veil the extent to which state broadcasting in New Zealand has been abandoned to commercialism. It is, however, primarily NZOA that has taken the lead in branding documentary.

Saving local content

In its administration of monies for the subsidy of national culture and identity, NZOA allowed local production to be subsumed within a culture industry model whereby indigenous television culture was redefined in minimalist terms as local content. The interests of industry took precedence over those of the public, as producers applied themselves to the battle for survival. Negotiating this shift with commercial broadcasters, NZOA assumed the style and practice of the business sector, strategizing for its own survival in the deregulated environment. By opting for quantity rather than quality the public funding agency established a straightforward benchmark for performance. By opting for a prime-time presence for local documentary it positioned itself prominently in the public eye as the guardian of local content. Branding is a conscious strategy acknowledged
by NZOA employees and commissioners, deemed as a way of giving the public ‘a feeling of good value for money’ (Crane, quoted in Bell, 1993: 35). Global advertising firm Saatchi and Saatchi was employed to devise the marketing campaign, ‘Putting New Zealand on Air’ – a message that was incorporated into the NZOA logo, which frequently played on television as an advertisement as well as at the end of NZOA-funded productions. These strategies betokened a siege mentality. The Lange government’s reform programme for the public sector drew on theories of institutional economics: public choice theory, managerialism, agency theory, and transaction-cost analysis which were all based on the assumption of individual self-interestedness, encouraging service to individuals as consumers rather than to a public of citizens. Managerialism, which emphasizes management and management skills over policy and professional skills, placed faith in quantifiable performance targets (Boston, 1989, 1991: 2).

Local content was a far easier idea to sell than public service goals – serving minority interests and reflecting national identity and culture. Emphasis on local content invoked national pride in the audience and served the interests of broadcasters and the independent sector. It was a win-win scenario for troubled times. Self-promotion was a necessary defence against free-market ideologues who opposed cultural subsidy of any form, but it sometimes appeared to displace the organization’s legislated purpose.

While its television advertising campaign served as public education to facilitate the collection of the licence fee, a market research campaign instigated in 1999 to find out ‘what the public thought it should be doing’ suggested an identity crisis. The organization was intended to bring transparency to the way in which the broadcasting fee was spent by separating the funding, producing and broadcasting roles. A market research campaign to find out what the public wanted seemed a misappropriation of scarce funds and a poor substitute for public debate on the subject. It also signalled continued preference for reductivist, quantifiable business strategies over the vagaries of concepts such as public interest or public service, seeking to acknowledge viewer’s individual desires as consumers rather than their social needs as citizens. In its 2001 report, NZOA announced a new initiative to encourage the sale of NZOA-funded documentaries overseas, noting they were among the most efficiently produced in the world. Citing cost-effectiveness as a primary achievement again suggests a naive managerialist mindset, undervaluing the place of social agency and creative merit as key distinguishing traits of successful social documentary (NZOA, 2001). Under the new system documentary as ‘national culture project’ was reinvented as a fusion of tabloid values, youth appeal and nationalism.
Branded documentary

Constraints

Having opted for quantity rather than quality NZOA inadvertently confined NZ documentary makers within a narrow range of documentary possibilities, excluding certain forms and encouraging a cheap and cheerful formulaic approach. The NZ $130,000 budget was usually broken down into two weeks’ pre-production, a three-week shoot and three-week edit.

A number of constraints resulted from the low-risk strategy applied by commercial broadcasters, whereby the known was always given preference over the unknown. Thus topics, treatments and forms that have been identified as low-risk, due to proven success elsewhere, were preferred. In New Zealand the risk-hedging approach spawned two clearly discernible trends: the overseas clone and the celebrity presenter. Several producers also noted it was common knowledge that broadcasters regarded Maori faces as an audience turn-off, an awareness that served as a disincentive to explore Maori subjects.

Preference for low-risk topics constrained political documentary. Despite restructuring and the disestablishment of the institutional in-house documentary unit, the old division between current affairs as ‘The Political’, and documentary as ‘The Social’, a division which originated in the BBC during the Second World War, is still retained in Television New Zealand (Scannell, 1979: 97). This bureaucratic ruling is now applied to the work of independents just as it was in the past to the work of in-house production units. Although the network broadcasts imported documentaries which feature interviews with politicians, the justification for excluding such interviews from local documentaries posits currency and production time-frame as the quintessence of the political. Thus such content became the preserve of in-house current affairs, with the ruling effectively quashing the production of political or issue-based documentaries. Elsewhere, an emphasis on process and style, rather than content, in distinguishing between these two factual genres recognizes that documentary can bring a different perspective to political issues. TVNZ is also unusual in insisting on balanced representation of opposing viewpoints within documentary, instead of addressing the issue of balance across its schedule, a requirement that is a further obstacle for political documentary (Steven, 1998; Wrightson, 1998).

Similarly, the preference for low-risk forms excludes essay or authorial documentaries, although a special strand for the latter was recently established in a late-night time-slot: an initiative which, if precedents are anything to go by, will have to prove its worth in ratings if it is to survive.1

The minimalist budget, which virtually excludes any funding for research, brings many limitations. Most of the documentaries that play in
these two strands, *Inside New Zealand* on TV3 and *Documentary New Zealand* on TVNZ’s TV One, conform to Winston’s definition of television’s ‘vérité’ documentary form – an expedient mix of interviews, reconstructions and observational footage (Winston, 1995: 210–11). This ‘vérité’ form serves the editorial constraints imposed on documentaries in these highly promoted strands, enabling relatively tight scripting prior to production in addition to accommodating the limitations of the low-budget production schedule. In this routine approach to film-making, little is left to chance and, as a consequence, many of the insights into the complexities of character, and the conflicts and relationships that emerge when shooting over a longer time-frame, rarely make an appearance, to the regret of those film-makers who worked under the old public service system where the constraints of time were not so restrictive. It is this issue of time spent in shooting – allowing for revealing moments to unfold on camera – and in editing – for the crafting of these into a story form – that many documentary makers regarded as essential to the art of narrative, observational documentary making. Several producers interviewed lamented the expedient techniques and magazine style that a three-week shooting schedule and three-week edit obliged them to adopt.

It is a point reinforced by 12 documentary editors in a letter to the New Zealand film industry magazine, *Onfilm*, in November 1999. They compare the time routinely allocated for editing a 50-minute documentary in Britain and Australia – six to ten weeks – with the three weeks allocated in New Zealand. They claim this results in aesthetic editorializing by broadcasters and ultimately in homogeneity in style (*Onfilm*, Nov. 1999: 12).

The low budget allocated for programmes within the New Zealand documentary strands is generally deemed insufficient for investigative documentaries which require a longer time-frame for research and shooting, and for documentaries observing the development of a story through time. Similarly, the research and archival costs entailed in producing historical documentaries militates against this sub-genre.

The low budget also impacts negatively on the film-maker–subject relationship. One producer who had worked within both systems spoke regretfully of the demise of ethical considerations in the pressured competitive grant application process, observing that the aftercare of social actors had been accredited higher status in the public service production unit, as a natural consequence of being in a position of public trusteeship. Consultation between researcher and social actors had once been accorded some latitude in the interests of the mental health of the latter, who would have to deal with the long-term effects of public exposure. Past in-house units functioned within a public service ethos which legitimized producers and directors, often facilitating access. In contrast, the new system operates within a neoliberal ethos which assumes that individuals invariably pursue their own self-interest, apparently obviating the need for any ethical
concerns. Independent producers now find themselves left with this responsibility but without financial recompense, peer support or feedback networks to assist them. The new professional attitude in New Zealand is that documentary is an industry, like any other, in marked contrast to the old professionalism of the in-house unit with its public service protocols.

Another major constraint is the need to structure the documentary around commercial breaks, a process that influences timing and the way in which the story is constructed, and which militates against overseas sales and festival exhibition.

Preferences

There is much evidence that the strands have worked against diversity, although the increase in quantity makes this a contentious point. In 1998 there were 10 documentaries fronted by well-known personalities. Seven of these were comedians who fronted what threatened to become a new sub-genre, comedians driving around the country chatting to the camera and local characters, a hybrid ‘road-movie/buddy-movie/stand-up comedy’ routine. Narration was replaced with repartee, the presenter as authority or witness replaced with the presenter as entertainer, and subject matter subsequently trivialized. Presenter-led documentaries provided another way in which stations reasserted their presence within the series, exploiting the public relations potential of local content and the national brand with popular television personalities being ‘hot-housed’, their loyalty to the station secured by retainer. One producer, expressing his irritation with this trend, commented that celebrity presenters were usually an unnecessary cost, placing further budgetary constraints on a project.

Popularization of documentary as local content meant that difference, particularly racial difference, tended to be represented in such a way as to dilute or diminish it. For example, when NZOA imposed a minimum Maori content requirement in the two documentary strands it funded, Maori and Pacific Islanders were most often represented within programmes featuring sports heroes, achievers offered as role models for at-risk youth, or as criminals sharing regrets in order to reinforce socially approved behaviour. This low-risk response to the representation of ‘other’ played to stereotype and endorsed mainstream values. It is a poor substitute for what documentary had achieved in the acclaimed 1970s series *Tangata Whenua*, in which Maori participated on their own terms and in which racial difference was represented as being of interest and of value in its own right.²

Another low-risk, cheap sub-genre favoured by broadcasters, ‘reality’ documentary, selected participants to be filmed in constructed situations, supposedly to reveal something new about human behaviour. A case in point was *Dying for a Smoke*, a documentary on adolescent smoking. The
documentary covered the interaction and behaviour of five young people shut up in a house after answering a radio advertisement for volunteers to stop smoking for 48 hours. At one point, presumably when little was happening, packets of cigarettes were sticky-taped to the windows of the house where the participants were staying, presumably by one of the crew. The formula is now a familiar one thanks to *Big Brother*. The constructed situation gives crew privileged access and the right to provoke the participants – frequently to break their resolve – and thereby create conflict for the story.

The ‘inside view’ is another sub-genre that fits the ‘vérité’ recipe, conforming to an easy chronological structure, expedient production schedule and low budget while offering multitudinous possibilities in terms of setting: in 1998 these included a supermarket, a restaurant and a group of airforce recruits.

*Exceptions*

There have been some exceptions to the constraints noted, which reflect the ability of some film-makers to negotiate their way around them. The most remarkable exception to be broadcast in 1998 was *The New Zealand Wars* series. In addressing the issues of bi-culturalism it is arguably NZOA’s best delivery of its legislated goals, to reflect and develop New Zealand culture. Several features distinguished the series from other New Zealand documentaries: it had a formal production style with an academic, Professor James Belich, virtually lecturing the audience; second, it dealt with the controversial subject of Maori/Pakeha relations but from an historical perspective that was more palatable to the broadcaster; third, it was very popular, outrating *Coronation Street*; fourth, drawing on James Belich’s doctoral thesis, it was the product of rigorous research; and, finally, with a budget of NZ $1.4 million was considerably better funded than most New Zealand television documentaries. One can only speculate as to why the series was so popular, but it seems reasonable to suggest that this signalled an appetite for cultural and social analysis that television had neglected.

NZOA attributed their success in getting TVNZ to invest in the series to leverage provided by a similar proposal from the competing broadcaster, TV3. It is worth noting that this was a co-production involving TVNZ’s Maori Department, a remnant of the old in-house production system, and a factor that influenced the commissioning decision. NZOA decided to make participation of the Maori Department a condition of funding – the anxiety being that insensitive breaches of Maori protocol could undermine the production. Another exceptional factor here is the production time-frame. Roger Horrocks (1998), a commissioner with NZOA, suggests the typically high turnover amongst television executives facilitated risk-taking here.
The irony, of course, is that the risk unexpectedly paid off with the series achieving unexpected high ratings.

Another exception, The Cave Creek Story, a feature-length investigative documentary made for TV3’s Inside New Zealand strand, eventuated because the production company chose to invest NZ $10,000 of its own money to do justice to the story. Exploring events that led to the collapse of a Department of Conservation viewing platform, which had resulted in the deaths of 14 young people, the documentary detailed the findings of a Commission of Enquiry into the collapse. In an era of public sector ‘reform’ and government cost-cutting, the Commission’s finding of systemic failure had singular social resonance. The documentary was also unusual for its longer form, which had been negotiated by the producer. Explaining his company’s stand in 1998, the executive producer John Harris, who has a public service background noted:

We . . . brought together a whole lot of facts that may have been brought to the public’s attention before, but delivered in a two-hour documentary . . . did really confront people with the full enormity of what a ghastly tragedy it was and how it could have been avoided . . . and we lost [NZ] $10,000 on that . . . because of the amount of research we had to put into it and because we wanted to put all the dollar value on screen . . . we just couldn’t help ourselves spending the money. So we lost money . . . I feel sore about that because I don’t think I should, but on the other hand that’s the reality of it. (Harris, 1998)

Other exceptions illustrate the capacity for purpose to triumph over form. The Bay Boys featured television personality, poet and comedian, Gary McCormick as a presenter. Revisiting the area where he grew up, McCormick is more witness than entertainer in the intimacies he solicits from discussions with old school friends, Maoris whose lives have been singularly less successful than his own. The result is an unsentimental and non-patronizing reflection of the economic and social disadvantage much of the Maori population faces.

While these exceptions suggest that the broadcaster’s non-quality agenda may not be as constraining as it first appears, they rely either on exceptional circumstances, or on a level of producer commitment and determination that is unlikely ever to be anything more than an occasional occurrence in the competitive grants system, where keeping onside with the broadcasters is essential for survival.

Attempts to resurrect public service television

By the mid-1990s public disenchantment with the state of television was beginning to surface. A poll done by the National Business Review in 1996 found two-thirds of viewers dissatisfied with television. Not enough quality/educational programmes was the reason cited (Smith, 1996). By
In May 2001, following public consultation, the Clark Labour government published a draft public broadcasting charter for TVNZ, re-prioritizing the broadcaster’s social goals and re-instating the phrase ‘to inform, educate and entertain’. The proposed Charter addressed a range of specific issues, from programme standards and editorial integrity, to mainstream access to programmes on Maori language and culture and minority interests, but initial retention of the ‘financial objective’ – to generate ‘an adequate rate of return on shareholders’ funds’ and operate as a ‘successful going concern’ – gave the broadcaster little room to manoeuvre (Hobbs, 2000). The lobby groups who had initiated calls for reform – viewers, academics and industry – were all dissatisfied. Friends of Public Broadcasting (FOPB) rejected the Charter, asserting that ‘adding a few social objectives will not deflect TVNZ’s commercial momentum’. Citing seven points of failure, FOPB argue for wider-ranging public debate on the issues of a non-commercial channel, and for an end to the exploitation of TVNZ as a cash cow (FOPB, 2001: 1). Writing on the subject of what appeared to be Labour’s slippage on the issue of public broadcasting reform, Peter Thompson suggested that the new policies provided a test case for Third Way thinking, promising eventual empirical evidence on whether attempts to fuse social democratic goals with a free trade approach are more than wishful idealism (1999: 1). The Screen Producers and Directors Association (SPADA) lobbied for a local content quota as the best way of preserving and extending diversity and local content on television (SPADA, December 2001). Following substantial public debate, the Charter was finally implemented as part of the TVNZ Act in March 2003, which also reconstituted TVNZ as a Crown Owned Company. Under the Act, TVNZ’s television and transmission arms are to be separated – a decision criticized for its emasculation of the broadcaster’s ability to implement its chartered goals (Kedgley, 2003). More importantly, retention of advertising as the primary source of revenue for TVNZ means the tension that has long frustrated public broadcasting in New Zealand will continue, and be compounded by the imminent expense involved in the introduction of digital television.

Despite TVNZ’s new Charter, NZOA remains the arbiter of production funding, still caught between the obligations of culture and broadcasting’s commercial imperative. With ongoing allocation of public monies to the private commercial broadcaster TV3, the existence of NZOA implicitly undermines the new public broadcasting identity being forged for TVNZ.
Continued commitment to market solutions also infused settlement of the local content quota issue. Voluntary quotas negotiated between NZOA, SPADA and the two broadcasters were finally settled in June 2003 with different quotas set for each channel: TV One (50%), TV2 (17%) and TV3 (20%) (NZOA, 2003). The quotas specify minimum hours for ‘at risk’ genres, but in grouping documentary with entertainment, information and Maori programmes as a single category, plenty of scope remains for broadcasters to subvert the goal of programme diversity without breaching their quota.

Whether or not the newly restructured and chartered TVNZ will open up new and better opportunities for documentary makers, keen to address issues of social justice or national culture, will depend on how much independence and funding is given to commissioning editors and programmers. Present prospects appear limited, given the broadcaster’s financial objectives and the rhetoric of key players, for whom representing national culture continues to be more about celebration than reflection.

**Conclusion**

While New Zealand’s minimalist model succeeded in winning a prime-time audience for local documentary, despite the commercial environment, in the process it constrained the form within tightly defined strands and, with national branding severely curtailed, any social function documentary might serve either as agenda-setter for public debate or site for contested visions of national culture and identity. Expectations that opening public funds for cultural subsidy to a more diverse group of programme makers would increase programme diversity were partially met through the increased volume of local production. However, de-institutionalization, the constraints of prime-time commercial television, and low budgets led to low-risk programming that contributed to, rather than countered, homogeneity. Furthermore, the bureaucratic shortcomings attributed to the old public service in-house production system – aversion to contentious programming and the need to address balance within programmes – continued under deregulation.

As social documentary was accommodated within the broadcasting marketplace a variety of new tensions emerged: first, the commodification of the genre – addressing the audience only as consumers and not as citizens – broke with the values and concerns of the past, ‘erasing collective social memory’ in the words of one producer (Andrews, 1998). Much of broadcasting’s past was seemingly expunged from public discourse, with the introduction of market competition framed as liberation from the dull restraining hand of the state. Yet state interference continued via appointments to the TVNZ board and the dependence of NZOA, and
collaboration with market censorship as TVNZ pursued its profit mandate. For many viewers in the older demographic not sought by advertisers, the restraining hand of the market looked very dull indeed. Second, a popular preference for ‘vérité’ forms and their supposed transparency undermined any authorial voice or impetus for social meaning. Third, casualization of the production workforce intensified self-censorship and opportunism, rather than passion for social justice, as large numbers of producers competed for scarce funding. And, lastly, NZOA, drawing increasingly on business principles, branding and other marketing practices to protect its own survival, undermined the status of cultural subsidy which had been the backstop of social documentary production, tipping the balance towards industry rather than culture.

Claims that New Zealand’s branded strands won an audience for documentary and helped build a ‘documentary industry’ invoke the inherent ‘worthiness’ of the documentary idea, yet simultaneously undermine it by asserting tabloid values and glib celebratory nationalism. Whether or not publicly subsidized programming can deliver public service goals in a broadcast marketplace depends on the accommodation of priorities other than revenue and ratings. Continued subsidy for social documentary as a discrete genre is a key element in preserving television programme diversity, for as documentary’s past truth and reality claims become untenable, only social purpose remains to differentiate the genre from the ragbag of factual programming.8

Notes

1. The NZOA-funded local documentary series Work of Art played for three seasons in a late-night time-slot before being cancelled by TVNZ due to low ratings.

2. Produced by Pacific Films, the six-part series Tangata Whenua was a collaboration between Pakeha writer/historian, Michael King, who conceived the idea, and Maori film director, Barry Barclay. The series attempted to explain Maori culture to non-Maori viewers. Posing the question ‘What does it mean to be Maori?’, the series was characterized by long takes, a measured pace, respectful interviewing style and the absence of any Pakeha narrator. Film historian Russell Campbell finds the series ‘the closest New Zealand documentary had ever come to a discourse originating from within the Maori community’ (1990: 107).

3. In a recent paper on focus group research into audience response to the series, Waikato University doctoral candidate, Lisa Perrott (2001), suggested that the New Zealand Wars series acted as a catalyst for reinvigorated public debate on issues of nationhood and decolonization.

4. The other partner in the production was the series’ producer, Colin McRae’s Landmark Productions. A former journalist and current affairs producer with TVNZ, McRae approached Belich and took the idea first to TVNZ and then with their support to NZOA (McRae, 1998).

5. In 1998 the Green Ribbon Campaign held a conference ‘Local Content: An Endangered Species’ at Auckland University which was attended by actors, writers,
directors, producers, representatives of the media watchdog group, Media Aware, academics and students.

6. Other recent initiatives to increase mainstream Maori programming include an increase in the informal quota of 15–20 percent for Maori programmes within the two documentary strands, and a new strategy developed via Maori community consultation, Rautaki Maori, which outlines wide-ranging training and development goals designed to increase the quantity, quality and relevance of Maori programming (NZOA, May 2000).

7. ‘We have been determined to see New Zealand’s cultural identity represented and celebrated in film and in both public and private television’ (Marian Hobbs, Minister for Broadcasting, SPADA, December 2001: 5).


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Mary Debrett lectures in the School of Communication, Arts and Critical Enquiry at La Trobe University, Australia and is currently researching documentary funding in Australia and New Zealand for her PhD. Research interests include broadcasting policy and documentary as a social project. Address: Media Studies, Faculty of Humanities, La Trobe University, Bundoora, Victoria 3086, Australia. [email: m.debrett@latrobe.edu.au]
Localizing the global: ‘domestication’ processes in international news production

Lisbeth Clausen
COPENHAGEN BUSINESS SCHOOL

The process of making foreign news from its origin until it is aired is completely the same in every country. (NHK, Japan, Ikuo Wada, Chief Desk, interview 17 July 1997)

Introduction

The present project is an investigation of the production and output of international broadcast news in Japan. It is a study of micro processes and strategies behind the proliferation of visuals and concepts that affects our phenomenological world or our ‘global consciousness’ (Robertson, 1992) from the perspective of news producers. The development of technology and news distribution infrastructures has enabled news access anywhere in the world. The constant inflows of information and the visibility of other cultures create a cultural and social reflexivity that makes each choice in the newsrooms a conscious cultural effort. Owing to the dynamic flows of media images, texts, sounds and graphics across countries, globalization entails both an increased awareness of other cultures, often in competition with one’s local culture, and much more immediate experience of the world as a whole. News producers at the national broadcast stations, who work in the space between the global and the national, have included a reflexive hunch in their strategy for the selection and production of international stories. The Janus-faced ability of both knowing international affairs and knowing the receiving audience was found to be essential in the framing of international news information and an important element in the process of presenting events to a national audience.
While the study exemplifies both processes of homogenization and diversification in global news communication, it emphasizes the localization aspects of international news production through an analysis of actors and factors at the global, the national, the organization and the professional level of influence. It answers the following questions: what are the similarities and differences in production strategies in different national contexts (Denmark and Japan)? How do extra media factors in the national media environment influence production processes? How do organizational differences between public service and commercial broadcasting influence decision-making processes? Finally, how are professional news criteria and international news agency stories negotiated between news producers on location and editors in the international newsrooms? Japan provides an interesting case, because its public service and commercial broadcast system bears intriguing resemblences to the dual broadcast systems of the European countries. Further, the Japanese broadcast stations allocate large financial and human resources to their flagship programmes and therefore have the ability to ‘domesticate’ news (relying less on ‘homogenizing’ international agency footage).

**Japanese newsroom studies and comparative content analysis**

The study is based on interviews with 40 media experts and news producers at the major Japanese broadcast stations, and newsroom observation at the public station, NHK, and the commercial station, TV Asahi, in 1997. The interviewees include executive managers, editors, foreign correspondents, news desk personnel, scriptwriters, producers and anchorpersons. They are asked about their considerations of news production at its different stages of negotiation, from planning to finished product, and about the strategies and decision-making processes involved in producing specific news. The event in focus in this article is the 1995 United Nations (UN) Conference on Women in Beijing. The news material is based on two weeks of tape-recorded news programmes from September 1995, collected for the ‘Co-operative Study of Foreign News and International News Flow in the 1990s’ (referred to as the International News Flow Study). The in-depth interviews were conducted in Japanese by the author and transcribed into English.

**Homogenization or diversification in news globalization?**

It is argued here that processes of globalization through international news mediation cause neither total homogenization nor total heterogenization of world-views. News communication should be seen as including dialectical
and dynamic processes in which ‘news as an institution is both affected by globalization and is itself an agent of it’ (Hjarvard, 2001: 10). While media play a considerable role in the global mediation of concepts and visual impressions, international news increases the awareness and interconnectedness of social and political information and actors across borders. As described by Robertson: globalization as a concept refers both to the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole (1992:8). In this sense, consciousness precedes the experienced and lived lives of most people. As described by Giddens (1991: 187): ‘Although everyone lives a local life, phenomenological worlds for the most part are truly global.’ Robertson further argues that a characteristic of the 20th century is our participation in a twofold process of the ‘interpenetration of the universalization of particularism and the particularization of universalism’ (Robertson, 1992: 100, original italics).

The present study contributes empirical support for this statement. On the one hand, technological development and the distribution of news through international news agencies enable the global diffusion of information about events, while enhancing the interpenetration of universal (in this specific case United Nations) concepts and policies. Further, news is in many respects produced according to universally institutionalized forms of communication – following transnational genre conventions. On the other hand, as emphasized here, processes of particularization (highlighting familiar elements) are enhanced in the mediation of international information. Events are framed according to particular frameworks of interpretation shared by national audiences (or audience segments).

Theories of global news distribution and its consequential homogenization of world cognition are thus turned on their head in the present study. UN concepts and political policies, while mediated globally, are ‘domesticated’ and made particular through news production. In other words, it is claimed here (as shown in Table 1) that news ‘domestication’ is a universal phenomenon and that global news is particular to each country. International news is presented within frames of interpretation of local audiences in each nation, which makes global news particular to each country. An empirical statement by a public service international news editor sums...
up the argument: ‘Global news in Japan is not like global news anywhere’ (NHK, Chief Desk, Interview, 17 July 1997).

In sum, the mediation of international discourse is a dynamic process of meaning construction, which is influenced by multiple factors at the international as well as local level. The following exemplifies how news contains both standard, that is, universal, characteristics as well as culturally specific contextual traits. It deserves mentioning that, while standardization features of news communication are acknowledged in the presentation of results, there is an emphasis on presenting factors that enhance the processes of ‘domestication’.

**News ‘domestication’**

The notion of ‘domestication’ was brought into news production studies by Gurevitch et al. (1991) in their European study of international news. While the present study exemplifies features in international news production that enhance processes of both globalization and localization, Gurevitch et al. use the term as a counter-conceptualization to globalization. They define it as follows:

> Media maintain both global and culturally specific orientations – such as by casting far-away events in frameworks that render these events comprehensible, appealing and relevant to domestic audiences; and second, by constructing the meanings of these events in ways that are compatible with the culture and the dominant ideology of societies they serve. (Gurevitch et al., 1991: 206)

Gurevitch et al., who base their study on production, audience reception and content analysis, further state that, ‘in order to be judged newsworthy, an event must be anchored in a narrative framework that is already familiar to and recognizable by newsmen as well as by audiences’ (Gurevitch et al., 1991: 207). Within the field of global communication, the special framing of events becomes important because it facilitates the target audience’s comprehension. While the present study does not study the dimension of audience reception, but instead focuses on audience considerations from the perspective of news production, it does provide a nuanced picture of how international news is ‘domesticated’ through the study of particular news events from processes of planning until the finished products. While Gurevitch et al. provide a European perspective on ‘domestication’ processes in international newsrooms, the present study contributes a non-Western perspective.

The notion of ‘domestication’ in this project is not intended to connote an understanding of the national or nationalism as a political countermeasure to globalization. A ‘protectionist’ strategy is described by Youichi Ito as:
Excessive inflows of information and cultural products from foreign countries can endanger cultural identity. Every nation, like every individual, has contradictory desires. They want to learn from and imitate others, but at the same time they want to be different from others. Just as every individual wants to create and maintain his or her individuality, every nation wants to create and maintain its cultural identity. Then a sense of cultural identity usually includes the sense of continuity and pride or self-esteem. Therefore, although no nation would oppose inflows of foreign cultures and information per se, it would like to keep it under a certain level or under its control. (Ito, 1990: 441)

Against this backdrop, ‘domestication’ strategies as a means of protection of national identity may be at work in the international newsrooms. However, overt measures to protect national identity by controlling inflows of foreign information were not apparent in the Japanese newsrooms. At editorial meetings, there was a continuous demand on international news producers to justify the relevance of their news in terms of audience appeal. This, however, according to the statements of the news-producing management, was more due to business concerns than to efforts to protect national identity. Thus, in short, ‘domestication’ in the present project refers to processes of making information comprehensible to audiences in a given culture.

It is worth mentioning that the news agenda in Japan differs in some respects from that of other countries, as described in content analyses of news flow (Clausen, 2001; Cooper-Chen, 1992; Cooper-Chen and Kanayama, 1998; Miller, 1994). The difference in news mix is mainly due to the global position of Japan and its differing interest in international news due to its political and historical background (following the ‘domestication’ thesis this may be true for every country). As noted above, the ability to ‘domesticate’ relies to a great extent on the national media organizations’ financial resources. The Japanese stations allocate vast amounts of money to the production of their flagship news programmes – a strategy that enables the presence of Japanese-held cameras and highly qualified staff around the world.

The following sections return to the topic of strategies of communication and outline the main observation at the four levels of analysis, namely the global, the national, the organizational and the professional contexts of news production.

The global level: ‘domestication’ strategies in Denmark and Japan

The comparative analysis at the global level of analysis shows that although formats and framing processes were similar in the Danish and Japanese presentations in some respects, the communication strategies, the discourses (themes) in focus and the choice of actors included elements of
‘domestication’ that made news content differ in terms of national socio-political context.

Communication strategies

Specifically, the analysis of communication strategies provided examples of how national public service and commercial broadcasters in the two countries package news presentations (form, studio-decoration, narrative style) and create the brand image (the station profile, message) according to similar global formats: the jingle, the opening logo, the marking of the international news section with a symbol of a globe and the introduction of specific news with a representational icon or logo was found to be similar across cultures. The insertion of signs to support the macrostructure (Van Dijk, 1991) of visuals in the programme, thereby providing coherence in news progression, was similar. Just as the reader of a newspaper glances at headlines and identifies different sections in the newspaper, viewers use visual instalments for guidance. A significant difference between the Danish and Japanese news programmes was the comprehensive use of written headlines in the Japanese programmes. Each piece of news, together with smaller sequences within it, was marked by an explanatory headline. The extensive use of headlines is similarly found in China and the literate cultures of Asia that, like Japan, make use of Chinese characters.

The aesthetic expressions and the choreography of actors in the presentations similarly followed the conventions of ‘factuality’ in the news genre. These conventions include the format, studio decoration, the ritual performances of socio-political actors and professional news presenters, the cutting pace, the framing of visuals and the staging of immediacy in live reporting.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the formats of the four programmes are designed and inspired by features of news transmissions styles of the English public service station BBC and the US commercial broadcasters ABC, CBS, NBC. The formats of the Danish stations TV-avisen and News 7 and the Japanese public service station NHK resemble the BBC News Service broadcast style, which is characterized by a conventional opening sequence with a static view of the newsreader in the studio. The studio at the Danish public service/commercial station Nyhederne is open, with cameras in the background as is common in US commercial broadcasts. Nyhederne, although it does not show commercials during the news programme, as does its Japanese counterpart News Station, has incorporated other ideas from the US commercial stations. Flyers and stringers of advertisement between news items work as appetizers and invite audiences to stay with the evening programme flow on the channel after the news.
The presentation at the Japanese commercial station TV Asahi is modelled after the co-anchorage style of the US commercial broadcasters. The TV Asahi studio is open and the presenters, including a female anchor, a male anchor and a male commentator, provide commentary through interaction. The interactive style was introduced by TV Asahi in the 1980s and followed by other commercial stations in Japan. Following the break with the Danish public service monopoly (Hjarvard, 1999), commercial elements were introduced in the late 1980s and early 1990s in Denmark.

Both commercial and public service programme newsreaders and newscasters radiate objectivity and authority. They appear to be Danish and Japanese, representing the mainstream population in both countries rather than ethnic or minority groups. Their appearance, personality and clothing include no sharp colours or individual character, which might distract

**FIGURE 1**
*News formats in Denmark and Japan*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Station</th>
<th>Programme</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DR1. TV-avisen</td>
<td>19.00–19.30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NHK. News 7</td>
<td>19.00–19.30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV2 Nyhederne</td>
<td>21.00–21.30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV Asahi, News Station</td>
<td>21.54–23.18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
attention from the news information. The didactic paternalistic way in which information is presented, the use of modalities, the factual reading of the news are characteristic of the news genre in the national broadcasting of the two countries. The impression and atmosphere signal factuality and trustworthiness. It should be mentioned that the style of the newscaster at TV Asahi’s News Station, Kume Hiroshi, differs from these norms. Kume Hiroshi is popular due to his emotional exclamations, laughter and idiosyncratic comments. Although the famous newscaster was on holiday during the two weeks of analysis, statements by newsroom staff bear witness to the importance of his personality in programme production (Clausen, 2001).

As illustrated in Figure 2, all stations create a sense of immediacy and proximity. The sense of time and space is ‘here’ and ‘now’, although the stories are edited in Beijing and therefore not in real time. (The time difference to Beijing is minus 2 hours in Japan and plus 8 hours in Denmark). The setting in the first report on the UN Conference on Women, a continuing news story, is established through professionals on location. The immediacy effect is intended to elicit a feeling of closeness to the event on the part of the viewer, while at the same time enhancing the sense of factuality. In other words, the fact that professionals are on location adds to a perceived sense of reality of the event. As confirmed by news professional and researchers alike, the documentation effect of visual communication is high. ‘Events that provide interesting visuals are more newsworthy than events with unclear, ambiguous or no visuals’ (interview, Director of Foreign News, Fuji TV, 2 July 1997). Mediation of events by ‘our’ news reporters provides interpretation from a Japanese and Danish perspective by a news personality familiar to the audience.

Using the station’s own visuals adds to the perception of the event as immediate and real. Visual impressions captured by the media organization’s own camera also enable ‘domestication’ processes (i.e. framings of stories according to national, cultural, organizational and professional interests). The Danish reports are produced mainly with their own visual

FIGURE 2
‘Live’ on location reporting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DR</th>
<th>TV2</th>
<th>NHK</th>
<th>TV Asahi</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

[Image of four different newscasters from different stations]
footage. DR1’s correspondent is outside on one occasion and the live
filming of the festivities inside is accomplished with the station’s own
cameras. TV2 microphones are in the picture on two occasions. Whereas
the Danish visuals are clearly from their own cameras, it is more difficult
to evaluate the origin of the Japanese visuals, especially in the extensive
reports on government speeches by the Japanese stations, described below.
These visuals may be from pool arrangements, international news agencies
or their own pictures.

The Danish and Japanese visual dynamics and cutting pace were found
to follow the genre conventions in news. The visuals in the Danish
presentation, although the average cutting pace (frames per minute) does
not differ from the Japanese, appear dynamic. Where the story in the
Danish presentation is told by visual sequences connected to an over-
arching theme, the narrative at NHK and the first part of TV Asahi’s more
than 5-minute report are illustrated by a slow-moving visual protocol
account of government representatives. Visuals in the Japanese case merely
support the narration and not vice versa. As stated by a foreign correspon-
dent ‘NHK has its own visual aesthetics’ (Interview, European Correspond-
ent, September 1997). This verbal account oriented production style, which
is mainly employed at NHK, resembles what the news producers in the
NHK newsroom referred to as ‘newspaper production style’. This is
exemplified in the news under analysis. The foreign correspondent makes a
voice-over report on location where the visual overview merely serves to
illustrate his narration. The cameras in this overview move slowly from
one dignitary to the other, combining close-up pictures of actors with
audience panorama views. In the presentation of the commercial station,
the cutting pace and the dynamics of the pictures pick up somewhat in the
second half of the report. However, as most of the story is based on
interviews, the camera rests upon the interviewees for long sequences. By
contrast, the Danish interview presentations include clips of passing Indian
women in colourful saris, which adds excitement and colour to the visual
impression. The ‘newspaper production style’ of NHK complies with
observations of US political scholar Krauss (1995), who comments that this
style differs from the visual focus of US commercial news production,
where professional storywriters direct events and visuals follow their
accounts.

In sum, the composition of aesthetic elements, including logos, framing
of visuals, graphics and props, is found to follow similar (universal)
procedures in Danish and Japanese media contexts. The procedures and
conventional practices are grounded in professional values (as discussed
further below) that ensure real and objective presentations of news through
what Norwegian media scholar Knut Helland refers to as incorporated
‘objectivity claims’ in textual production (Helland, 1999). Another genre
convention is the staging of professional and socio-political actors. An
in institutionalized use of sources forms a ‘web of facticity’ (Tuchman, 1978) and legitimizes information. The staging of actors is exemplified in the following.

**Actors in international news**

The public service stations mainly represented voices of the international, political and social elite, while the commercial station represented multiple voices, including those of ordinary people and grassroots organizations. Specifically, the Danish stations showed longer sequences with South African Winnie Mandela and showed interviews with ministers and government representatives. The commercial Danish station additionally showed interviews with an NGO participant. The Japanese stations presented Chinese Prime Minister Jiang Zemin, the Japanese Socialist Party member Doi Takako, the conference leader Gertrude Mongella and Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto. The commercial Japanese station additionally showed interviews with representatives including the Japanese Lawyers’ Council, an ordinary Japanese participant, a female Japanese NGO participant (lawyer) and ordinary participants in the NGO forum from Jamaica, Canada and the USA. In sum, the active voices were few at the public service stations and many at the commercial stations.

The analysis thus reveals that the public stations featured representatives of the international and domestic political elite, while the private stations, especially the Japanese, gave voice to a more diverse group, including ordinary citizens as well as members of the social elite. It is also revealed that the choice and orchestration of actors reflected the political and ideological views of the broadcasting organizations. Whereas the public stations in the two countries represented the system and a pro-government ideology, the constellation of actors in the commercial station presented the people and an anti-government ideology. Such political tendencies were most pronounced in the Japanese broadcast news, as elaborated further below.

In conclusion, the social actors represented in the analysed news broadcasts largely reflected the regional and national affiliations of Denmark and Japan. The Danish presentations featured Danish politicians. Mandela was presented as significant while the Chinese were constructed as a distant Other. Mandela was not mentioned in the Japanese news. From a number of UN representatives, the Japanese chose to focus on Japanese and Chinese government officials. The United States was clearly a significant other in the Japanese presentations. Where NHK was pro-US, TV Asahi was critical. The critical tone in the Danish presentations towards the Chinese organizers was not found in the Japanese news. Although news producers at both Japanese stations agreed that the
organization of the event was problematic, this was not an issue in their reports. Rather than being critical, they concluded that problems such as these are to be expected in a country like China. It should be mentioned that political and diplomatic relations were of great concern in the newsrooms (Clausen, 2001).

**UN discourse as presented in Denmark and Japan**

The analysis of discourses in news revealed that the general themes of the UN Conference, namely Equality, Development and Peace, were framed differently across cultures. Moreover, in the Japanese news there were great differences in framing as a function of the pro- and anti-government views of the stations. In all reports, the notion of equality (between women and men) was strongly connected with the concept of human rights. The Danish stations chose negative frames of reference for their stories. They made on-location descriptions of the conditions at the Beijing Conference, positioning the Chinese organizers as being in direct contrast to the UN themes: ‘The Chinese organizers exemplified everything but equality, development and peace.’ Rather than making political commentary or relating the UN concepts to domestic politics, which was the approach taken by the Japanese stations, the Danish reports made reference to conditions on location while drawing on political discourse concerning human rights and gender issues in developing countries. Seemingly, as a frontier in gender equality issues, the Danish stations did not debate issues in relation to home conditions while Japanese presentations witnessed curiosity to measure the progression of issues such as equality and peace in relation to Japan.

The Japanese stations treated the theme of equal rights from a domestic political perspective. NHK, the public service station, described step-by-step how the Japanese government intended to implement the ‘Platform of Action’ for gender equality in Japan. TV Asahi, the commercial station, elaborated on the theme of peace, taking the opportunity to criticize the Japanese government’s treatment of victims of the Second World War, including the ‘comfort women’. The problem of ‘comfort women’ (young girls from surrounding Asian countries forced to provide sexual services to the Japanese army) is still a public issue in Japan, as many of the women have come forward demanding compensation for these war crimes. In contrast to the critical Danish reports, the Japanese stations did not offer any criticism of the conditions at the conference in China. TV Asahi put Chinese nuclear testing on the agenda but, according to the news producers, this was in order to criticize nuclear testing rather than a deliberate strategy to criticize China. Thus UN discourses were represented differently due to differing strategies in the two national contexts.
In conclusion, when watching Danish and Japanese international news, casual viewers would immediately recognize familiar elements of the news genre and might experience a resemblance in news formats. This first glance thus confirms the notion of a universal format familiar to viewers worldwide. On closer analysis, however, distinctions appear. The systematic analysis of communication strategies, discourses and actors in news content in Denmark and Japan exemplifies elements of both global (universal) and local (particular) factors that influence international news production. Similar formats, framing processes and presentation styles across nations bear witness to universal communication features in news mediation. The awareness of national positioning and involvement in world affairs as important factors in the choice of themes and actors indicates deliberate ‘domestication’ strategies by national broadcasters.

The subsequent sections further illustrate how these strategies are influenced by national, organizational and professional factors. Note that these observations are made in a Japanese context.

The national level: the political character of Japanese news

Everyone in the Japanese media will insist that they are not engaged in politics, and in reality that is what it is all about. (TV Asahi, Chief Director, interview, 25 November 1997)

As noted above, the Japanese presentations were distinct in their clear pro- and anti-government presentation styles. An investigation of the Japanese media environment and factors external to the media clarifies why. Four observations serve to illustrate factors in the Japanese media environment that influence international news production as well as to exemplify ‘domestication’ processes. First, because the Japanese media are highly politicized, different views on parliamentary processes are presented in their news programmes. Second, the difference between the public service and commercial news presentation styles and news mix provides viewers with a variety of different news programmes and consequently different international news presentations. Third, exclusive agreements with international news agencies and national Western broadcasters result in differentiated use of Western sources. And, finally, strategies of regional focus in news presentations support the ‘domestication’ thesis. The observations are discussed in turn.

The dual Japanese public-commercial system (including the public service provider, NHK and four national broadcasters, TV Asahi, TBS, Fuji TV and NTV) was found to provide Japanese viewers with a variety of news programmes. NHK, a provider of traditional factual news, represents one end of the spectrum, while NTV, a provider of social information in entertainment form, represents the other. Second, despite legal aspirations
to keep broadcast news politically neutral, domestic politics do influence the production of text and images. Although executive managers of the international news departments at the major broadcast stations claimed that professional criteria of objectivity and the legal stipulations of broadcast law caused them to refrain from political involvement, newsroom negotiations and news output at NHK and TV Asahi showed clear pro-government and anti-establishment stands. The affiliation between Japanese broadcast stations and the Japanese newspapers (see Table 2) that represent particular political views may provide explanations for the political ‘spin’ in broadcast news. The political character of the Japanese media and the differing agendas of public and private stations were thus found to affect the strategies for global news processing.

Another significant observation was the close connection between the Western networks and the Japanese national broadcasters. Through cooperation and exclusive agreement, the Japanese news producers are closely connected with and rely on their affiliated sources for what they perceive as reliable information. The availability of material from, and professional connections with these suppliers enhance the Japanese broadcasters use of material from their affiliates. Thus, from a globalization perspective, the close cooperation with Western agencies and national networks is potentially a strong factor of Western influence on international news production in Japan. Many of the Western international agencies and US national network news providers offer the same news menus (Paterson, 1998) and the programme mixes of the three US national networks are very similar (Miller, 1994). However, ‘domestication’ strategies in news production depend not only on agency access, but also on the economic capability of the news organization. As noted above, NHK and TV-Asahi have vast resources in the form of Japanese correspondents stationed around the world, which enable ‘domestication’ processes.

Finally, a regional focus and transference of resources from the Western to the Eastern part of the world were expressed as strategic plans at higher management levels. These measures support the notion that news distribution is becoming increasingly diversified and stratified in a global perspective.
Thus, the political character (pro- and anti-establishment), the dual broadcast system (public service and several private news suppliers), the differentiated affiliation to international news suppliers and, finally, regionalization strategies were factors supporting the ‘domestication’ hypothesis. The vested interest in US affairs and the strong reliance on international agencies were factors supporting the thesis of global (Western) influence.

The organizational level: public service and commercial TV

While the studies of news content above provided examples of different communication strategies in the two countries, the interview survey and observation at NHK and TV Asahi provides empirical evidence that organizational factors – including decision-making processes, newsroom practices and general institutionalized strategies behind news production – affect global news presentation. Practices at the public service and the commercial station differed greatly in several respects. The following summarizes the main observations at the organizational level.

The public interest strategies versus commercial business strategies at NHK’s News Seven and TV Asahi’s News Station were found to be the prime factors of influence on production procedures at the organizational level. The fact that public fees finance NHK turns the focus of NHK news mediation to political processes and public interest concerns. News Station was originally conceived as a money-generating programme based on commercial income, which has naturally influenced the overall strategies of the programme. Whereas NHK news producers are regular NHK employees, the News Station staff includes personalities from the TV Asahi Broadcasting Company as well as independent production companies. The NHK news producers are specialists within their field and the production process is negotiated between professional news experts. On the other hand, at News Station, generalists are employed in many key positions and traditional journalism and technically difficult international news items are often processed so as to interest a more general audience, as exemplified below.

The observed organizational difference between the two flagship programmes is partly due to the fact that the news producers at NHK are responsible for several news programmes, while News Station has its own production unit. Authority in the production hierarchy differs according to the organizational structure at the two stations. At NHK, there is a hierarchical production line in which decision-making power is a function of position in the hierarchy. At News Station, a strong focus on individual personalities (in particular the anchors) and the importance associated with the programme greatly influence the decision-making structure with respect to the preparation and arrangement of news.
In sum, the analysis at the organizational level highlighted differences and similarities in communication strategies and in-house norms at NHK and TV Asahi. The most outstanding organizational difference guiding production practices and composition of news was the pro-government political ethos of the public service station and the anti-establishment ethos of the commercial station. (The political demarcation of the Japanese stations was more noticeable than that of their Danish counterparts.) While the analysis at this level provided knowledge about general procedures in the news organizations, the study at the professional level explores and reiterates the notion that general production formulae characterize the world-views of the news producers at the two broadcast stations.

The professional level: ‘news’ and ‘views’ strategies

The study at the professional level provides insights into the implementation and emergence (Mintzberg, 1987) of strategies (including factors from the above levels) in individual action as concerns the production of specific news. First, the analysis at this level shows how news producers ‘domesticate’ events in situ through efforts to make information understandable to national audiences. Second, the specific production formulae (objective/subjective, news/views, pro-/anti-establishment) making news content differ are exemplified. Third, it is pointed out how news producers’ expert versus generalist schemes of knowledge guide their choice of themes on location. And, finally, the analysis at this level exemplifies the interaction between news producers and the use of international news sources on location.

The non-partisan view and adherence to traditional news reading at the public station was in contrast to the partisan focus on individual opinion at the private station. The fact that members of the international newsroom at NHK are educated as journalists within the company, as opposed to the news producers at the commercial station, who have a variety of backgrounds, has important consequences for the framing of issues. The news negotiation process at NHK was influenced by traditional journalistic news values and expert knowledge, and the final news was greatly influenced by professionalism. News values at NHK were characterized by the view of its own staff as traditional, conventional and reliable. (This image of NHK news was widely held by news producers at the private stations.) News values at News Station, as noted by its own staff as well as observers, may be characterized as proximate, interesting and instantly gratifying. Whereas shared professional practices and news-making procedures at NHK were guided by strategic measures to make objective non-partisan news from a systems perspective, the shared professional practices at News Station were guided by strategies to make subjective and anti-establishment news from the point of view of the people.
The preparation for and production of news on the UN Conference on Women exemplifies how the in-house norms were implemented and negotiated in the production process. NHK news producers would frame news in terms of the station’s capacity as a government spokes-channel, and consequently sought to offer little criticism of government action and less of international political partners of importance to Japan. In cases of criticism (e.g. the US criticism of China by President Clinton on the second day of the UN Conference on Women), NHK attempted to be less critical than the international news agencies and at most offered indirect criticism using agency material. It was also found that the NHK journalists’ in-depth knowledge of Chinese–Japanese political and economic relations, metaphorically speaking, caused their spectacles to focus on political processes and international politics rather than on conference themes related to women’s issues.

The Asahi news producers, on the other hand, were not guided by elaborate schemes of knowledge about the economic and political implications of the conference or by knowledge of Sino-Japanese relations. Their approach was to cover the events of the conference through observation and interviews about popular issues. Entertaining, informative and critical reportage about unfolding events illustrates their efforts to frame what the reporters referred to as the atmosphere on location with national audiences in mind. The in-house norms reflected in the TV Asahi news producers’ strategies were (a) an eagerness to cover gender issues in Japan in relation to foreign advances, and (b) an effort to cover the issue of comfort women, a recurrent public concern.

In sum, the overall strategy of NHK news producers was (albeit with a pro-government bias) to make objective news in the traditional journalistic sense through a rational appeal and with political commentary. TV Asahi’s efforts to make a more popular appeal may be described as a subjectivist emotional approach to news coverage. Subjectivity, according to Cottle (1999: 11), ‘may be constructed through a variety of textual means, including prominent use of visuals, popular language and interviews designed to elicit emotive and experiential accounts’. These were features prevalent in the TV Asahi presentations. However, in spite of the emotional and subjective appeal of News Station, which is also referred to as a ‘well-researched infotainment programme’ (Cooper-Chen, 1997), it was found that the production of international news included many elements of traditional hard news coverage. In support of this observation, it should be mentioned that the Japanese public service station and the commercial station analysed were more factual and information-intensive in their approach to international news coverage than were their Danish counterparts (Clausen, 2001).

Finally, the systematic analysis of communication strategies, discourses and actors in news content in Denmark and Japan exemplifies elements of
both global and local factors of influence on international news production. Similar formats, framing processes and presentation styles across nations bear witness to universal communication features of news mediation, a finding that supports the homogenization thesis. The strategies and factors of influence listed at each level served to illustrate news ‘domestication’. Two main factors supporting the notion of ‘domestication’ across levels were: first, an intentional effort to make information understandable to national audiences, which was incorporated into professional mental scripts and models for news production; second, contextual differences at the national, organizational and professional levels caused news content to differ.

**Conclusion: the integrative character of national broadcasting**

Although recent research shows a decline in the politically and nationally integrative role of national news broadcasting, the present analysis argues that national broadcasters, in spite of growing international competition, maintain a competitive edge through their ‘domestication’ competencies.

At the global level, the large international mediators of political and cultural information, CNN International and MTV, employ market strategies of diversification and segmentation (Volkmer, 1999). At the regional and national level, new concepts of diversity are found, especially within the field of political communication, in response to a growing social and political pluralism that corresponds to the diversity of the information environment (Neuman, 1991: 38). In the US, the shares in the market of the established networks, ABC, CBS, NBC and PBS, are decreasing in a highly fragmented market. The original goal of domestic programming for government-regulated or public service broadcasters was social integration: a political unification through the use of a domestic news framework (Dahlgren, 1995). The concept of unification, according to Dahlgren, is in decline. This is also observed in the fall of public service broadcasting market shares in Western and Southern European countries. The services are losing their cultural function in many countries, and are facing increasing competition from other national and international broadcasters. This trend includes the news sector.

In light of these changes, the present study found that Japanese national news producers, in spite of concerns regarding growing international and national competition (enhanced by 400 satellite channels), envision a continued need for national broadcasting. In spite of future strategies of segmentation to cater to individual needs in the development of new channels, executive managers envision no crises for their national flagship programmes. Rather, according to their predictions, the increasing international competition and growing availability of new channels make
Japanese national broadcasts in the Japanese language as pertinent as ever. The financial and human resources of the national broadcasters were found to enhance the ability to frame information for national audiences. The interpretations of Japanese political processes and the translation of news into Japanese were perceived by executive management at all national stations as being a competitive edge and raison d’etre of the national flagship programmes. Detailed study of NHK and TV Asahi revealed their capability – in their role as mediators between the global and the local – to ‘domesticate’ information.

The observations in this study are summarized in a discussion on universal (globalizing) and particular (domesticating) elements in production strategies. In the final analysis, the production of international news may be ‘characterised by a tension between the particularistic and the common; the shared world and the divided one; the effort to defend cultural borders and, at the same time, the effort to blur them’ (Cohen, 1996: 154). In other words, the challenges of the international newsrooms were twofold. On the one hand, efforts were made to make international news a mirror on the world; on the other hand, efforts were made to ‘domesticate’ international information for national audiences. Thus we see a dialectical process in which universal communication features are used in local meaning creation.

Notes

I would like to thank Professor Youichi Ito at Keio University, Japan, for making the initial introductions to NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute and for arranging access to the international newsrooms at NHK and TV Asahi.

1. The project ‘Coorporate study of Foreign News and International News Flow in the 1990s’ is coordinated by Professor Robert Stevenson of the University of North Carolina and Professor Annabelle Sreberny at Leicester University. A description of the project and a list of participants are available on the project web site: http://sunsite.unc.edu/newsflow/

2. Much television and other media content has been effectively internationalized in terms of genre or format, even when it is locally produced. Typical of such ‘international formats’ are quizzes, games shows, soap operas, telenovellas and other dramatic fiction genres, the news itself, sporting events chat shows (McQuail, 1992).

3. The origins of visuals are only noted on rare occasions. Consequently, it is difficult to determine the original source of events without being able to compare with news agency output. In the DR1 report, an interview was conducted with Winnie Mandela showing DR1 and TV2 microphones, thus indicating that this is the station’s own footage.

4. The Japanese pool arrangement includes the five main TV stations in Japan: TV Asahi, Fuji TV, NTV, Tokyo TV and NHK take turns filming big events and press conferences abroad; responsibility shifts at one-month intervals. The visuals
are distributed to all pool members (Interview, NHK Satellite section manager, September 1997).

5. TV Asahi, Chief Director, Interview 25 November 1997.

6. In the government speech, Nosaka Koken merely expresses appreciation to the government and the People’s Republic of China for the efforts to ensure the success of this Conference. ‘It is indeed significant and an opportunity that the Fourth World Conference on Women should be held in China, a country that has achieved remarkable economic progress, and a country where women hold up half the sky’ (UN Press Release, 1995).

References


Lisbeth Clausen holds a PhD from Copenhagen Business School where she is currently employed as an Assistant Professor. Her research interests include global communication, information management and news production in Japan.

Address: Department of Intercultural Communication and Management, Copenhagen Business School, Denmark. [email: lc.ikl@cbs.dk]
A world in retreat: the reconfiguration of hybridity in 20th-century New Zealand television

Brennon Wood
Sociology Programme, Massey University, New Zealand

INTRODUCTION

Not that long ago, television was a medium preoccupied with underwriting a taken-for-granted realm of the normal. As many commentators have argued, however, over the latter part of the 20th century its content increasingly departed from any such sense of the mundane. These departures were signalled in particular by the advent of hybridizations that cut across the categories into which programming is customarily divided. Television’s cultural forms have lost their former rigidity and are increasingly confounded. What was once kept apart is now mixed together.

One way of approaching media content is to divide it into types, as in the genre analysis initially developed in film studies. There are, of course, numerous ways to categorize television output and thus many controversies between the advocates of competing classification systems. Recent programming developments, however, have called the classificatory drive itself into question. Why insist on making distinctions when, as Corner (1996: 43) comments, ‘television’s generic system shows an increasing tendency towards hybridisation and reflexiveness’? If televised culture has become comprehensively intertextual then any attempt to define discrete types seems wrong-headed. The analysis of hybridity has thus typically been conducted by investigating particular programmes rather than by exploring large-scale quantitative variations. However, if hybridity is content that somehow transgresses distinct categories then analysis must begin by defining the distinctiveness of these categories. As we must understand the distance that is crossed, formal content analysis still has its uses.
To date, the most systematic analyses have developed in the field of documentary studies and have accordingly focused attention on the advent of prime-time ‘reality programming’ in particular (see for example Bondebjerg, 1996; Corner, 1996; Kilborn and Izod, 1997; Nichols, 1994). ‘Reality TV’, with its radical mixing of fact and fiction, is certainly an important part of the puzzle. However, to focus narrowly on such programming risks misunderstanding contemporary developments. An overemphasis upon the stylistic departures of reality TV fails to appreciate much of what is indeed novel about hybridization in the 1990s. As Kilborn (1994: 421) comments, ‘there is nothing intrinsically new about most of these reality strands’. Moreover, to treat hybridity as a variation upon the documentary tradition is clearly limited, for documentaries have always been more significant as film than as television. Analysis needs to consider both a broad historical frame and a wide range of television content. Only on these terms can we begin more fully to appreciate the complexity of televisual hybridization.

My intention here is to expand the historical context in which hybridity is discussed and thus to deepen the appreciation of its complexity. Hybridity is not all of one piece. Drawing upon diverse resources, it comprises a range of different types that have developed unevenly over time. I investigate these shifting configurations over the past 30 odd years of New Zealand television. Hybridity is typically equated with a radical undermining of the distinction between fact and fiction. I show, however, that such undermining is characteristic of recent developments rather than of hybridity per se. By focusing on trends in programming as a whole rather than in prime time in particular, I highlight the significance of infomercials, a hybridization that has largely been ignored in discussions to date. The analysis thus sheds light on the relationship between hybridity and the commerce of television.

Mapping the field of hybrid transgression

The analysis of hybridized television has centred on changes in the status of reality, focusing in particular on the mixing together of styles that formerly segregated the domains of fiction and non-fiction. My interest here is also with the discursive relationship between televised contents and any sense of a world outside these contents. Invoking the problematic status of reality inevitably raises the spectre of interminable philosophical dispute and I do not propose to resolve such ancient arguments here. Proceeding without the benefit of meta-theoretical certainty, I will pragmatically treat reality as a product of televisual discourse. Reality refers here to the discursive construction of worldliness, of a peopled realm of things and events. By this count, then, reality is not the preserve of one sort of
programming. Rather, all media content produces worldliness and so can be typed according to the variety of ways in which it accomplishes this sense of the real. Generally speaking, television can be divided into four modes – fact, fiction, entertainment and advertising. Each of these four modes produces reality in a distinctive way.

**Fact**

Factual programming privileges the sense of an objective world outside the confines of the content and to which that content refers. The characteristic types of factual television are news, current affairs, documentaries, practical advice shows and religious broadcasts. These contents tend towards ‘the discourses of sobriety’ that, as Nichols (1994: 47) puts it, ‘attempt to represent the state of affairs in the historical or natural world itself rather than offer openly imaginative representations of it’.

**Fiction**

Fictional programming conveys the sense of a world that is imaginatively constructed within the confines of the content itself. The characteristic types of television fiction are drama, feature film and some forms of comedy. These contents internalize reality; as Nichols (1991: 109) says, ‘we enter into a fictional world’ as ‘a unique imaginary domain’. Accordingly, the truths of fiction ‘cannot be arrived at by a shortcut through causal history’ (Branigan, 1992: 200). The people and events depicted are not located in an external world; they are characters and stories whose relations make sense within the invented context.

**Entertainment**

Entertainments represent people who exist beyond the confines of the content itself. These people act ‘as themselves’ in televised fora that have been specifically designed for the exhibition of spectacles of various kinds (public talk, singing, competing for prizes and so on). The characteristic types of programming are game shows, musical acts, talk shows, variety programmes, broadcast sport and some forms of comedy. These entertainments convey a theatrical sense of reality as performance.

**Advertisement**

Advertisements market products, typically in 30–60-second ‘spots’ grouped together in segments. Each advertisement refers to a commodity that exists
outside its content and aims to increase the circulation of that commodity. These commercials, however, ‘are not “about” products, but are images of desire and pleasure that overwhelm the product they are attached to’ (Fiske, 1987: 116). As Williams (1980: 185) argues, the crucial message of modern advertising is ‘that the material object being sold is never enough’. With this emphatic deferral of objective reference, advertisements displace reality; they conjure up a sense of the world through ‘magical inducements and satisfactions’.

The four conventional modes of television produce reality in discursively distinct ways. Fact externalizes reality with referential pointing while fiction internalizes the world as imaginative invention and entertainment stages reality as theatrical performance. Advertisement, on the other hand, deploys discourses of magical substitution; it conjures up the real. Although these distinctions are no more than rules of thumb, they express readily recognizable differences that can be used to further the analysis of hybridity. Of course, any typology necessarily involves a loss of detail. In assigning types of content to a mode, such as news to fact, my analysis is twice-removed from the intricacies of any particular programme. My concern here, however, is with developments across rather than within the four modes.

I propose to investigate hybridity as a distinctive form rather than as a trend within existing forms. Hence, for example, I do not consider how entertainment values have increased in programmes that remain identified and scheduled as news, but I do explore the advent of information shows about celebrities as a hybridization that systematically compounds fact with entertainment. As this implies, the four modes are ideal types that for analytical purposes are treated as constants. Though this is a significant limitation that renders the analysis incomplete, it is a useful reduction. The loss of detail at programme level is made up for by a more general purview which, I intend to show, highlights the complexity of hybridizing trends. Although a widely acknowledged characteristic of hybridity, this complexity has often frustrated attempts at analysis.

Consider, for example, the case of ‘reality TV’, an important focus of recent discussions. Kilborn (1994: 423) defines reality TV as ‘a hybrid mix of presenter talk, vérité material, dramatic reconstruction and various forms of audience participation’. Such definitions prompt attempts to nail down hybridity by identifying its characteristic internal properties. On these grounds, Cavender and Bond-Maupin (1993: 305) describe reality programming as ‘a new television genre’. Given the increased frequency of hybridized expression such attempts at generic identification are understandable, but they have not proved successful. The definition of reality TV has remained ‘notoriously imprecise’ (Kilborn and Izod, 1997: 157). Dauncey (1996: 93–5) argues that by the mid-1990s French reality shows
had become ‘increasingly resistant to a cataloguing based on programme format’. Rather than develop format typologies, he suggests a ‘thematic approach’ derived from ‘the context of general trends in French television scheduling’. On these terms he divides reality TV into everyday dramas of courage, talk about feelings and civic action. The problem with such classification, however, is quite apparent – these thematic unities do not distinguish hybridized reality from many other sorts of television content. Maintaining the sense of transgression demands some sort of formal analysis and cannot rely solely on the identification of recurrent themes.

Genre and thematic analyses fail because both can succeed only by normalizing the hybrid. They lose sight of the categorical crossing that defines this sort of content. Rather than focus on the repetition of conventional attributes, analysis must centre on the operation of relational processes. Dauncey is thus right to insist on the need to contextualize hybridity within general scheduling trends. Rather than integrate hybridity as a new genre, I will use the above four content modes to identify recurrent forms of hybrid transgression. Drawing on both existing literature and my own empirical investigations, it is clear that a delimited range of crossings between fact, fiction, entertainment and advertisement have developed. These forms of crossing are hinges that turn the conventional modes upon each other. Four characteristic hinges can be identified.

**Re-enactment**

Re-enactments are dramas and films ‘based upon’ people and events that exist in an external world. Typically this basis is signalled outside the content’s narrative flow, through the use of advance publicity and the opening and closing credits. The content itself is constructed with wall-to-wall fictional techniques and thus has the internal coherence of an invented world. As Nichols (1991: 21) argues, the re-enacted content simultaneously externalizes an historical world (to which it refers) and ‘has the status of an imaginary event’. Re-enactments thus compound invention with reference; they construct reality by hinging fact upon fiction.

**Diversion**

In an entertainment mode, diversions portray people performing ‘as themselves’ in televised fora. However, these fora are external contexts that have not been specifically designed for the spectacle presented. Such programming includes ‘making of’ shows about media productions, quasi-journalistic news about celebrities, out-take compilations of ‘bloopers’ by such celebrities, and reality programming and ‘home video’ compilations that depict unusual
events in everyday domestic and occupational situations. Reference and performance are here compounded in a detour through what Langer (1998: 35) calls the ‘especially remarkable’; these are stories concerned with the comings and goings of ‘institutional and celebrity elites’ and with the daily upsets of ‘ordinary people’. Fact is hinged upon entertainment by diverting the mundane through the exceptional and vice versa.

Absorption

Absorptions refer to extreme situations with reconstructions, vérité footage and presenters’ reports either on location or in news-like studios. Such programming includes reality TV about law enforcement, medical and emergency services, shows about dangerous stunts, natural disasters and the supernatural, along with tabloid news packages of similar material. These contents combine factual reference to situations where taken-for-granted reality has radically broken down with fictional techniques that heighten dramatic impact. Unlike re-enactments, which base fiction upon externalized fact, here fact and fiction coincide. The real is constructed through absorptions that make fact and fiction disappear into each other.

Infomercial

Infomercials are ‘programme-length commercials’ broadcast outside prime-time hours. They market products in 30-minute packages that combine multiple demonstrations with testimonials from experts and consumers, interspersed with several brief ‘hard sells’ that state the offer and provide purchasing details. Infomercials compound advertising with fact, presenting themselves as quasi-news programmes or investigative consumer reports that interview the commodity producer, studio audiences and the proverbial ‘man in the street’.

Re-enactments, diversions, absorptions and infomercials are various ways of compounding the four conventional modes of television content. Each makes a different sense of the world because each is a different way of crossing between fact, fiction, entertainment and advertisement. What is more, these differences have a history.

The historical transformation of hybridity

The above categorical distinctions have been used to undertake a content analysis of 20th-century New Zealand television. A database has been
constructed that samples all programming in the month of October for the years 1966, 1975, 1979, 1987, 1990, 1993, 1996 and 1999.\footnote{Sampling has been restricted to nationally networked, ‘free to air’ broadcasters (excluding both the regional and satellite operations of the 1990s); 14,728 individual programmes (not counting advertisements) have been coded, amounting to approximately 10,800 hours of broadcast time.} Analysis focuses on the distribution of total broadcast hours. Over the last 30-odd years of the 20th century there has been a more than thirteen-fold increase in the overall amount of televisual discourse. Here, however, my interest is in changing emphases and thus the analysis focuses on proportions rather than aggregate hours.

Beginning in earnest in 1960, television was a late arrival in New Zealand by comparison with many northern hemisphere societies. However, its subsequent development has followed a pattern familiar in much of Europe, with public monopoly steadily retreating before deregulation and privatization. Given the extent to which New Zealand television has been deregulated, the case can be expected to have some general relevance. Moreover, New Zealand television has historically relied heavily on imported content, in particular from the United States and Britain.\footnote{It has thus been described as ‘a house without a mirror’, as a medium that fails to reflect local realities (Barnett, in Norris and Farnsworth, 1997: 71). While the lack of such mirrors may thwart nationalist aspirations, it also means that the New Zealand case provides a window onto the world of Anglophone television.} As Table 1 shows, the last decade of the 20th century saw profound changes in the configuration of televisual discourse. Fiction was clearly dominant from the 1960s to 1990, comprising more than half of total content. From 1990 on, however, fiction went into relative decline; by the end of the century it had slipped to below one-third of content and was no more than marginally ahead of its nearest rival. The decline of fiction was preceded and accompanied by significant changes in relations between the

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{lccccccccc}
\hline
Advertisement & 4.8 & 8.5 & 9.4 & 11.3 & 14.7 & 19.5 & 18.4 & 16.2 \\
Entertainment & 15.7 & 16.0 & 15.9 & 10.9 & 10.7 & 14.5 & 10.3 & 12.6 \\
Fact & 22.6 & 17.9 & 14.5 & 17.8 & 14.4 & 16.2 & 21.6 & 15.8 \\
Fiction & 52.3 & 56.5 & 57.7 & 55.9 & 57.3 & 45.4 & 36.0 & 29.3 \\
Hybrid & 4.6 & 1.1 & 2.5 & 4.1 & 2.9 & 4.4 & 13.7 & 26.1 \\
Total & 100 & 100 & 100 & 100 & 100 & 100 & 100 & 100 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Content mode by year ($\%$ of total hours)}
\end{table}
three other conventional modes. Until the late 1970s, fact and entertainment were the second and third most frequent respectively, with fact gradually declining to 14.5 percent and roughly level-pegging with entertainment by 1979. From this time on the relative significance of advertisements steadily increased. By the 1990s fact and advertisement were the second and third most prominent modes of televisual discourse. At the end of the century, they stood on equal footing at some 16 percent of content, while entertainment, close behind at 13 percent, had become the relatively least frequent mode.

During the 1990s, the relative standing of fiction rapidly declined and the significance of advertisements was entrenched. This reordering was accompanied by an increasingly frequent use of hybridized expression. Until the early 1990s, hybridity was a minor feature of televisual discourse; at less then 5 percent of content it remained the least common mode. From this period on, however, it began to dramatically increase in significance. By 1996 hybridity had surpassed entertainment; three years later it had overtaken fact and advertisement as well. At the end of the century, it was only narrowly the second most common mode. Amounting to approximately one-quarter of all content, hybridity was now more or less on a par with fiction. Table 1 not only confirms claims about the increase of hybridization but also situates this trend within a far-reaching reorganization of television content. Moreover, as Table 2 shows, hybridity itself was caught up in this discursive re-ordering. The 1990s transgressions were markedly different from those of previous years.

The four hybridizing hinges have received varying emphases since the 1960s. Fictional re-enactments of fact were clearly dominant until the mid-1970s, comprising over 80 percent of all hybridized content. From 1975 on, however, re-enactment began to decline, dropping to 36 percent and second ranking in 1987 and then falling sharply throughout the 1990s such that by the end of the century it was an insignificant form of hybrid expression. The decline of re-enactment was accompanied by both innovation and expansion of alternative forms. The only other hinge operating during the

<table>
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<th>TABLE 2</th>
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<tr>
<td>Hybrid hinge by year (% of total hours)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Absorption 0.0 0.0 2.1 14.0 30.5 35.5 12.8 5.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diversion 18.9 17.5 45.3 49.7 19.4 40.2 5.8 6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infomercial 0.0 0.0 0.0 0.0 9.4 7.6 77.8 87.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-enactment 81.1 82.5 52.6 36.3 40.7 16.7 3.6 0.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total 100 100 100 100 100 100 100 100</td>
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<tr>
<td>(n = 10) (n = 8) (n = 16) (n = 35) (n = 42) (n = 79) (n = 306) (n = 763)</td>
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years of re-enactment’s dominance was diversion, coming a distant second at less than 20 percent of hybrid content. From the late 1970s, however, these compoundings of fact with entertainment increased in significance, reaching a high point of 50 percent and first ranking in 1987.

The late 1970s also saw the development of a radically new hinging of fact upon fiction. At first a relatively minor development, absorption rose from 2 percent of hybrid content in 1979 to 14 percent in 1987. By 1993 it had reached a high point of 35 percent, in second place only slightly behind diversion. From 1993 on, however, both absorptions and diversions pegged sharply downwards, such that by the end of the century each was standing at just above 5 percent of hybrid content. Their fall was matched by the rapid rise of a new non-prime-time form that compounded fact with advertising. First appearing in 1990, between 1993 and 1996 infomercials soared from 7.6 percent to 77.8 percent of hybrid content. By 1999 they stood at some 88 percent, far outstripping their nearest rivals.

The dramatic increase of hybridized expression in the 1990s took place along with considerable changes in its internal composition. Re-enactment had already been in steady decline for more than 20 years, with diversion and absorption having risen to become the two dominant hinges. From the early 1990s, however, re-enactments began to decline even more sharply, ending the century at less than 1 percent of hybrid content. During this same period, the relative significance of absorption and diversion also fell precipitously, albeit less far. By the end of the century, infomercials ruled the field. They had emphatically displaced re-enactment as the most common way of crossing between the conventional modes of televisual discourse.

**A world in retreat**

Although hybridity has been a persistent feature of New Zealand television, its relative standing dramatically increased in the 1990s, making it one of the most common forms of expression. Not only was there more of it, but there was also a dramatic change in its context and character. Late 20th-century hybridization was very different from that which preceded it. Each of the four hinges is a distinctive way of constructing the world and the people who live in it. The shifting relations between these hinges reveal the contours of a broader transformation that has undermined the post-war cultures of social and historical confidence.

From the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, content was comprehensively dominated by fiction and hybridity was the least common mode. Moreover, hybrid contents were relatively undifferentiated, with by far the great bulk consisting of re-enactments. Typically, re-enactments are biographical reconstructions that draw on the traditions of the ‘biopic’, one of the oldest
cinema genres, in which a story is premised on the life of ‘a real person whose real name is used’ (Custen, 1992: 6). In a factual mode, re-enactments refer to a world that exists outside the content itself. In factual content, however, the televised image and this external reality are indexically linked. The image and the referent correspond, as the famous definition has it, ‘point by point’. Re-enactments rupture this indexical bond (Nichols, 1991: 21). Instead of a point-by-point correspondence, fictional images are ‘based’ upon factual referents.

Facts are clearly the junior party in this hinging. In most re-enactments, ‘all the documentary elements have been subject to a thoroughgoing creative transformation’ (Kilborn and Izod, 1997: 145). Explicit references to external reality are usually assigned to the margins, as an envelope signalled in the opening and closing credits. Facts operate as a ‘base’ precisely by being systematically externalized, thus allowing the content itself to be organized along familiar fictional lines. Thus it is not surprising that re-enactments were the prevailing form of hybridity when fiction was the dominant mode of television content. Although fiction provides its main organizing principles, this hinging does not corrode the independent standing of factual reference. Indeed, quite the reverse. Re-enactments externalize facts; rather than dissolve fact into fiction they arc across the two, leaving their boundaries intact. This is a hybridization that disturbs but in so doing protects the conventional distinction between invention and reference.

The other, minor hybridity operating until the mid-1970s is a similarly limited form of transgression. Diversions hinge entertainment upon fact by representing people performing ‘as themselves’, not on some purpose-built stage, such as a talk-show studio, but rather in their own everyday lifeworlds. Thus, in many respects, diversions are diametrically opposed to re-enactments. The indexical bond between image and external referent is preserved rather than ruptured; we see the ‘real person’ in their ‘real world’, not an actor on a set. This indexical correspondence, however, does not replicate the ‘straight look’ of factual sobriety. Instead, there is a theatrical excessiveness that aligns diversions with what Langer (1998: 49), in his study of tabloid television, dubs the ‘especially remarkable’. There are two main variants of such stories – some focus on ‘the ordinary routines of extraordinary individuals’ while others deal with ‘the extraordinary actions of ordinary folk’. On the one hand, there is celebrity journalism, such as Entertainment Tonight, that takes us ‘behind the scenes’ into the lives of famous people. On the other hand there is programming like Candid Camera and the various ‘funniest home video’ compilations, focusing on typically humorous and often embarrassing upsets in the daily lives of ordinary people.

Diversions invoke news values to emphasize either the affairs of the famous or the breakdown of normal expectations in everyday life. As the
familiar interpretation has it, these values exnominate a realm of taken-for-granted routines (Fiske, 1987: 290). By obsessively highlighting what oversteps its boundaries, the news establishes an implicit and undisturbed domain of the mundane. Diversions work in the same way. According to Langer (1998: 148), these are stories about fleeting and flamboyant deviations from the everyday, deviations that underscore the ‘mastery and control’ of people who have the ‘resources, will to succeed, and self-motivating optimism to conduct their lives’. The ‘especially remarkable’ signifies that people ‘can be the principal instruments for making their own fate’.

Factual programming externalizes the world in order to depict it as readily at hand. As Nichols (1991: 3) argues, the discourses of sobriety ‘assume they have instrumental power; they can and should alter the world’. Although the two forms of hybridization in operation until the mid-1970s compounded these discourses with fiction and entertainment, neither undermined the distinctiveness of fact. Re-enactments not only preserve the externality of fact but, as Sturken (1997: 76) suggests, they are premised on the conviction that the meaning of historical events can be retrieved and creatively transformed. Diversions project reality by detouring it through the remarkable. Although they depart from sobriety, ultimately they reinforce an instrumental sense of control. These impersonations and detours thus imply a degree of confidence about the external world’s availability for effective individual action. In a context dominated by fictional invention, both re-enactment and diversion transgressively maintained the integrity of factual reference. They are conventional forms that consolidated the fact/fiction divide as the organizing axis of a televisual discourse that was marked by low levels of hybridity and a stable set of cultural discriminations.

All this, however, began to change in the late 1970s. Although the dominance of fiction continued at previous levels, the other conventional modes jockeyed for position. The most notable feature here was the continued rise of advertisements, such that by 1987 they had overtaken entertainment. Hybridity remained the least common mode, but from the late 1970s to 1990 there was considerable change in its internal composition. Re-enactments declined; although remaining in the first order, they were no longer the clearly primary form of hybridity. Their position was now challenged, not only by diversions but also by a radically new hinge. First appearing in the late 1970s, absorptions quickly rose in significance. By 1990 they amounted to nearly one-third of all hybrid expressions.

In a factual mode, absorptions use news-like reports and on location footage to refer to situations where taken-for-granted reality has profoundly broken down. These breakdowns are considerably darker than the upsets highlighted by diversions. Their themes typically concern those struck by
accident, the criminal, the diseased and the supernatural. Reference to these extremes is combined with fictional techniques that heighten dramatic impact. Like re-enactments, then, absorptions hinge fact upon fiction. For example, they often ‘reconstruct’ historical events; like re-enactments, they use actors to represent ‘real people’. In absorptions, however, these reconstructions are clearly and repeatedly labelled (often using a caption and voice-over) and are combined with other contents, including presenter talk, footage of police or medical emergency services, material from surveillance cameras and recordings (often by amateurs) of dangerous situations (Bondbjerg, 1996: 39; Fetveit, 1999: 792). Rather than wall-to-wall fictions ‘based’ on facts, here the emphasis is on a ‘packaging’ together of diverse ingredients (Kilborn and Izod, 1997: 159). As this suggests, absorption and re-enactment are quite different ways of hinging fact upon fiction.

Whereas re-enactments rupture the indexical bond between image and referent, in absorptions this link is made redundant by the simultaneity of its polarities. As Nichols (1994: 54) says of reality TV, absorption ‘succeeds in activating a sense of the historical referent beyond its bounds but also works, constantly, to absorb this referent within a tele-scape of its own devising’. Accordingly, ‘reference to the real no longer has the ring of sobriety that separates it from fiction’. Like diversions, absorptions are intoxicated by situations where everyday routines no longer apply. Diversions, however, highlight upsets that exnominates a world of effective action and thus help to sustain the distinction between fact and fiction. Absorptions, with their radical ‘aesthetics of immediacy’ (Nichols, 1994: 59), not only do away with this distinction but also thereby renounce the powers of exnomination.

Rather than exnominates the mundane with the remarkable, absorptions exhibit ‘a spectacular oscillation’ that ‘makes the strange banal’ (Nichols, 1994: 45–6). It is simply an inescapable truism that the world consists of ‘situations and events of startling horror, intense danger, morbid conduct, desperate need, or bizarre coincidence’. Individuals live in a context dominated by ‘random and inexplicable forces of chaos and darkness’ (Dovey, 2000: 95). Happy endings are the result not of actions by those subject to these forces but by the deeds of others who fortuitously appear and who can offer no more than temporary respite until the next outbreak of disorder. As Langer (1998: 149) comments, such stories are guided by ‘an undercurrent of fatalism’. This is not a world of instrumentally successful individuals; rather, it is a world peopled by the victims of uncontrollable forces. In closing the gap between image and referent, absorptions corrode the sense of an external theatre of effective action. Compared with re-enactments and diversions, then, they signal a profound loss of historical confidence.
The advent of absorptions was a prelude to dramatic changes in the composition of television content in the 1990s. During this decade, advertisements approximated the levels of factual programming, entrenching their position ahead of entertainment. More profoundly, the standing of fiction collapsed while hybridity rose rapidly to become the second most common mode. These changes were accompanied by further shifts in the forms of hybridization. Re-enactment declined to the point of virtually disappearing altogether. From 1993 on, diversion and absorption tracked downwards, their place emphatically taken by a new hinge. First appearing in the early 1990s, infomercials soared in significance to comprise nearly nine-tenths of all hybrid broadcasts by the end of the century.

Infomercials appear outside prime-time hours. Typically, they market a seemingly endless array of ‘self-improvement’ products – fitness equipment, personal growth tapes, cosmetics, dietary and cooking aids, and so on. As Caldwell (1995: 292) argues, with their lengthy form and stylistic techniques they ‘evaporate completely the distinction between program and advertisement’. Although infomercials are like ‘spot’ advertisements in that both are commodifying discourses, the two are significantly different. Unlike advertisements, infomercials are emphatically ‘about’ the product for sale. Their longer time frame allows for less symbolic compression and a protracted reiteration of the commodity’s material properties. As these references deploy the instrumental power of facts, it is not surprising that infomercials have often been charged with ‘counterfeiting the news’ (Chester and Montgomery, 1988).

Whereas advertisements conjure up the real with images of desire and pleasure, an infomercial compounds such magic with painstaking insistence that use of the commodity will directly realize these desires in the world. Reference becomes not so much a source of sobering facts as an obsessive incantation. Facts, then, are very much the junior party. References to an external world are not only linked with but also subordinated to advertising. The grounds for this subordination had already been established by the absorptions of the 1980s. By displacing the fact/fiction divide, absorptions corroded the sense of a transformable world. The 1990s intensified this displacement, most notably through a sharp reduction in the levels of fiction. The declining significance of differences between reference and invention opened up space for a new hinging of fact upon advertisement. Infomercials are thus in many respects an elaboration upon earlier cultural developments. Like absorptions, they do not project an external reality that can and should be changed. Instead, infomercials propose various ‘self-improvements’ that fit people into a reality that currently exists and in terms of which they are somehow or other deficient. Fatalistic about the world, infomercials deflect instrumentality inwards. Rather than manifestos of historical confidence, they are self-help manuals for the victimized.
Conclusion

The blurring of once-demarcated content modes is an outstanding feature of contemporary New Zealand television. As also seems to be the case elsewhere in the world, by the end of the 1990s hybrid transgression was routine. Many analysts have sought to understand this turn by focusing narrowly on developments in certain types of programming. The documentary tradition and the advent of reality TV in particular have received much attention. A portmanteau term encompassing diverse types of programming, reality TV has proved difficult to define. Moreover, generalizing on the basis of a category that is both narrow and indefinite has resulted in analyses that underplay the complexity of televisual hybridization. Paradoxically, many interpreters pose hybridity as if it were an undifferentiated category. Given that the hybrid mixes what is customarily distinguished, this charge no doubt seems misplaced. However, hybridity is often treated not just as a complex of conventional modes but also as simple in its complexity. There is a lack of attention to systematic variations that organize the field of transgression.

I have used the definition of conventional contents to identify a range of hybrid hinges. My investigation of this typology has shown that in the 1990s hybridity was both more frequent and quite unlike that of previous years. Until the mid-1970s, content was dominated by fiction and hybridity was both rare and relatively undifferentiated. Most hybridizations were re-enactments, ‘true stories’ that based fiction upon fact, while the rest were diversions that turned fact upon entertainment by detouring the mundane through the remarkable. These two hinges hybridize the factual in ways that preserve its distinctiveness. Both the relative infrequency and characteristic forms of hybridity underpinned a culture in which facts, fictions, entertainments and advertisements were separate discursive events. Stabilized by the divide between reference and invention, television content conveyed a sense of normality that robustly consigned reality to a limited array of types.

The rise of hybridity in the 1990s was preceded by a profound reordering of these discursive priorities. Although fiction remained dominant and hybridizations were still the least common form of expression, from the late 1970s there were shifts in both the relative standing of the minor content modes and in the character of hybridity itself. Signalling increased commercialization, advertisement levels surpassed entertainment and rose to near equal footing with fact. Moreover, by 1990 re-enactment had declined to the extent that it no longer unequivocally ruled the field and a new hinge, absorption, had surpassed diversion as the second most common form. Unlike the pre-existing hinges, absorptions radically undermined the projection of an external reality distinct from imaginary inventions. During the 1990s this undermining was comprehensively
generalized to televisual discourse as a whole. The erosion of the fact/fiction boundary set the stage for two subsequent developments – the collapse of fiction, both as content mode and as re-enactment hinge, and the ascendance of a new compounding of fact with advertisement, the infomercial. Surprisingly, both these developments have been largely ignored in discussions of contemporary hybridization.

Most interpreters focus on the collapse of the fact/fiction divide, arguing that there has been an erosion of the real as an objective context of human interaction. Some celebrate a populist disrespect for the status quo, others fear an Americanizing ‘infotainment’ that undermines the already vulnerable traditions of public service broadcasting (Branston, 1993; Brants, 1998). By transgressing the boundaries of once-familiar positivities, hybridity opens up opportunities that can be turned to diverse ends. It is a mistake, for example, to reduce the hybrid to an identification of fact and fiction; such identification is a characteristic of late 20th-century forms in particular. Moreover, both sides of this equation must be considered. Anchored in the documentary tradition, interpreters have been preoccupied with consequences for our sense of the factual. According to Nichols (1994: 54), in reality TV ‘reference now is a fiction’. Similarly, White (1996: 19) emphasizes how ‘the referential function of the images is etiolated’. Establishing the world through reference is certainly a crucial cultural moment; all the hybrid hinges I identify involve some sort of crossing with facts. However, a single-minded concern with the factual has downplayed the consequences for fiction. It seems to have been forgotten that the arrow runs both ways, that fiction is now reference, that the inventive function of images has been etiolated. The capacity to direct attention inwards and focus it upon an invented world has been reduced. Clearly, any interpretation of contemporary hybridity must attend to this cannibalizing of the imaginary.

The 1990s were marked not only by identifications of reference and invention but also by a new hinging that compounded fact with the magical substitutions of advertising. Despite their obvious significance for any account of hybridity, very little work has been done on infomercials. Infomercials appear overwhelmingly in the early morning hours, television’s ‘down time’. On the other hand, most systematic interpretations of hybridity have focused upon the emergence of prime-time reality TV. Clearly, there is a logic in attending to prime-time developments, not least because this is when audience levels are highest, but we should be wary of taking such a focus for granted. A number of writers have rightly argued that the recent rise of hybridized forms takes place in a context of increased commercialism (Bondebjerg, 1996; Dauncey, 1996; Dovey, 2000; Kilborn, 1994). It is certainly true that prime time is a matter of commercial definition. Paradoxically, however, concentrating on these
hours has deflected attention away from those very contents in which the impact of commerce is most strikingly evident.

Infomercials inherited the cultural terrain of the 1980s, when advertising rose to the level of facts and absorptions identified imagination with reference. By undermining the status of fiction, absorption freed up reference for recombination with the wishful thinking of advertisements. Like absorptions, infomercials do not open out upon a world that can be known and creatively transformed. Unable to change the world, its victims can aspire only to ‘self-improvement’. Commercialization in the 1990s thus reconfigured not just the conventional contents of television but their various hybridizations as well. Here too the business of broadcasting has circumscribed instrumentality and impoverished the imagination.

Notes

1. According to Gunning (1999: 47, 52), the main product of late 19th-century cinema was ‘actuality films’, often made by amateurs using concealed cameras. Films and photographs displayed ‘a new fascination with daily life and a nearly prurient interest in uncovering scandalous or otherwise deviant material’, especially in ‘the burgeoning urban slum jungle’ of the lower classes.

2. Comedic fictions are sustained, scripted and acted dramatizations, such as situation comedies.

3. Comedic entertainments are magazine-style compilations of ‘skits’ and studio or club performances by comedians appearing as themselves.


5. Fishman and Cavender’s (1998) investigation of ‘crime TV’ is an example of such thematic analysis.


7. The selection of sample years is determined by the institutional history of New Zealand television, ranging from the state monopoly of the 1960s to the late 1980s advent of deregulated and commercialized competition between ‘state-owned enterprises’ and private multinationals. See Day (2000) for an overview of these developments.

8. The primary source for programme details is the scheduling published by the New Zealand Listener, supplemented by Brooks and Marsh (1999) and a variety of online sources, notably the Internet Movie Database (http://www.imdb.com). As less than 1 percent of programmes could not be detailed, the category ‘unknown’ has been deleted from the analysis. Levels of advertising are derived from the regulatory limits that operated prior to the late 1980s and from various surveys undertaken in the subsequent years of deregulation. The main sources of advertising information are Day (2000), Suich (1997) and Yeabsley et al. (1994).

9. Of the sampled 9150 programme hours (i.e. excluding advertising), some 48 percent is US-sourced, 28 percent is locally produced and 16 percent is imported from Britain.

11. Diversions thus draw on thematic structures that are common in re-enactments. According to Custen (1992: 215), since the 1970s televisial biopics have ‘valorized the ordinary’ either by depicting the ‘elite famous’ in tabloid fashion or by focusing on ‘the lives of everyday people to whom unusual things happened’.


13. Absorptions radically generalize pre-existing themes rather than invent them anew. Representations of ordinary people as victims, for example, are also common in biopic re-enactments (see Custen, 1992: 223–8).

14. Tom (1995/6) reports that (relative to total duration) infomercials contain less information than conventional ‘spot’ advertisements.

15. Whether this decline has occurred elsewhere in the world is unknown. Dauncey (1996: 94) suggests that in France the levels of both fiction and reality TV rose during the 1990s.

References


Brennon Wood is a Senior Lecturer in Sociology at Massey University, New Zealand. He has published in the areas of cultural and media studies. His current research focuses on the institutional and discursive reorganization of broadcasting.

Address: School of Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work, Massey University, Private Bag 11 222, Palmerston North, New Zealand. [email: B.A.Wood@massey.ac.nz]
The media representation of public opinion: British television news coverage of the 2001 general election

Rod Brookes, Justin Lewis and Karin Wahl-Jorgensen

Cardiff University, Wales

Introduction

The focus of most research on mass communications and public opinion has been to explore the extent of media influence. Our concern, here, is with another aspect of this relationship: specifically, the way in which public opinion is represented by the news media. The critical literature on opinion polling has implicitly understood opinion polls as a form of representation rather than as a transparent system of measurement, and, in so doing, has understood the opinion poll as an ideologically inflected construction (see, for example, Bourdieu, 1979; Herbst, 1993; Salmon and Glasser, 1995). This has led many in media studies simply to dismiss opinion surveys as merely the flawed instruments of an empiricist method. Our approach is rather different. Once we accept that opinion polls are a form of representation, it raises the important question of how that representation works ideologically: what kinds of public opinion are produced, and what aspects of public discourse are excluded? Our interest is therefore less in public opinion polls as a method, and more as a cultural form (Lewis, 2001).

While there is interesting work on the ideological assumptions that inform polling questionnaires (see, for example, Lipari, 1996), very little of the voluminous supply of opinion data finds its way into the public domain. The central question, for us, is how public opinion is constructed in mainstream culture. Since the dominant site in which public opinion is represented and discussed is in the news media – which, as Asher (1998)...
and Ladd and Benson (1992) point out, are increasingly likely to commission or report opinion polls – this forms the focus of our study.

Although examination of the media reporting of polls is not new, the small amount of work in this area has tended to focus on the technical aspects of poll reporting, examining how far journalists accurately reflect or examine the data pollsters produce (Brady and Orren, 1992; Krosnick, 1989). Our approach is to focus on the ideological assumptions and consequences of the media representation of public opinion. Once we move to this broader question, it becomes clear that the use of polls is only one aspect of the way public opinion is represented. As King and Schudson (1995) discovered when they examined the reporting of the first two years of the Reagan presidency, journalists drew on anecdotal and impressionistic evidence to convey the impression that Reagan was a popular president, ignoring most of the polls that suggested Reagan’s poll ratings were unusually low. Journalists, in other words, invoke public opinion in many ways.

Our study analyses the diverse means through which public opinion is represented in television coverage of elections. It examines how a certain type of poll – the voting intention or ‘horse race’ poll – is privileged, while other types of opinion surveys are ignored. But it also identifies less obvious ways of representing public opinion. First, it discusses the subtle invocation of public opinion through casual and often unsubstantiated assertions about the attitude of the public made by anchors, reporters or politicians. Second, it assesses the extent to which the views of individual members of the public are made to stand in for public opinion overall, either through vox pops or through the interaction of members of the public with politicians on the campaign trail. On the basis of our findings, we argue that the representation of public opinion produced through the media has important ideological consequences.

**Context and method**

The British general election of June 2001 provides a particularly interesting case study of the media representation of public opinion. In May 1997 Labour had won a landslide victory after 18 years of Conservative rule. Four years later, the opinion polls indicated that the Labour government held such a comfortable lead that a Conservative victory would have required an unprecedented swing. Prime Minister Tony Blair declared the election on 9 May to take place on 7 June, a campaign of just over four weeks. Blair sought to make health and education the key issues of the campaign, arguing that while he acknowledged widespread public dissatisfaction with the condition of these services, Labour needed more than one term in office to put these right. As opinion polls during the campaign
showed no evidence of significant movement Conservative leader William Hague increasingly tried to appeal to public fears of growing European integration by claiming that this election was the last one where the electorate would get the opportunity to ‘save the pound’.

Our study is based on the late evening news programmes produced by BBC and ITN for the main terrestrial networks, BBC1 and ITV. The 2001 general election came at a key moment in the ratings war between BBC and ITN. From 16 October 2000, the BBC rescheduled its late evening news broadcast to 10 o’clock in an attempt to halt a long-term decline in its prime-time audience. At the same time the Independent Television Commission ordered ITV to reinstate its traditional Ten O’Clock News broadcast following a fall in ratings that had accompanied the previous rescheduling of its late evening news broadcast to 11 o’clock. For commercial reasons ITV resisted, but compromised on scheduling a 20-minute News at Ten on an average of three nights a week from 22 January 2001. From then, for the first time ever, the BBC and ITN late evening news broadcasts were scheduled in direct competition. Within this battle for ratings, both broadcasters prioritized coverage of the general election. ITN announced that it would extend its News at Ten to 30 minutes and run it over five nights a week (Guardian, 2001a). Our sample consisted of all the BBC1 Ten O’Clock News and ITN News at Ten programmes between 15 May and 7 June 2001, as well as the weekend late evening news broadcasts on BBC1 and ITV.

Our study is based on an analysis of the ways in which public opinion is invoked in news coverage of elections. We identified four categories of references to public opinion as described below.

1. **References to opinion polls.** Our starting point was to investigate the ways in which opinion polls were represented. The BBC publicly issues guidelines governing the use of opinion polls by programme makers during election campaigns (BBC, 2001). These are based on the premise that whereas polls are newsworthy and therefore cannot be ignored, there is a danger of taking single newsworthy polls out of context. The BBC’s regulations insist that bulletins should not lead with an opinion poll or headline opinion polls, that polls should be contextualized with trends, that full details should be supplied (the commissioning organization, the dates when the poll was conducted, margin of error). The guidelines even specify the language that should be used in reporting polls in order not to give them ‘greater credibility . . . than they deserve: polls “suggest” but never “prove” or even “show”’ (BBC, 2001). The BBC guidelines on reporting polls have been more widely adopted as an example of good practice – for example, by the United Nations-sponsored ACE (Administration and Costs of Elections) project (see www.aceproject.org).

However our interest lies not in whether the BBC and ITN conform to these guidelines when reporting specific polls. Rather, we were more
interested in the references to opinion polls used by reporters to back up general assertions about the 'public mood'. We quantified how many of these references were to horse-race polls, and how many were to issue polls (for example, on Europe or transport). We were also interested in whether the polls referred to were conducted on the general population or on specific social groups (for example, pensioners).

(2) Inferences about public opinion. The representation of public opinion in television news goes beyond the direct reporting of opinion polls. We also categorized the use of statements in which the views of the public in general, or sections of the public, is simply inferred often without any supporting evidence from polls. We were interested in whether these inferences about public opinion were made on-screen by politicians, indirectly reported by anchors, reporters or correspondents, or whether it was the anchors, reporters or correspondents themselves who were making the inferences. Once again, we were interested in whether these references were to the issues that these inferences related to, and whether these inferences were to the political mood of the general public or to specific social groups.

(3) Vox pops. The vox pop is an important means of representing public opinion because the views of members of the public seem to be directly and transparently communicated to the viewer. However, the BBC guidelines themselves warn that vox pops:

. . . do not even remotely indicate wider public opinion. Their value to programmes is to allow different sides of an issue in question to be expressed through the voices of the man and woman in the street. But the context should always make it clear that they are an expression of one side of an argument, not an indication of the weight of opinion on either side of it. (BBC, 2001)

Once again, we were not concerned with whether the use of vox pops conformed to these guidelines. Instead, we were interested in the ‘issues in question’ broadcasters selected as significant enough to solicit the views of the man and woman in the street, and hence the types of issues that were not. We also quantified how many vox pops were conducted among specific social groups (women, pensioners, etc.).

(4) Campaign interactions between politicians and members of the public. As the agenda for mainstream television news coverage was structured around photo opportunities provided by political parties, members of the public were often represented in their encounters with politicians. As we will see, the protests of two members of the public on the same day became defining moments of the campaign, but there were others as well. The key issue was whether the individual members of the public were represented as symbolizing wider public opinion, or whether they were represented as belonging to a specific social group, perhaps even
an organized group. And, once again, we were interested in which issues were highlighted by such encounters.

Across all four categories, we coded each reference to public opinion in each story according to topic, which broadly corresponded to those identified in the Loughborough University/Guardian media study that was conducted during the campaign itself (Golding, 2001a, 2001b; Golding and Deacon, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c). The topics were of two different types: references to public opinion on the election process (for example, on the conduct of the campaign by political parties and their leaders, public disillusionment and apathy), and references to public opinion on political issues (for example, Europe, taxation, health and education). Some references to specific political issues resisted easy codification: there were some references to public opinion on taxation, others on the condition of the public services, but there were also references to the balance between public expenditure and taxation (in this case we have decided to assign these references to a separate category). We were interested in two different aspects: the balance between references to the electoral process as opposed to specific political issues; and whether the subjects referred to tended to correspond with either the agendas of the main political parties or opinion polls on political issues.

Finally, we counted both the number of stories in which public opinion was referenced according to each category, and the number of references to public opinion overall. Many stories contained a number of different types of references to public opinion. Obviously then, there were more references to public opinion than there were stories that contained references to public opinion (see Table 1). Of the 214 stories we examined, two-thirds (145) contained some reference to public opinion in terms of our four categories. Since this was an election campaign, this is not very surprising. However, as we shall see, it would be premature to assume that this suggests that the public play an active or powerful role in the construction of election news.

In the next section of this article, we analyse the means by which public opinion in general is represented in the media, both through references to opinion polls and through less specific inferences about public opinion. In the following section, we examine the ways in which a particular

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representation of public opinion is invoked through news coverage of individual members of the public, either through the format of the vox pop or through reporting of events involving encounters between politicians and members of the public.

References to opinion polls and inferring public opinion

As Table 1 implies, the most common ways of signifying public opinion were through *polls* and through more general *inferences* (which may or may not have been based on a reading of polls). This is not to say that these are the most *significant* forms of invoking public opinion – it may be, for example, that a vox pop makes a more visual and lasting impression than a brief reference to public opinion made in a conversation between an anchor and a political correspondent like Andrew Marr – merely that these are the most numerous in terms of our categories.

References to opinion polls

As Table 2 suggests, the use of polls follows a fairly routine pattern. Most references to polls (93%) are made by reporters rather than politicians and most (84%) are ‘horse-race’ polls on the state of the parties or the popularity of particular candidates. The use of polls thereby fits into a more general pattern of election coverage in which it is the horse race rather than the discussion of issues or policies that takes centre stage (Hallin, 1994).

There are a number of points worth noting about what is, by now, a fairly well established routine. The first is the degree to which a large body of polling data on a whole range of policy preferences and outcomes is ignored (Lewis, 2001). In this election, the polling data available to journalists indicated, for example, that the majority’s main concern was the

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state of public services (notably health and education; see MORI, 2001). This data was consistent with findings over a number of years, which have shown that most of the public are prepared to see tax increases to pay for improvements in public service (Taylor-Gooby, 1995). While this discourse was part of the overall election narrative – notably as one informing aspects of the Liberal Democrat campaign – the failure to refer to the specific polling data on these issues is singular.

There might be some justification for regarding some of this polling data with a degree of scepticism: it may be, for example, that people are more generous about increasing taxes to pay for public services when speaking to a pollster than when keeping their own counsel. But it would be difficult to argue that the horse-race polls that dominate media discourse are any more revealing: on the contrary, such polls are one of the most ambiguous indicators of what people want from government. While there is usually some correlation between party preference and political ideology, there are significant proportions of people whose policy preferences on a whole range of issues are out of kilter with the party they vote for (Lewis, 2001; Mayer, 1992). We might reasonably ask why we see such a focus on horse-race polls when they tell us so little about public opinion?

We would offer three explanations. First, as we have suggested, horse-race polls fit a more general pattern in which the dominant recurring story is the election itself. Second, the use of polls in the media coverage of elections actually has very little to do with an attempt to understand or represent public opinion. Polls are used – to develop the horse-race analogy – as a kind of ‘form guide’ to structure the narrative of the campaign. Thus one ITN correspondent, reporting the wide discrepancies in opinion polls on the extent of the Labour lead, concluded their piece by looking at bookmakers’ odds in search of a more ‘authoritative’ prediction (News at Ten, 24 May 2001) – a mildly frivolous piece of journalism that perfectly captured the function of polls in media discourse. So, for example, in this election, the ‘story’ of the final week was the Conservative Party’s failure significantly to dent Labour’s lead in the polls. Much of the subsequent reporting was thereby framed by this fact.

Third, the fact that more specific polls are more indicative of people’s ideological leanings is itself a problem for journalistic notions of objectivity. In short, if polls tell us what people want, the ‘battle’ between political parties can no longer be presented on neutral ground. Thus it was difficult, in this election, for a television journalist to have pointed out that one of the Conservative Party’s main problems was that most people wanted something – more public spending – that the Conservatives were ideologically opposed to delivering. Such a commentary may have been accurate, but it would not have appeared to have been impartial (it is in this sense that the notion of objectivity has very little to do with truth and
everything to do with a certain form of impartiality). The closest TV journalists came to such a statement was to speak in a kind of code, to say that the Conservative Party’s problem was that this campaign was not being fought on their ‘strong’ issues.

This last point reveals just how small a role public opinion really plays in the structure of election coverage. Election coverage – like most forms of news – is top-down rather than bottom-up: as recent research in the United States suggests (Lewis, 2001), public opinion is introduced only insofar as it informs the discussion going on between political elites. The idea that politicians should be forced to respond to public opinion (rather than public opinion being merely a response to the politicians) may be a democratic idea, but is goes against the grain of the well-established routines of election coverage. To put it bluntly, television elections are about what politicians talk about rather than what the public want them to talk about.

It is notable, in this context, that the only issue on which polling data was cited with any regularity was Europe (see Table 2). In our sample, of the 11 references to polls on specific issues, 7 of them referred to Europe. However, most of these references occurred in the context of correct statements that this was a subject which issue polls consistently suggested was fairly low on most people’s list of priorities. According to a MORI poll conducted for the Economist between 10 May and 14 May, only 18 percent of the sample rated Europe as a ‘very important’ issue to them, placing it joint eleventh along with housing, and behind public transport (23%) and protecting the environment (20%) (MORI, 2001). Our key point is that the reason that opinion polls on Europe rather than on other issues became relevant was because the Conservative Party chose to make it a central issue. By contrast, two ICM polls in the previous six months indicating massive support for the re-nationalization of the railways (69% in a poll for BBC Newsnight in December 2000, 76% in a poll for the Guardian in March 2001) went entirely unmentioned because this was not on the election agenda of either of the two main parties.

Inferences to public opinion

We see a little more reference to people’s attitudes on specific issues if we look at moments when public opinion is inferred. These rather vague references to public opinion are also delivered mainly by reporters, although often to describe what politicians were thinking or saying. As indicated by Table 3, overall, 42 percent of inferences are made directly by journalists, 36 percent by journalists on behalf of politicians (‘the Prime
Minister thinks that the public . . . '), and 22 percent are delivered by politicians (either directly quoted or on camera).

Table 3 also indicates the presence of a wider variety of statements about people’s attitudes on a range of topics from taxation to immigration. As we have said in the method section above, none of these statements include evidence in support of these claims. The fact that inferences about public opinion were more common than poll references is, in itself, notable, since it suggests that reporters are not shy about making generalized claims about public opinion. The source and reliability of these claims is unclear: these statements were often broadly in line with opinion poll findings, and thus probably came from a familiarity with those polls. In a report on the Conservative Party’s attempts to highlight Europe as the major issue of the campaign, ITN’s John Sergeant states that ‘the problem for [the Conservatives] is its not a key issue in the minds of many voters. It doesn’t rate anything like as high as health and education’ (News at Ten, 23 May 2001). This can be directly supported by, among others, the MORI/Economist poll (2001) cited above. But, as with King and Schudson’s study, other claims were made that have a much vaguer relationship with the available opinion research data. For example, the BBC’s Andrew Marr asserted that ‘there are a very large number of people in this country

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<th>TABLE 3</th>
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<td>Politicians</td>
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<td>Political leaders</td>
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<td>Disillusionment/apathy</td>
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<td>Political issues</td>
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<td>Europe</td>
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<td>Taxation</td>
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<td>Public expenditure vs taxation</td>
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<td>Law and order</td>
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<td>Public services</td>
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Brookes et al., Media representation of public opinion
who want to leave the European Union’ (Ten O’Clock News, 15 May 2001). But how large is ‘very large’? British Social Attitudes surveys have indicated that support for withdrawal from the European Union has increased from a low point of 16 percent in 1991 to 28 percent in 1997 (Evans, 1998). An ICM/Guardian poll suggested that 19 percent were either somewhat or strongly in favour of not remaining a member of the European Union (conducted 26–28 May 2001). These percentages of the British population undoubtedly represent a very large number of people, but the description ‘very large’ may well be understood by many as indicating a much greater proportion of the population if not a majority.

The role of the main political correspondents Marr and Sergeant is particularly important here, as both are expected (often in conversations with anchors) to speculate about public opinion on various issues. Indeed, Marr and Sargeant were among the main sources of information about public opinion in the television news coverage of the election.

Although these references to public opinion go beyond the election horse race, Table 3 also suggests that public opinion is still seen as mainly as a response to the main party agendas. This is manifested in two ways. First, three of the top four topics (the election, political leaders and voter apathy/disillusionment) are about the election process itself (rather than about specific ideological or policy preferences). Second, public opinion is referred to on those issues that dominated the Labour/Conservative debate (or the media’s construction thereof), rather than those issues that surveys indicated were most important to people themselves. So, once again, Europe is the policy issue on which public opinion is most likely to be invoked, followed by taxation (either on its own terms, or in reference to putting up taxes to pay for public services). In the latter case, the question of whether Labour would raise taxes dominated much of the early part of the campaign, a discussion often based on the assumption that such a move would be unpopular, despite the paucity of polling evidence to support this assumption. Indeed, for a campaign that many commentators felt was won and lost on the question of who might deliver better public services, references to public opinion on these issues (mainly health and education) were much less common that we might have expected.

Overall, these inferences appear to draw upon a range of sources; polls, conversations with voters on the hustings, conversations with politicians and conversations with other journalists, all of which combine to produce a rather impressionistic, journalistic ‘common sense’ about public opinion. Thus, despite the wide availability of quantitative and qualitative data, it would appear that journalists still rely largely on their own hunches, and remain confident about their ability to speak independently on the people’s behalf. And, once again, public opinion tends to be invoked in response to elite debate rather than as a driving force of the political conversation.
Vox pops and campaign interactions

The last two categories of our content analysis tap into representations of public opinion that are less explicit, and more symbolic in nature. Whereas the first two categories code content that refers explicitly and verbally either to public opinion polls or to the idea of public opinion, these last two categories refer to instances in which members of the public, or the citizenry, are visually represented, and given voice in the television news coverage. The third category, ‘vox pops’ refer to ‘man/woman in the street’ interviews with individuals, and the fourth category, ‘campaign interactions’, captures reporting of citizens engaged in verbal and/or physical exchanges with politicians.

These last two categories are the smallest ones: while the vox pop category makes up only 20 instances out of a total of 214 references to public opinion in the study (9.3%), the campaign interactions account for 38 references (17.8%). Together, these two categories make up just over a quarter of all references to public opinion in our study.

This should not be taken as evidence that citizens are generally absent in visual representations of the elections. Indeed, television coverage of the elections on both ITV and BBC abounded with images of citizens. Almost every report from the ‘campaign trail’ of the three major parties included an establishing shot of the leader of the party against the backdrop of groups of citizens waving placards or shaking hands with him, or party luminaries speaking to a large audience of party supporters/members of the public. Such reports appeared at least once in each of the programmes we analysed, but often much more frequently. In the final weeks of the campaign, citizens were represented in such roles three or more times in each news programme, as leaders went on walkabouts in their constituencies and gave speeches. However, in these types of news items, citizens never take an active role, nor are they given a voice. They are there to shake hands, hold up placards, applaud, smile or sometimes boo at the leader.

Habermas has offered a helpful metaphor for understanding these widespread representations – a metaphor that also helps us to contextualize the categories of vox pops and interactions with politicians. He suggests that, with the rise of a mass society centred on consumption, the public sphere is becoming ‘refeudalized’ (Habermas, 1989: 195). By this, Habermas means that the public opinion formation process has crumbled because the relationship between citizens and government is no longer based on democratic principles. Instead, it has come to resemble the relations between subject and sovereign that characterized medieval feudal regimes. The feudal lord offered himself as an embodiment of a higher power, representing his own greatness not for, but ‘before’ the people (Habermas, 1989: 7–8). Showing off his pomp in the public court, before subject-
spectators, the feudal lord bathed himself in ‘representative publicity’, staged as a ‘counterweight to democratic participation’ (Peters, 1993: 545).

In today’s society, where public relations and advertising increasingly dominate public discourse and structure political communications, the rational-critical debate that characterized the bourgeois public sphere so celebrated by Habermas no longer has a place (if it ever did). The public sphere has been turned into a public stage, which displays products and individuals that imitate the aura of ‘personal prestige and supernatural authority once bestowed by the kind of publicity involved in representation [of the feudal lord]’ (Habermas, 1989:195). To Habermas, the refeudalization of the public sphere reflects a tendency to turn the citizen into a silent consumer. Habermas’s reading urges us to examine representations of citizens to assess whether they contribute to the public discourse, or whether their role is purely one of legitimating the exercise of power from above.

Vox pops

As shown in Table 4, out of 20 vox pops in the coverage we examined, only three had to do with actual issues of policy. These three stories focused on the Euro, pensions and petrol prices. The remaining 17 interviews with citizens were all conducted to gauge the outcome of the election. Overall, the largest category, nine of the interviews (45%) sought out citizens’ views on particular politicians (such as William Hague, Tony Blair, Margaret Thatcher, Charles Kennedy). Many of the vox pop items that were ostensibly designed to provide viewers with an understanding of the political views of particular groups in society – pensioners, council estate tenants, women, young black people and rural residents – ultimately revolved around the topic of voter alienation from politics. For instance, on 25 May, BBC’s George Alagiah reported from South Yorkshire, to ‘gauge

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<th>Topics</th>
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<tr>
<td>Attitudes to specific politicians</td>
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<tr>
<td>Voting intention</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics in general</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Euro</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pensions</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Petrol prices</td>
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how far some in this rural community feel alienated from the campaign’. Alagiah interviewed a number of residents, one of whom complained that politicians in Westminster ‘just don’t realize what’s going on down here whatsoever’. The landlady of the local pub suggested that politicians are ‘acting like spoilt children in a playground, and a lot of them . . . I wouldn’t give them a job behind my bar.’

It would appear, from watching the BBC and ITV coverage of the elections, that citizens’ response to restricted opportunities for political participation is to voice apathy, disengagement and cynicism. Through the vox pops, the broadcasters show that both the general public and particular populations, such as women, young people, pensioners, rural folk and ethnic minorities are alienated from politics.

This study suggests that if citizens endeavour to show they don’t care about politics, the media are complicit in this process. They produce and perpetuate disengagement, by indicating that a key feature of citizenship in Britain today is a principled refusal to engage in the most basic ritual of citizenship.

Overall, the pattern of the first two categories is repeated in the vox pops: the role of public opinion is limited to predicting or commenting on the likely outcome of the elections. Although citizens are allowed a voice, the majority of the topics on which they are consulted relate to the horse race, rather than to their positions on specific issues. When citizens were allowed to speak about issues, it was in the form of giving response to items that were already firmly placed on the news agenda. The form of the vox pop does not allow citizens to introduce ideas of their own into the public discourse, and, as such, their role in the public deliberation is limited to a passive and purely reactive one: that of the consumer.

**Campaign interactions**

The final category consists of representations of citizens verbally interacting with politicians (Table 5). Such campaign interactions appeared in 33 news stories, for a total of 38 references. Of these campaign interactions, three-quarters (74%) were of a hostile nature, whereas 24 percent of interactions were supportive. The majority of the supportive encounters reported by the BBC and ITV related to individuals such as Keith Vaz and Margaret Thatcher, who did not play central roles in the campaign.

This category was perhaps the most anomalous one, because approximately a third of all content coded in this category was accounted for by only two events. These two events, however, were replayed with such fervour and frequency that they came to be seen as defining moments of the campaign. Both happened on 16 May, the date of the release of Labour’s manifesto. The first event occurred as Deputy Prime Minister...
John Prescott was campaigning in Rhyl. As he got out of his campaign bus and made his way to a theatre where he was scheduled to speak, he was met by angry fuel and countryside protesters. When one of the protesters threw an egg in Prescott’s face, he responded by punching the man in the face, and the encounter turned into a dramatic melee that made for great television. The second event occurred later in the day, when Tony Blair visited the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham. Outside the hospital, he was berated over his health policies by Sharon Storrer, the partner of a cancer patient in the hospital. The concurrence of these two events effectively displaced the Labour manifesto from the election coverage.

One of the reasons for the popularity of these events among broadcasters was that they made for great television viewing: They were a departure from the careful packaging of politics (Franklin, 1994). Campaign interactions such as these offered the space for the unscripted expression of public opinion, a site for spontaneous and spectacular action. They contributed to a relatively unexplored ‘strategic ritual’ among journalists (Tuchman, 1972): the ritual of public participation; of pretending that regular citizens have a voice in the public debate. When citizens were allowed a voice, their contribution to the public debate took the form of the hostile, the irrational, the exceptional or even, as in the case of the Prescott punch, the violent. This is perhaps not surprising, giving the importance of negativity as a news value (Allan, 1999; Galtung and Ruge, 1965). But it does limit citizens’ ability to make a positive and proactive contribution to public deliberation.

As such, the last two categories tell a story about prevailing understandings of citizenship and ‘the public’: these representations create, but also delimit possibilities for citizen action and speech. If we were to go by the BBC and ITN campaign coverage, citizens can choose between being alienated and angry, ignorant and irrational, and placid and violent. There is little room for subject positions between these extremes.

### TABLE 5

| Campaign interactions between politicians and members of the public |
|------------------------|-------|---|
|                        | Number | Percentage |
| Coverage of actual interaction | 25    | 66 |
| Reference to interaction | 10    | 26 |
| Reference to interactions in general | 8    |   |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of encounter</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Antagonistic</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
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Conclusion

A whole range of scholars are suggesting that there is now a ‘crisis in public communication’, a declining trust in politicians and interest in politics, which is at least partly caused by citizens’ perception that they have no role to play in the game of politics (for example, Blumler and Gurevitch, 1997). Page (1996: 106) in his study of American forums for public participation has shown that experts and officials dominate the public debate, and that ‘only a tiny fraction of all the millions of US citizens typically gain access to a nationwide audience’.

This study demonstrates an overwhelming emphasis on the horse race, and on strategy over substance, in the coverage of the 2001 British general elections (see Table 6). In all of the four categories examined, substantive expression of citizens’ opinion on specific issues was largely absent. As a result, citizen participation in public deliberation over their shared future is all but non-existent, and the political parties and media institutions not only set the agenda, but also overdetermine subsequent discussion.

Towards the end of the campaign, voter alienation and apathy became an important topic of coverage, as media pundits predicted the lowest turnout in 80 years.3 In its leader summing up the elections, the left-leaning quality paper the Guardian (2001c) suggested that ‘the majority of voters veer between apathy and a dangerous cynicism about the way in which modern politics is conducted’. This was reflected in the ratings for the news programmes we analysed. After an upturn in the second week due to the confrontations between John Prescott and the egg-throwing protester, and

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<tr>
<td><strong>Topics on which public opinion is invoked overall</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Election campaign/process/parties</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Horse-race</td>
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<tr>
<td>Politicians (specific or general)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Election campaign/process</td>
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<tr>
<td>Disillusionment/apathy/turnout</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Issues</strong></td>
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<td>Europe</td>
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<td>Health and education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Taxation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public services/taxation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asylum</td>
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<tr>
<td>Countryside/fuel</td>
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<td>Law and order</td>
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<td>Pensions</td>
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<td>Petrol prices</td>
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<tr>
<td>Public services</td>
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Sharon Storrer and Tony Blair, ITN’s *News at Ten* lost an average of 800,000 viewers in the third week of the election campaign, while the BBC’s *Ten O’Clock News* lost 600,000 (*Guardian*, 2001b).

The combination of low turnout and low television ratings precipitated an outbreak of post-election inquests involving journalists and broadcasters about growing political apathy, particularly among younger people. Yet reversing this trend will require something more fundamental than broadcasters claiming that they can reverse public apathy by changing presentational style. We believe that that it is not surprising that citizens feel alienated from politics given the limited and passive role they are allowed to play. The discursive construction of the apathetic electorate works ideologically to legitimize a situation in which media and political elites are the key players, while citizens are incapable of making meaningful contributions to the debate. In this way, the political and media establishments produce the alienation they claim to deplore.

Notes

1. ‘Political Attitudes in Great Britain’, MORI (2001) on behalf of *The Economist*. This poll suggested that the two issues most important to voters were health (61%) and education (53%).

2. Both of these campaign interactions, for instance, were replayed in BBC’s three-minute visual summary of the campaign on election day, and both were referred to in hundreds of news stories in the last three weeks of the campaign.

3. Despite the fact that it only became an important topic around the last week, it still made it onto our top six of issues on which public opinion was invoked in campaign coverage, ahead of issues such as taxation, public services, law and order, and pensions.

References


The authors are all based in the School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies at Cardiff University. **Dr Rod Brookes** is the author of *Representing Sport* (London: Arnold, 2002). **Professor Justin Lewis**’s most recent book is *Constructing Public Opinion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001). **Dr Karin Wahl-Jorgensen** has published a number of journal articles on journalism and the public sphere. Lewis and Wahl-Jorgensen are lead researchers on an ESRC-funded project on the construction of public opinion.

**Address**: School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies, Cardiff University, Bute Building, King Edward VII Avenue, Cardiff CF10 3NB, Wales, UK.

[emails: brookesra@cf.ac.uk; lewisj2@cf.ac.uk; wahl-jorgensenk@cf.ac.uk]
Producing nature(s): on the changing production ecology of natural history TV

Simon Cottle
University Of Melbourne, Australia

INTRODUCTION

How and why television genres change and evolve through time and in response to changing production environments has received little empirical exploration. This is unfortunate because questions of media form are intimately bound up with questions of ‘mediation’, of how media representations are constructed, conditioned and conveyed. Today an army of researchers deploying varieties of linguistic and discourse methodologies often direct their critical attention to the recovery of ‘discourses’ within media ‘texts’ and how these are thought to serve wider social and political interests. This produces a tendency to theoretically under-estimate and empirically under-examine the ways in which ‘representations’ more broadly conceived have been shaped and conditioned by media ‘forms’ (Corner, 1995; Dahlgren, 1995), as well as in response to their conditions of production. The shift from ‘discourse’ and ‘text’, to ‘representation’ and ‘form’ is necessary and helps to broaden our focus to a consideration of the encompassing forms and appeals of media genres, their impact on media representations, as well as their determination at the moment of production. Setting out with the mission to recover the powered play of discourses within texts all too easily short-circuits consideration of how the forms of media themselves, generically, but no less powerfully for that, facilitate, condition and constrain the nature of media representations.¹

To demonstrate how form is deeply implicated in changing media representations and is indebted to informing conditions of production, this article reports on recent research into the changing nature(s) of natural history programmes. This long-established but ‘neglected tradition’ (Bousé,
has undergone dramatic evolution and change across recent years reflecting wider processes of industrial reorganization and cultural shifts within national and international television marketplaces. New technologies of production and delivery, heightened competitiveness, industrial centralization, fragmenting audiences and internationalizing markets have all dramatically impacted on the ‘production ecology’ of natural history programmes.

The research reported here examines how these wider forces have been organizationally managed and ‘creatively’ negotiated by programme-makers within their particular field of cultural production. Together these producers and their organizations constitute a distinct ‘production ecology’ characterized by competitive institutional relationships and cooperative dependencies. Key players here include national public service and commercial broadcasters and their respective natural history units; international satellite and cable TV distributors, co-producers and co-financiers; and a plethora of medium- and small-scale production houses and independent producers. Coexistence and cooperation, competition and rivalry are enacted and played out in response to strategies of self-interest and the imbalances of scale and market opportunity. The concept of ‘production ecology’, based in part on Bourdieu’s notion of a ‘cultural field’ (Bourdieu, 1993), is relevant here. It helps to signal the theoretical importance of attending to organizational relationships and dynamics that exist within a particular field of media production, as well as attending to individual media organizations or general marketplace dynamics. Studies of selected production domains and associated professional practices are invaluable for improved theoretical understanding of media output, but ‘production ecologies’ encompass and extend beyond the immediate sphere of production of any one organization within a particular cultural field. It is only by attending to the ‘production ecology’ within a cultural field that we can begin to better understand how the different organizations within it reproduce, adapt and differentiate their associated cultural forms through time.

This approach is in sympathy with the position of Peter Golding and Graham Murdock when they argue from a ‘critical political economy’ approach that if we are to understand the nature of the ‘cultural industries’ we have to ‘explain how the economic dynamics of production structure public discourse by promoting certain cultural forms over others’ (Golding and Murdock, 2000: 84). Critical political economy is essential for understanding the general market dynamics of media organization and production, and it also needs to be deployed in respect of particular fields of cultural production. We also need to attend, however, to the organizational structuration of a particular field as well as the professional negotiation within it of wider forces if we want to understand the production and evolution of cultural forms. The concept of ‘production
ecology’ helps here and brings into view the dynamic relationships between different media organizations that coexist and compete within particular arenas of cultural production and how they respond – both organizationally and professionally – to wider forces of change, and adapt and differentiate their particular cultural forms.

This study serves, then, to demonstrate the usefulness of attending to ‘production ecologies’ for improved understanding of media organization and production more generally as well as, in this case, the recent development and evolution of a particular media form: natural history programmes. As such it also performs as a case study in the social construction and social evolution of public representations of ‘nature’. Nature, as contemporary sociologists have documented, is susceptible to a diversity of social constructions (Eder, 1996; Macnaghten and Urry, 1998; Allan et al., 2000), and the study of natural history programmes provides important insights into the changing ‘nature(s)’ of public representation and understanding of (or sensibility towards) the natural world. Derek Bousé has eloquently charted the history and informing cultural narratives of wildlife films and argues, ‘wildlife film producers, working in a competitive, commercial setting, have perfected and come to rely upon narrative formulas, if only to systematize production’, and goes on to say that, ‘the regular application of these formulas, along with consistencies of theme and character give wildlife films the rule-governed coherence of a full-fledged film genre’ (Bousé, 2000: 20). Recent changes in production and representations of natural history programmes, however, render problematic both the notion of a relatively settled genre defined by predictable formulas, consistencies of theme and character and rule-governed coherence, as well as its functionality for systematizing production. The ‘genre’ of wildlife programming has, if anything, become decidedly ‘un-genre-like’ if this is taken to be a relatively settled ensemble of industry inscriptions, programmes’ formal composition, routine subject matter and appeals, and audience expectations (Williams, 1985; Feuer 1992; Neale, 1995).

In what follows I do not mean to imply that a ‘golden age’ of natural history programming, defined perhaps in terms of so-called ‘blue-chip’ programmes, has recently been eclipsed or has mutated into something less ‘pure’. The term ‘blue-chip’ has typically come to refer to programmes devoted to observing ‘spectacular’ animal behaviour displayed within ‘timeless’ natural habitats and all relatively ‘untainted’ by human intervention, whether presenters in front of the camera, producers and animal trainers behind them, or humans interacting with, or on, the ‘pristine’ animal habitats depicted. The problem with this, as Bousé demonstrates, is that, historically, natural history programmes have undergone evolution and change and in any case the scientistic pretensions of earlier forms of wildlife documentary do not really stand up to much scrutiny; and nor
could they, given the inescapable artifices of TV production and the medium’s predilection for storytelling over science.

By attending first to the changing production ecology of natural history TV production followed by the responses of different programme-makers and their programme representations, this article documents processes of cultural negotiation and adaptation at work and how this particular genre became transformed in a period of production instability and organizational change. In this way, we can also begin to build a better sense of how media production, though inevitably conditioned and shaped by wider forces – whether technological, regulatory, commercial, cultural – in practice is actively managed and ‘creatively’ negotiated by organizations and programme-makers operating within particular fields of cultural production.

The study draws upon diverse sources of data and insight including, industry updates and interviews reported within the broadcasting trade press; a small sample of in-depth interviews conducted with UK independent, commercial and public service natural history producers; in-house documents and organization web-pages; and a review of natural history programmes produced and broadcast across recent years.2

Changing TV landscapes: Survival and the fittest

Over recent years established production companies and successful natural history units noted for their production of so-called ‘blue-chip’ wildlife documentary programmes have been subject to powerful, sometimes devastating, forces of change. These pressures often emanate from outside the immediate sphere of natural history production, but their impact on the fortunes and survivability of established production teams has been no less dramatic for that. Within the ITV commercial sector the case of Survival is a case in point.

Commercial television: apex predators and prey

Since its inception in 1961 Survival had established itself as a respected and influential natural history production team based within the ITV commercial broadcaster Anglia Television. Across its 40-year existence the unit produced over 1000 Survival programmes, sold in 112 countries, and for which it collected over 160 major awards including prestigious Emmys. Producing this ‘respected’ output was a team of 40 staff based at Norwich, where films that could take up to three years to make were conceived and put together, often requiring teams in the field for up to 18 months. For much of its history, Survival set the standards for natural history program-
ming whilst demonstrating that natural history programmes could win large prime-time audiences. Its high regard within the field of natural history production, and with past television audiences, did not however protect it from becoming, like the subjects of many of its programmes, an endangered species. Its demise is illustrative of the wider forces of change that have reshaped the TV landscape and the ecology of natural history TV production.

In 2000 one of the largest production teams of wildlife programmes outside of the BBC’s Natural History Unit (NHU) was Granada’s ‘United Wildlife’, producing up to 50 hours of production annually (estimated to be worth £10 million in 2000). United Wildlife, in keeping with Granada’s business success within the entertainment field, had established relationships with Discovery, Animal Planet, National Geographic and PBS as well as ITV, Channel 4 and Channel 5. The Director of United Wildlife summed up his company’s view of the changing nature of wildlife programmes in 2000 when he publicly stated: ‘Viewers are no longer looking for big budget films which concentrate on animal behaviour in isolation. They want identifiable stories and strong people-based narratives. We are introducing more science, history, animation and fantasy into our films (Paul Sowerbutts, quoted in Broadcast, 6 Oct. 2000: 21).

In 2001 Granada acquired – for £1.75 billion pounds – United News and Media’s (UNM) franchises, Meridian, HTV and Anglia the host company of Survival. This brought Granada’s total franchises to seven and made it the largest company in the UK television commercial sector. Granada subsequently sold the HTV franchise to Carlton PLC, the second largest franchise owner, for £320 million to reduce its share of the total national audience below 15 percent in line with regulatory requirements. As part of this centralization process Granada then pooled its wildlife television production at its factual production facilities at HTV studios in Bristol with the loss of 35 jobs, announcing that the company expected to rely more on freelance staff recruited project by project in the future. Granada had earlier also acquired Partridge Films in 1997, a respected independent production house making popular wildlife films founded in 1974 under the directorship of Michael Rosenberg, who subsequently resigned following the dilution of the Partridge brand. The trade press reported on this latest Granada acquisition and consolidation of its business interests as follows:

Granada has dumped its inherited United Wildlife brand and is overhauling the division as a major supplier of ‘blue-chip’ films shot on video tape under the new name of Granada Wild. The move . . . also sees the disposal of former United Wildlife brands Partridge Films and Survival. (Broadcast, 6 April 2001)

This prompted the Head of Granada Wild to publicly complain about the way this change had been represented, revealing something of the market
logic and programming rationale informing United Wildlife’s future production stance towards wildlife programming.

Contrary to the impression given . . . we are not ‘disposing’ of the *Survival* and Partridge brands. We are rebuilding the best bits of both firms into a new, powerful and efficient wildlife production company, which will be equipped to deal with the needs of a rapidly changing marketplace. If we hadn’t taken this action now, our business and the wildlife television industry as a whole could have been severely damaged. . . . By renaming ourselves Granada Wild, we are signalling the firm’s commitment to this genre and that we intend to pursue new ways of making wildlife programmes which better meet the needs of the market, both here and abroad. . . . We are still making high-end programmes for ITV, Discovery and Animal Planet among others, and intend to retain *Survival’s* relationship with the best wildlife film-makers in the world.

However, we believe that attention to storyline, character and innovative approaches are much more important than simply filming the natural behaviour and habitats of animals – the traditional focus of many natural history shows. (Paul Faircloth, Head of Granada Wild, in *Broadcast*, 20 April 2001: 17)

This public justification of Granada’s natural history programming production arrangements and programme emphasis perfectly illustrates how wider commercial and corporate forces have forced a re-evaluation of the genre, and a public defence of the same.

These forces are not confined to the UK or even European marketplaces but also impinge from further a field. The world’s two largest cable and satellite distributors of natural history programmes on multi-channel TV, US-based Discovery’s Animal Planet channel, and National Geographic Television (NGT), exert a global influence on the marketplace of natural history programming. NGT has partnerships with key broadcasters; its main channel is broadcast in 133 countries, in 21 different languages and reaches 27 million homes in Europe. Its principal rival, Discovery Communications Incorporated (DCI), is even bigger. Since the Discovery Channel first went on air in 1985 it has grown exponentially. Today it has services in 155 countries and, according to its own estimates, reaches over 650 million total subscribers. Discovery Networks, US, alone reaches almost 85 million households and produces 2,100 hours of original programming. In 1996 DCI launched Animal Planet; this has proved to be one of the most successful networks ever and is now available in 74 million homes.

In the fight for global pre-eminence natural history programming has been found to be an important market in which to win audience ratings and revenue. Wildlife programmes are especially commercially useful because they generally have a long ‘shelf life’, their subject matter and universal appeal can seemingly cross different cultures, and they can easily be repackaged and dubbed. Both Discovery and NGT have therefore become major international players in the production ecology of natural history programming, commissioning natural history programmes and co-producing with major broadcasters. This includes a global partnership with
BBC Worldwide Ltd, extended in 2002 for a further 10 years, and which includes the co-ownership of Animal Planet. Both NGT and DCI have sought to buy up precious programme libraries and programme rights to satisfy the insatiable multi-channel TV environment. While Discovery’s approach has been to buy up entire libraries, including the back catalogue of Survival, NGT’s approach has been to cherry-pick selected series. In 2001 UNM sold 180 hours of programming from the Survival catalogue worth £34 million.

New appointments reported in the trade press frequently serve to underline important shifts in the production ecology of natural history programmes and reveal how developments in one organizational sector are often purposefully replicated and capitalized upon in another. For example, when Oxford Scientific Films (OSF) appointed former United Wildlife producer Mark Strickson as head of programming for its natural history unit, this was announced in terms of increasing the range of productions at OSF to include lower-budget, high-volume programming in its science and adventure strands. Strickson had previously been the producer in charge of such presenter-led programmes as Steve Irwin’s The Ten Deadliest Snakes in the World. OSF, in contrast, had previously built a reputation for blue-chip natural history programmes.

The appointment means that we can proceed with building the business, with OSF and Southern Star [parent company] working much more closely together. This allows us to access international funding and co-produce programmes in a commercial environment. (Head of Factual Programmes at Southern Star, in Broadcast, 9 Nov. 2001: 6)

Independents in the TV food chain

During the late 1990s and early 2000s the trade press also reported on how independent producers and production houses were struggling to survive in the face of the changing demands of the marketplace and increased competition. Broadcast, for example, regularly reported on companies forced into mergers, redundancies and cost-cutting measures. In 2000, for instance, Café Productions, maker of natural history programmes for, among others, National Geographic and Discovery was reported to be in deep crisis. The so-called ‘Green Hollywood’ of Bristol (because of the numerous natural history production companies based in and around the city including the BBC’s Natural History Unit, and United Wildlife’s Partridge Films), produced a number of casualties. Green Umbrella, a blue-chip production house that had employed 40 staff, halved this, and the company Ammonite merged its film-making wing with factual producer Scorer, while Zebra Films also cut back its staff by half. Before it was
subsumed under Granada Wild, Partridge had also been forced to make redundancies. These difficulties are widely related within the industry to the downturn in international demand for ‘blue-chip’ programmes, based in part on a previous over-supply of these ‘heavy investment’ programmes by a proliferation of small-scale independents, and the shift in commissioning to low-cost programmes.

Independent companies cannot rely on the occasional supply of blue-chip factual programming. To create a viable business you need a high volume of good, low-cost popular programming because that’s what the market wants. (General Manager, Southern Star Wild and Real, in *Broadcast*, 5 Oct. 2001)

A reduction in commissioning by broadcasters in such countries as the USA, Germany, France and Japan – traditionally key markets for natural history programmes – as well as a decline in commissioning in the UK by the BBC, the NHU and Channel 4, with ITV rarely commissioning such programmes at all and Channel 5 only interested in low-budget programmes, the marketplace for wildlife programmes had become highly competitive. Even the big players, Granada Wild and the BBC Natural History Unit, were increasingly seeking out co-productions with international partners such as Discovery and National Geographic as a means of reducing costs – a trend that continues to this day. But this only exacerbated the problems confronting small independents lower down the food chain that could ill-afford to devote resources to compete for large-scale projects and international co-finances.

Traditional blue-chip programmes, which can take up to two or three years to produce and which require considerable time in the field, are relatively expensive to produce. At the top end of the market in 2001–2 a spectacular BBC/Discovery series like *Blue Planet* cost £850,000 per programme (£7 million for the series of eight 50-minute programmes) and was produced over five years, while the maximum commission a respected independent company could probably command was around £550,000 pounds per programme; £40,000–£50,000 per programme are more likely at the lower-end of commissions while library and archive-based programmes and very cheap commissions can be as little as £15,000 per half hour programme. In 2001, Animal Planet’s European Director of Programmes had 50 hours to commission on budgets averaging only £30,000 an hour. The Director commissioned a series about vets in Abu Dhabi called *Vets in the Sun*, *Wildlife Police Undercover*, a video-clip series on *The Planet’s Funniest Animals* and *Adopt a Wild Animal* (reported in *Broadcast*, 24 August 2001: 2). In such commercial circumstances independent producers struggled to stay afloat while trying to meet changing market conditions and programme commissioners’ requirements.
BBC Natural History Unit: a protected species?

The BBC’s Natural History Unit (NHU) in Bristol is the world’s leading production unit of its kind in the world. Employing up to 300 people on the development and production of natural history programmes it produces around a 1000 hours of footage a year, and has the largest natural history archive in the world. Since its inception in 1957 it has established a reputation for the production of blue-chip programmes and series that are sold around the world, including spectacular series presented by David Attenborough such as *The Living Planet*, *Life on Earth*, *The Life of Birds*, *State of the Planet* and *The Life of Mammals*. The collaboration between the BBC and Worldwide/Discovery has resulted in BBC natural history programmes being shown on Animal Planet around the globe. Currently headed by Keith Scholey, the NHU seeks to position itself as the world’s leading producer of natural history programmes aimed at different channels and markets. Scholey endorses the view that an over-supply of wildlife programmes stimulated by the growth of TV channels and markets led to the collapse in the market, but he also suggests that the poor production values of many of these programmes only served to further erode audience appreciation, prompting a re-evaluation of ways of making ‘traditional’ wildlife documentary as well as innovations of form across the spectrum of programmes.

There was a kind of a shock about four years ago [1998/9] when people suddenly realized that the traditional wildlife film bubble had burst. That has put a lot of creative pressure on producers. We’re trying to create new formats and using new technology to move us on. . . . I would [also] say the modern way of doing the traditional format has proved to be as successful as ever. So that is our strategy now. It’s not to put all your eggs in one basket, it’s to spread it around, to have lots of diversity. (Keith Scholey, Head of NHU)

Following the success of *Blue Planet*, which at the time of production was widely thought to be the last of the BBC’s spectacular mega-budget ‘blue-chip’ programmes, Scholey maintains that programmes such as these can in fact buck the trend, and even help reverse the trend originated in the US of commissioning one-off natural history programmes to ‘punch through schedules’ and hook audiences.

We were coming to a point of doing short sharp things, but now you will see the BBC review that, and we will continue to do big landmark pieces. . . . We may end up being kind of unique suppliers of them though, because I don’t know if there is a profitable business for other people to make them in the future. (Keith Scholey, Head of NHU)

With *Blue Planet* costing £7 million, such spectacular programmes are invariably dependent on co-production. According to the Head of the NHU
typically 40–50 percent of the finance required for such a project would come from the BBC, world sales/marketing could generate a further 25 percent and 25–30 percent could come from the co-producer. Within the public broadcasting system spectacles such as *Blue Planet* can perform a function over and above the generation of large ratings. The BBC NHU, though intimately bound up in the changing international production ecology of natural history programmes, also occupies a unique programming space. Symbolically, programmes such as *Blue Planet* can therefore help to promote the ‘public service value’ of the BBC, and it was literally used to do so when, for example, shark scenes from the series were used in the corporation’s on-air promotions of itself.

We need to be distinctive, we need to be public service, and we need to claw in larger audiences. And the BBC gets rewarded in all sorts of ways for productions like *Blue Planet* which is important in audience terms but is very, very important in terms of overall BBC public perception terms; that we are there to provide and to inform, educate and entertain. And so there is a lot of support to carry that on. (Keith Scholey, Head of NHU)

The NHU, however, notwithstanding its privileged status and relatively ‘protected’ position within public service broadcasting cannot escape entirely the changing TV marketplace of programmes and wider trends. Programme diversity, channel scheduling and niche demographics are no less pertinent to the NHU’s commissioning and programme developments than to others within the pressurized TV marketplace.

You want to get a lot of BBC2 audience, but it is nothing like the BBC1 audience and we ought to hit different kinds of buttons. Also the demographics; I look really carefully at the range of shows that we are doing. That is why I was so pleased with *Ultimate Killers*; it was ‘hitting’ a lot of teenagers, we don’t normally draw them in. . . . So I think it is a complicated thing. There are the channel needs and we do want to serve those, we do want to stay on ‘platforms’. . . . And I think *Blue Planet* must have demonstrated to everyone that you do not have to compromise what you are doing to get a big audience. (Keith Scholey, Head of NHU)

**Producing nature(s): killer content and kissing snakes**

As we have heard, the production ecology of natural history programmes is characterized by a differentiated organizational field. This encompasses some of the world’s leading global media conglomerates, national public service and commercial broadcasters, and a plethora of medium- and small-scale production companies. These all coexist and compete (or go to the wall) within this ‘production ecology’, as they seek to position themselves advantageously both in relation to each other and in response to the changing international and national marketplaces of natural history pro-
gramming. Exactly how they do this is crucial for an understanding of the changing nature(s) of natural history TV and how this field has become reconstituted in particular ways. The next part of the discussion therefore attends to the changing forms and output of natural history TV, and how these express this changing production ecology.

_Migrations: presenters to celebrities_

Within the evolution of natural history programmes, on-screen presenters have come and gone, and come again. In some quarters programme presenters have migrated from ‘presenting’ the subject of their programmes to arguably becoming the subject itself.

The Americans aren’t buying any more, they’re not buying into blue-chip natural history films any more; not at the sort of money you would need. So then there is this huge change in so-called presenters of wildlife. You have got to do things like Steve Irwin, sort of kissing snakes and nearly getting eaten by crocodiles. (Independent producer)

The use of personalities to enhance the appeal of natural history programmes has become almost a stock response of programme-makers in their bid to win commissions and enhance programme attractiveness. This trend is most evident within the commercialized sectors of cable and satellite history programme delivery, though it now extends across all sectors. Discovery, for example, is in no doubt of the popularity of its most successful programme, nor of the role of the ‘presenter’ within this. Under a close-up picture of Steve Irwin holding a deadly snake inches away from his face, Discovery promotes the programme series, and markets the video of the same, as follows:

Watch the Croc hunter tackle these slithering killers with unmatched bravado and fearlessness while displaying his unique wit. As the most watched program on Discovery, the Croc Hunter Series has taken Steve Irwin across the globe to the find the world’s most deadly creatures. Now, he’s reached new heights with these African snakes with some of the most deadly venom on earth. Let’s hope he has his anti-venom handy!

Many producers in the field are highly critical of such programmes:

I’ve not seen one of those programmes where there has been a good reason for that Australian presenter to go there with a film crew and grab a snake or kiss it or swim in a river with it or whatever. I do not understand that . . . (Independent producer)

This ‘personalized’ approach to wildlife programming has nonetheless helped to make the _Crocodile Hunter_ series Animal Planet’s highest rated
series and served to propel Steve Irwin to celebrity status with appearances on such US shows as Saturday Night Live, The Tonight Show, Rosie O’Donnell and Late Night with Conan O’Brien; and he was also depicted in South Park. This commercial value of celebrity was then partially cashed-in by Discovery with a global partnership with Toys ‘R’ Us with its chain of 1500 outlets around the world selling toys and products modelled on the series.

Independent producers have also seized on the increased ratings that apparently follow the incorporation of celebrities. Tigress Productions, for example, has produced a string of such programmes seeking to replicate its initial successes in this vein. Programmes include Born to Be Wild – Operation Lemur with John Cleese, and, under its In the Wild series, Orang Utans with Julia Roberts, The Galapagos Mystery with Richard Dreyfuss, Cheetahs with Holly Hunter, Dolphins with Robin Williams, Asian Elephants with Goldie Hawn and Wolves with Timothy Dalton. Even producers of ‘high-end’ natural history programmes, such as Scorer Associates, have felt obliged to incorporate ‘attractive’ presenters into their programme presentations.

It’s been quite difficult for Scorer Associates the company because we’ve always had a reputation for making high-quality, high-budget, documentaries and we’ve never been seen as a company that churns out Animal Planet type, £10,000, half-hour programmes. . . . We made a film about chimps a few months ago with a primatologist called Charlotte Uhlenbroek who’d previously done a successful series called Cousins at the BBC. She’s very good, she’s very presentable, and she’s young and attractive and she’s somebody that the BBC has been trying to mould into a presenter who will attract more viewers to wildlife films. (Production manager, Scorer)

The BBC’s involvement of the respected naturalist David Attenborough as a presenter of its landmark series has extended over many years but the NHU is now deliberately seeking out new presenters, some of whom have already become minor celebrities on the basis of their presentation of other popular TV genres, all of them young, all of them attractive: Phillipa Forrester (Robot Wars), Trude Mostue (Vets in Practice), Steve Leonard (Vets in Practice), Charlie Dimmock (Ground Force) (reported in Broadcast, 6 Oct. 2000: 2) This generalized attempt to enhance programme appeal across the industry is plain enough, though it is interesting to note that the migrations of presenter to personality and celebrity have reached different destinations across the different sectors of the programme environment. David Attenborough continues to present occasional BBC series along with a growing cast of ‘professional’ BBC presenters; naturalists – albeit attractive ones – are sought out to present independent ‘high-end’ programmes; celebrities have been used to front more populist programmes; and flamboyant ‘entertainers’ have assumed the focal point of interest in mass appeal shows.
**Jaws, claws and mauls: killer content**

The wildlife genre has always had to deal with ‘adult’ themes of sex, violence and death; it goes with the territory. In pursuit of audiences, ratings, subscriptions and advertising revenues broadcasters have recently begun to overcome earlier conceptions of audience squeamishness and/or moral discomfort and most now actively seek out, albeit in different ways, the drama and pathos as well as the action and excitement that attend the life-and-death struggles of animals.

Natural history films are like a football match, with a beginning, middle and end, and predation is like the goal being scored. In this series we are producing a *Match of the Day*, putting all the goals, or predation sequences, together, because in these moments you get to see what the animals are built for. (Producer of *Predators*, BBC1, in *Broadcast* 28 April 2000: 30)

Such scenes, like the ‘money shot’ in pornography, are widely thought to be what the audience wants, and this helps account for their increased prevalence within recent programmes as well as the increased numbers of programmes devoted to the big predators, often sharks, and even more specifically the Great White. To put it another way, the political economy of natural history programmes disenfranchises invertebrates.

There is an enormous pressure on getting that shot, that money shot, that kill, that television moment which is going to get you ratings. (Independent producer)

There’s been a pressure, that’s the kill, kill, kill pressure. It’s certainly the case that the natural history programmes have been increasingly sold on their ability to deliver the kind of wham, bang, killer shot. (Documentary film maker)

Over recent years countless programmes have focused on, or included, sharks – perhaps since the film *Jaws* the most deeply feared of all species. Here’s just a few of them: *Maneaters: Sharks* (Tigress Productions), *Blue Water Predators* (Granada Wild/Animal Planet), *Predators* (NHU/Discovery); *Ultimate Killers* (BBC NHU), *Killers of . . .* (Granada Wild), *Shark Encounters* (BBC1/Animal Planet), *Shark Summer* (BBC1), *Sensitive Sharks* (Wildlife on One, BBC). Again, however, a discernible differentiation in the extent and use of killing scenes is found across these programmes dependent on the commissioning organization and channel outlet. A producer of two programmes about sharks explains:

Discovery is much bloodier. Animal Planet is gentler. Animal Planet reckons to have a different audience profile from the Discovery Channel in that they have more women and kids. They don’t go for the sort of same blood and guts things. So at the moment one of their most successful is *Animal Frontline*, which is about cruelty inspectors working for the American Society of
Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in New York. That’s a really popular one for them because it’s a natural way I suppose of putting together people and animals in a dramatic kind of way, and that’s really what Animal Planet’s brief is. Discovery certainly likes more kills per acre. I mean, Animal Planet is quite likely to either tell you to take a shot out because it’s too gory, whereas Discovery will put it the other way. And yet they both belong to the same parent outfit. (Independent producer)

The BBC has also increasingly focused on deadly predators and killing across a number of its programmes but, given it has its public service reputation to uphold, it is also careful to distance itself from any possible criticism that it is simply following wider market trends or base cultural appetites. The six-part NHU BBC1 series *Ultimate Killers* (2001) covered themes of ‘speed’, ‘strength’, ‘chemical killers’, ‘pack hunters’ and ‘deadly offenders’ before climaxing with a programme devoted to ‘man-eaters’. Across the series Steve Leonard short-listed the world’s deadliest animals, his six ‘ultimate killers’. In the same year BBC1 broadcast another six-part series *Predators*. According to the BBC’s on-line promotion, ‘Predators captures for the first time the moment where life hangs in the balance, the split second that the human eye would never normally see’, and went on to say, ‘This is not a story of blood and guts – it is the behind-the-scenes drama of a gripping battle of wits that decides which animals get a meal and which escape becoming one.’ While these and other BBC programmes are careful to distance themselves from the most gratuitous use of predatory behaviour and scenes, it is also apparent that the BBC has sought not to be left behind in the competition for audiences attracted to programmes about large predators and killer content TV.

*Human habitats, w(h)ither environment?*

A recurring complaint about earlier nature programmes, especially those that appeared to endorse the blue-chip representation of humanly untouched environments, was that these ‘timeless’ representations failed to provide any means for understanding how animal habitats and behaviour are in fact influenced by human activity and processes of environmental degradation. More recently, as we have heard, the return to presenter-led programmes and dramatic storylines has led commissioners and programme producers to explore various forms of animal–human interaction.

The old-fashioned biology lesson approach has to change. We want to find strong emotional storylines and more interaction with people. (Granada Wild, Managing Director, in *Broadcast*, 24 Aug 2001: 2)

The pursuit of emotional storylines and interaction is apparent in the recent spate of programmes about sharks, as well as elsewhere. The
producer of *Shark Encounters* outlines the informing ideas set out by the commissioning organization, Animal Planet:

They wanted me to work in Michaela Strachen [TV presenter] in a slightly more grown-up role than she had been in kids’ programmes; and they wanted to get close up to the sharks. And we went back to the shark-attack victims, we went back to scientists and a photographer who was actually attacked by the shark while he was filming it, so he’s a good story. . . . I wasn’t constrained only to the Great White, but they wanted the man-eaters basically. They wanted the big three – the Tigers, the Bulls and the White. (Producer, *Shark Encounters*)

Though constrained by the commissioning programme brief, this particular producer seeks to overcome the evident play on deep-seated cultural myths and fears about sharks embedded in so many programme treatments. Her next programme about sharks, currently in production, aims to move the genre on, though to what extent it too still trades in popular myths of sharks in the very act of trying to dispel them is a moot point.

Our working title is *Sharks beyond Jaws*. And the whole idea is that you can get behind this image of the teeth and find out what the whole animal is about. I’m learning about the importance of the apex predator. . . . So the film is going to try and develop the idea of the shark as an individual, and I’m also trying to develop the idea of shark researchers as individuals. This film is going to say, ‘Here’s a shark. His name’s Rip Torn.’ . . . I suppose that’s why I’m doing it because we haven’t seen sharks as individuals. (Producer, *Sharks beyond Jaws*)

A very different strategy to incorporate emotional storylines and human interaction draws more on the dramatic devices and narratives of soap opera than the documentary tradition of film-making. And this also has the commercial benefit of being cheap to produce. A series of 15 half-hour programmes, *Safari School*, produced by Cicada Films for Animal Planet, follows eight young trainee safari tour guides as they learn survival skills in an African game reserve. Soap-opera angles are used to hook audiences into the unfolding narrative across the episodes. The series was produced on a micro-budget of £15,000 per 30-minute episode, with the director herself shooting much of the DVcam material, before editing each programme in five days. The ‘shaky-cam’ effect that results from using a hand-held camera was felt by the director to give the programme a *NYPD Blue on Safari* feel, music introduced mood, and slowed-down sequences helped to dramatize action scenes. The director also explains how:

We only had a five-day edit so there was no way that we could produce something that flows in the traditional way – with perfect cut-aways etc. – so we chose a more dynamic, vital style, using visual effects, jump cuts and music very much like they do in drama productions. This creates real immediacy and excitement. (Director, *Safari School*, in *Broadcast* 6 July 2001: 16)

Here we see how constraints of budget and commissioning have in fact been creatively negotiated by this director to produce, in this instance, a
blend of TV genres while pushing the boundaries of the wildlife genre in new directions. Human interactions with animals and nature are also on the horizons of producers working for the BBC.

It’s not enough just to show life-cycle stories any more, because people have seen all that. We’re very interested in showing the interface between humans and animals, because landscapes are changing and wildlife and humans are being pushed closer together all the time. (Producer, BBC1 Bear Crime: Caught in the Act, in Broadcast, 28 July 2000: 30)

As the producer also explained:

I’m very aware of the legacy of Wildlife on One. There was no way I was going to do anything to alienate our core audience, but it was very important at this time, when so much has changed in television, that we looked at the format, because we’re going out on BBC1 and we have to compete. (Producer, BBC1 Bear Crime: Caught in the Act, in Broadcast, 28 July 2000: 30)

The pursuit of mass audiences can also take natural history programmes into the domestic habitats of ordinary viewers. The Producer of an LWT production for ITV explains:

Instead of the Serengeti plains as our landscape we have our ordinary semi-detached house in Hitchin, Herefordshire. It’s a real house, where a real family live. What we wanted to do was a kind of science/natural history/wildlife programme for a popular mainstream audience. That was central to the brief. It’s a way that ITV can get a handle on popular science. (Producer/director Infested, in Broadcast, 22 June 2001: 20)

These programmes and many, many more produced in recent years have deliberately sought to increase their appeal for audiences by including presenters and peopled landscapes that interact with animals in interesting or, preferably, dramatic ways. While this may be thought to be an important development on the ‘timeless’ portrayals of habitats depicted in earlier ‘blue-chip’ productions, the absence of a politicized environmental agenda across most of these programmes is all too apparent, and strikingly out of step with the growth in environmental politics and wider public environmental concerns.

Any proposal that had the word ‘environment’ or ‘conservation’ in it was immediately in the bin. What wasn’t permitted was to look at a story within a wider context, environmental or ecological. (Independent producer/director)

I’m wary about these ‘e’ words, the ‘environment’ and ‘ecology’. I’ve been told explicitly that I can’t have a strong conservation message. (Producer/director)

In part, the failure to produce programmes informed by environmental and political issues relates to the shelf-life, and hence longevity, of these
programmes as a commodity, as well as their potential international appeal; those that engage with current political concerns and developments, like news, will soon date and become un-saleable, and they may also have an ‘unhelpful’ national inflection. But of course there is more to it than that. Entertainment-based channels and distributors seeking to maximize audiences are generically disposed to avoid contentious, audience-splitting issues, and a general avoidance of ‘gloom and doom’ series (such as those purportedly thought to have turned away audiences in the 1970s) acts as a further barrier to the production of environmentally engaged programmes – barriers that commercial companies and independent producers find difficult to overcome. Even so, the differentiated production ecology of natural history programme-making permits some variation of output and occasional BBC series such as *State of the Planet*, as well as occasional independent productions, have managed to introduce themes of global environmental threat and engage with the politics of conservationism. These, though, are a rare sighting on the populist plains of natural history TV now rolling across channels and schedules. This chronic lack of engagement with and representation of the rise of ecological politics can only be seen as politically inexcusable given the rise of environmental new social movements and a growing environmental consciousness over recent years (Lash et al., 1996), but it is culturally prefigured in the current forms of natural history programmes.

*Blue-chip to micro-chip: future(s)*

The production of natural history programmes has always been intimately dependent on the development of new technologies that have allowed film crews to record animal behaviour in natural settings, or examine certain aspects of behaviour in microscopic detail under laboratory conditions, or slowed down to the nth degree within the editing suite and so on. Blue-chip films were as much dependent on the arrival of new portable technologies of recording as today’s programme-makers are on miniaturized cameras and new post-production technologies facilitating the construction of virtual habitats, simulated animals and interactive applications. The BBC’s *Walking with Dinosaurs* (2000) and *Walking with Beasts* (2001) are only the most well-publicized of what is anticipated to be a long line of simulated animal portrayals (3D animations) artificially recreated and narrativized entirely in the studio. The two high-profile series mentioned visually trace the evolution of mammals and the appearance of early man. As a way of promoting the series, the BBC also trailed the latter programme showing prehistoric beasts in modern environments to exaggerate their ‘weirdness’, including a sabre-tooth tiger walking across a zebra crossing, and a prehistoric whale emerging from a park pond.
In pursuit of broad audiences, then, these and other animated programmes have pushed the natural history genre in new directions. These technological applications, however, are deployed within the changing production ecology of natural history programmes and, as such, do not escape the shifting priorities and approaches informing the producers’ pursuit of commissions, audiences and market success. Computer graphics are increasingly being used, for example, to enhance the viewers’ perspectives on animal killing, continuing current ‘killer content’ enthusiasms as well as, it seems, the fascination with shark attacks. An independent producer ironically comments on this continuing fascination.

The next thing that I’m going to do is about sharks and what we’re doing between very, very expensive graphics is we are looking in intimate detail at a shark killing a particular thing. What we’re trying to do is look at that from the point of view of all the other animals on the reef. Give me a break! But it will go down well; the public will be wowed by the graphics. Anyway, it’s 16 weeks work over the next six months. Yeah, that’s the next six months sorted, thank you very much! (Independent producer)

Miniaturized electronic cameras and high-speed photography running at 500 frames a second in contrast to the normal 100–150 can be deployed to capture all manner of forms of animal behaviour.

It has been a dream in natural history for many years that one day, when the technology is small enough, it will be possible to film from the animal’s point of view. . . . It’s revolutionary. In the past it has been rather cumbersome so the animals have not behaved normally. (Cameraman, quoted in Broadcast, 28 April 2000: 30)

This technical capability, however, is more often than not put to work in the service of the current production ecology and its general pursuit of dramatic scenes and split-second killing moments, especially if these can subsequently be slowed down and explored in detail (for example, BBC1’s Predators).

Digitalization, electronic archiving of previous films and out-takes combined with new post-production techniques such as computer graphics represent a major opportunity for new programmes to be constructed either without, or with minimal, new filming. Depending on the extent to which these make use of expensive graphics and so on, they can also be produced relatively cheaply if the producer has access to library and archive materials (‘electronic museums’) – and these, as indicated above, have recently become a prized resource acquired by major players in the competitive natural history TV environment.

The Head of the NHU is in no doubt that interactive TV will be the next main advance. ‘Technological improvements will continue to surprise in series like Predators’, but, ‘to attract the younger multimedia audience.
interactive wildlife shows are the way forward.’ How interactivity develops in natural history provision will depend on the capability of different organizations to take advantage of new technological capabilities. The boundaries of the wildlife genre, as we have seen, are highly fluid and these most recent developments only look set to further erode notions of wildlife programming as a settled form. Differentiation within the field of natural history programmes continues, and this is both constituted by and is constitutive of, the informing field of natural history programmes and its changing production ecology.

Conclusion

Wildlife programmes have clearly undergone something of a dramatic evolution across recent years and these changes and adaptations can be related to the changing production ecology of natural history programmes and the wider forces that are expressed and negotiated within and through this production environment. Attending to how these forces are actively addressed and negotiated by organizations and programme-makers and professionally inscribed within the forms of wildlife programmes is crucial for understanding exactly how changing representations of nature have come about, and how the boundaries and content of television wildlife programmes have become redefined in recent years.

It is at the level of production ecology, comprising the relationships and responses of differently positioned media organizations that we can begin to understand how and why the genre has been reconfigured, and also differentiated, in the ways that it has. It is within and through the production ecology of natural history programmes that production choices have been enacted that have changed and inflected the nature(s) of wildlife programmes in sometimes innovative, sometimes unimaginative, ways. The genre, like the nature(s) that it represents, continues to evolve.

Notes

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1. Recent studies have sought to make this case with respect to the television news genre and how differentiated forms of news, as forms, have impacted on the
mediation of diverse social problems whether the reporting of the inner city (Cottle 1993a), the environment (Cottle, 1993b), victims of ‘risk society’ (Cottle, 2000a) and anti-capitalist protests (Cottle, 2001). The argument has also been extended to ‘deliberative’ forms of current affairs programmes and the forms of ‘agora’ facilitated by these in respect of the post-September 11 period (Cottle, 2002), and informs a recent discussion for a revitalised ‘second wave’ of news ethnographies (Cottle, 2000b). Attending to considerations of form, as deeply embedded within and conditioning of media representations, is no less relevant for a deeper understanding of other ‘factual’ forms of programming, though the approach tends to be most widely deployed within non-factual genres.

2. For the purposes of this research eight semi-structured interviews were conducted between November and December 2001 with managers, programme-makers and independent producers working in natural history programming.

References


**Address:** Media and Communications Program, John Medley Building, University of Melbourne, Victoria 3010, Australia.

[Email: s.cottle@unimelb.edu.au]
Understanding speech rights: defensive and empowering approaches to the First Amendment

Laura Stein
Department of Radio-Television-Film, University of Texas at Austin

Rethinking First Amendment theory

The configuration of speech rights in contemporary media systems is a vital concern for democratic societies. Rights demarcate opportunities for individual and collective action, and protect the conditions necessary to democratic societies (Bobbio, 1987). As the ultimate arbiter of who can speak in the media and the conditions under which they can do so, speech rights frame the possibilities and limits for democratic speech in contemporary communication systems. Since media act as critical forums for public opinion formation (Garnham, 1990; Habermas, 1962/1991) and influence public perception of political and social reality (Graber, 1984; Iyengar and Kinder, 1982; Kraus and Davis, 1976), understandings of speech rights in these forums are highly significant.

The question of how to understand speech rights in the US media is ripe for re-evaluation. Contemporary speech regimes governing media law are unravelling due to media convergence. Speech rights in the media traditionally have been determined according to whether a media system operates within a print, broadcast or common carrier framework. While the print model assumes that the speech rights of media owners are inviolate, the broadcast model permits the government to balance the speech rights of the broader public against those of media owners. The common carrier model, which applies to telephones, treats media owners as mere conduits of information with no associated speech rights. These divergent speech regimes are being called into question by new media systems and services, such as cable television, direct broadcast satellites and computer networks, which blur the boundaries between media once thought to be
technologically discrete and distinct. These hybrid or convergent media highlight the inadequacy of tying speech rights to media forms and characteristics, and demand a rethinking of speech rights theory.

Divergent speech regimes are also the product of conflicting interpretations of the First Amendment to the Constitution, the principal guarantor of speech rights in the USA. The First Amendment states, ‘Congress shall make no law . . . abridging freedom of speech, or of the press’ (Constitution of the United States of America, 1791/1979: 31). Despite their apparent clarity, these words have engendered radically different understandings of speech rights. Scholars generally account for these differences by pointing to one of two normative distinctions found in dominant interpretive traditions of First Amendment law. One view states that legal analysis divides over whether the First Amendment should be seen as an absolute or conditional prohibition on state action (Horwitz, 1991: 22; Smolla, 1993; Sunstein, 1993: 5). In this explanation, First Amendment interpretations hinge on normative views of state action in which the state is seen either as never justified in regulating speech or as occasionally permitted to impose reasonable regulations under some conditions. The other view attributes differences in First Amendment law to conflicting normative conceptions of the relationship between individuals and society. In this account, the courts choose either to protect individual autonomy from government interference or to enable government action that promotes the exchange of information and debate among social collectives (Fiss, 1986; Parsons, 1987). While both accounts pinpoint salient distinctions between current views of speech rights, neither offers a systematic view of the relationship between speech rights and normative democratic theory. Yet, a more systematic and comprehensive account of this relationship is precisely what is necessary if we are to understand both how speech rights have been interpreted in the past and how they might best be interpreted in the future.

In this article, I endeavour to re-evaluate the relationship between speech rights, media systems and democratic communication. A logical place to begin this re-evaluation is with liberal democratic theory, the dominant and long-standing tradition within US political thought. Concerned primarily with the protection of individual rights and the maintenance of a democratic system of governance (Held, 1987; Holden, 1988; Miller, 1991), liberal democratic theory provides a philosophical foundation for a more comprehensive understanding of speech rights. This understanding encompasses not only normative views of the relationship between individual and society and of the role of state action, but also normative definitions of freedom and its relationship to extant social conditions. Drawing on key liberal political theorists, such as Locke, Mill, Nozick, Friedman, Hayek, Green, Dewey and Barber, I advance the notion that two conflicting views of speech rights coexist within liberal democratic thought. These views,
which themselves stem from divergent intellectual traditions within liberalism, are labelled ‘defensive’ and ‘empowering’. Briefly stated, the defensive approach to speech rights presumes that freedom exists in privately controlled spaces that have been secured against government coercion, while the empowering approach holds that freedom exists in public spaces in which individuals find actual opportunities to speak free from both governmental and non-governmental coercion. After reviewing the principal tenets of each approach, I demonstrate how defensive and empowering theories of speech rights are manifest in, and reinforced by, legal understandings of the First Amendment. Specifically, I analyse their role in two Supreme Court cases widely recognized as pivotal in determining print and broadcast speech regimes, Red Lion Broadcasting Co. v. Federal Communications Commission (1969; henceforth Red Lion) and Miami Herald Publishing Co. v. Tornillo (1974; henceforth Tornillo). I conclude by arguing that empowering speech rights offer the best foundation for democratic communication, and by proposing a set of philosophically determined legal principles capable of revitalizing the meaning and function of speech rights in the USA.

**Liberal democratic theory and speech rights**

Liberal democrats agree that speech rights are a fundamental human liberty and that access to a wide range of information, opinion and expression is a prerequisite for legitimate democratic decision-making. Yet, contained within liberal democratic thought are two traditions that differ sharply over how to achieve these ends. These two traditions, neoliberalism – with roots in classical liberalism – and participatory democratic theory, invoke competing philosophical assumptions about the core questions underlying determinations of speech rights. These questions include the nature of the individual’s relationship to society, the meaning of liberty or freedom, the proper domain of state action and the necessity of examining the real conditions surrounding speech. The end result is that two fundamentally distinct conceptions of speech rights emerge from within liberalism.

*Neoliberalism and the defensive approach to speech rights*

The defensive approach to speech rights can be traced from its early appearance in the works of classical liberals, such as Locke and Mill, through its present incarnation in the neoliberal thought of Nozick, Friedman and Hayek. Classical liberals argued for restrictions on state power and for private spheres of activity free from state intervention as a means of protecting civil society from autocratic political systems (Held,
Locke (1688/1996), the founder of modern liberalism, maintained that individuals enter into society to protect pre-existing rights and interests. While government may be called upon to protect rights from the transgressions of others, government regulation should be limited to maintaining private spaces in which individuals are left to themselves. Liberty, defined as the absence of coercion, would flourish in private spaces where strict limits on state action and laissez-faire economic policies prevailed. Applying these ideas to the question of speech rights specifically, Mill (1859/1993) argued that prohibiting government interference with expression and relying on the public’s self-restraint in matters of non-governmental censorship could secure freedom of speech.

As with classical liberalism, neoliberalism is concerned with defining the limits of state power and with maintaining private spaces in which individuals can pursue their goals with minimal state intervention (Held, 1987: 244). Neoliberals follow Locke in asserting that individuals possess inherent rights that it is the duty of government to protect (Friedman, 1962: 2; Hayek, 1960, 1944/1962; Nozick, 1974: 14–19). Like classical liberalism, neoliberalism defines liberty as the absence of coercion by government and by others (Friedman, 1962; Hayek, 1960, 1944/1962; Nozick, 1974). Finally, in addition to sharing the main tenets of classical liberalism, neoliberalism further explores the essential role markets play in creating and maintaining private spheres of freedom.

According to neoliberals, liberty exists in private spaces in which individuals are free to enact their will when circumstances permit. Markets are ideal spheres for individual liberty, and the relationship between markets and liberty is iterative. Liberty is both a precondition and an outcome of competitive markets. On the one hand, a well-functioning economy requires that individuals be able to draw on their knowledge and experience to respond to changing social conditions (Friedman, 1962: 4; Hayek, 1960, 1944/1962). Individuals require liberty to act in a marketplace that permits the unplanned coordination of economic activity. Liberty is also the result of competitive markets that decentralize power among a plurality of individual decision-makers (Friedman, 1962: 12–13) and constitute a neutral space in which individuals may exercise their will. Thus markets are coercion-free, and marketplace decisions are superior to decisions made by governments because the state has no legitimate reason to interfere with individual actions (Nozick, 1974: 262–4) and because government power threatens liberty (Friedman, 1962: 15). For neoliberals, the primary function of the state is to maintain a private sphere of individual liberty, and the state can do so by generally ensuring the conditions necessary to a competitive market economy (Friedman, 1962: 4; Hayek, 1944/1962: 35).

Proponents of communication industry deregulation draw on neoliberal theory to argue that speech rights and opportunities should be determined
by ‘neutral’ market mechanisms rather than by government policymakers (Fowler and Brenner, 1982; Kelley and Donway, 1990). For neoliberals, emphases on the need to maintain individual rights against society, liberty as the absence of direct coercion and strict limits on government action combine to produce a defensive view of speech rights. Neoliberal theory suggests that government has no role to play in fostering democratic speech. From this perspective, free speech is best served by market mechanisms that are identified with a private sphere of public opinion formation. Thus, Friedman (1962: 35) can argue that federal regulation of radio and television oversteps the government’s primary role of maintaining markets and thereby constitutes ‘implicit censorship and violation of free speech’. Whether or not the majority of individuals find real opportunities to exercise free speech is inconsequential to the defensive view of speech rights that assumes that governments alone, and never competitive markets, have the power to coerce.

Participatory democratic theory and the empowering approach to speech rights

Participatory democratic theory, as expressed in the writings of Green, Dewey and Barber, contains a formidable critique of classical liberalism and neoliberalism, as well as an alternative view of speech rights. This tradition redefines the terms and tenets of liberal democratic theory, particularly the definitions and functions of liberty, theories of state action and the conditions necessary to democratic communication. Taken together, the work of Green, Dewey and Barber supports an empowering view of speech rights that is grounded in a philosophical and pragmatic assessment of the role of speech in democratic societies.

T.H. Green provides a foundation for this revision of liberal theory (Holden, 1988: 80; Sabine, 1973: 368), as well as for empowering speech rights. Green (1881/1991: 21) argued that liberty is only possible when social conditions permit individuals to act on their will and capacities. Liberty requires freedom from coercion, as well as freedom to act in the social world. Green further observed that coercion is not the sole province of the state. Rather, economic and social conditions may also pose significant threats to individual liberty or freedom. In such cases, the state should play an affirmative role in promoting the conditions necessary to freedom. The state must make it possible for individuals to realize both their own and the common good through unobtrusive regulations which permit, but never compel, individual actions (Green, 1879–80/1967: 45).

Green’s revision of liberalism is incorporated and extended in the work of American pragmatist philosophers Dewey (1927/1954) and Barber (1984), both of whom construct a vision of liberalism dedicated to
participatory democratic processes. Both Dewey and Barber assert that political rights and freedoms are maintained not against, but rather through, society. Both view rights as mutually agreed-upon social constructs that accord individuals possibilities and protections they would otherwise lack. Rather than stressing the alienation of individuals from the government, Dewey and Barber argue that democratic publics and the state are theoretically coterminous. Democratic states exist not only to protect their citizens from coercion, but also to provide an instrument through which citizens collectively examine, make and enact social decisions to benefit the common good.

Both Dewey and Barber assign communication a central role in democratic processes. Communication facilitates processes of social inquiry and mediation that generate the political and social knowledge necessary to legitimate self-governance (Barber, 1984: 13; Dewey, 1927/1954: 155). Social mediation, which enables democratic deliberation and decision-making, requires the circulation of the full range of the public’s insights, experiences and perspectives. Citizens must be able to express their views and have these views heard by others. This type of communication is necessary if citizens are to think as a public, to make reasoned political judgments, and to democratically structure the consequences of a life in common (Barber, 1984: 197).

Participatory democracy aims to ensure the conditions that make it possible for all citizens to actively engage in the political arena and in the process of social mediation. Unlike neoliberal theorists, who define rights and liberties without reference to actual social and political conditions, participatory democrats recognize that any definition of liberty must be sensitive to the historical and social contexts that affect its real life applications. Consequently, both Dewey and Barber are concerned that citizens in a democracy be able to utilize existing communication systems for democratic ends. For Dewey (1927/1954: 168), democratic communication requires an understanding of speech rights that provides real opportunities for public participation in democratic processes on a scale commensurate with the consequences of associated life. For Barber (1984: 273–9), democracies must support local and national institutions and forums that enable communities to mediate between themselves and to engage in a full range of democratic speech.

Participatory democratic theory suggests an empowering approach to speech rights. This approach recognizes the constructed nature of rights, defines liberty as the opportunity to act and requires governments to ensure that these opportunities exist within a given set of social conditions. Concentrating on the need to develop procedures, processes and institutions that support the acquisition of social knowledge and legitimate public decision-making, participatory democratic theory outlines the communicative requirements of democratic societies. These requirements include
the maintenance of communication systems which enable social mediation, the availability of communicative spaces that are free from coercion of all kinds and a democratic state that is authorized to secure these conditions.

**New readings of old cases**

Threads of neoliberal and participatory democratic theory run through law and policy debates surrounding the First Amendment. These divergent traditions of liberal democratic theory condition how social conflicts over speech rights are interpreted, framed and decided within the legal arena. Consider, for example, the way two Supreme Court cases seminal to the development of print and broadcast speech regimes make use of the philosophical assumptions behind defensive and empowering speech rights. Both cases, *Red Lion Broadcasting Co. v. Federal Communications Commission* (1969) and *Miami Herald Publishing Co. v. Tornillo* (1974), examined the public’s right to send and receive information in the media, two integral components of social mediation. Yet, in each case the Court drew on a different liberal democratic tradition to reach opposite conclusions regarding the appropriate configuration of speech rights in print and broadcast media.

**Red Lion and empowering speech rights**

In *Red Lion*, the Supreme Court was asked to determine the constitutionality of federal communication policies designed to promote the public’s right to receive balanced information. The case involved the Federal Communication Commission’s (FCC) now defunct Fairness Doctrine, which required that broadcasters air fair coverage of controversial issues of public importance (Fairness Doctrine and Public Interest Standards, 1974). Also under scrutiny were two rules, closely related to the Fairness Doctrine, which mandated that broadcasters give a right of reply to the subjects of personal or political attacks (Personal Attacks; Political Editorials, 1969, cited in *Red Lion*, 1969: 373–5; *Report on Editorializing by Broadcast Licenses*, 1949).² The Doctrine and its corollaries asserted a limited claim on behalf of the public for speech rights in broadcasting. The FCC had designed these policies to ensure that broadcasters fostered informed public opinions, promoted ‘freedom of speech . . . for the people of the Nation as a whole’, and refrained from imposing restraints on the public’s speech rights (*Report on Editorializing by Broadcast Licenses*, 1949: 1248–9).

In a unanimous decision, the *Red Lion* Court declared the Fairness Doctrine and its corollaries constitutionally sound. The Court offered two
reasons for its decision. First, the FCC was authorized by Congress to implement reasonable rules and regulations in the public interest, and, second, the Doctrine and its component rules served to enhance rather than to abridge the First Amendment rights of the public and the press (Red Lion, 1969: 375). The Court also linked its decision to spectrum scarcity in broadcasting, arguing that the paucity of broadcast opportunities on a publicly held resource, as well as government licensing of that resource, necessitates that the public retain some First Amendment rights over this medium (Red Lion, 1969: 30). Textbook readings of the case generally attribute the Red Lion decision to the Court’s perception of spectrum scarcity (Gillmor et al., 1998: 676; Middleton et al., 1997: 527). Yet, spectrum scarcity can only become a factor once the Court decides that the real conditions in which broadcasting operates are relevant to its analysis of speech rights. Indeed, a closer reading of the case suggests that the Red Lion decision is not the product of a mid-range theory about spectrum scarcity, but rather of a particular political philosophy of democratic communication. In setting forth its opinion, the Court made use of several tenets of participatory democratic theory. The Court maintained that the government might act to affirmatively promote speech rights, that non-governmental actors are capable of coercion and that the real conditions influencing speech opportunities are relevant to determinations of speech rights.

The Court rejected the contention that all state action constitutes censorship. In the case of broadcasting, the Court argued, government regulation promotes speech rights in several ways. First and foremost, government regulation and rationalization of broadcast spectrum is a necessary prerequisite to the effective use of the medium (Red Lion, 1969: 376). Without the government regulation of otherwise chaotic spectrum space, no one would be able to speak or be heard over the airwaves. Additionally, regulations like the Fairness Doctrine crafted an appropriate balance between the speech rights of broadcasters and the public. According to the Court, the public status of the airwaves, as well as the government’s role in allocating licenses, bestowed speech rights on the broader public. By allocating licenses while simultaneously requiring license-holders to adhere to public interest regulations, the government was thought to preserve and promote the speech rights of all parties. Finally, the Court made a distinction between government policies that enhance, and those that inhibit, free speech. The fairness rules enhanced speech rights by ensuring that the public received balanced information on controversial issues without proscribing or prescribing any specific broadcast content (Red Lion, 1969: 396).

The Court also argued that the government could act to protect the public’s speech rights from infringement by private, non-governmental censors. Citing Associated Press v. United States (1945), a case that had
supported government sanctions against private actors who obstructed freedom of expression, the Court noted that broadcasters’ speech rights did not include ‘a right to snuff out the free speech of others’ (Red Lion, 1969: 388). The Court said:

There is no sanctuary in the First Amendment for unlimited private censorship operating in a medium not open to all. ‘Freedom of the press from governmental interference under the First Amendment does not sanction repression of that freedom by private interests.’ (Associated Press, 1945, cited in Red Lion, 1969: 393)

Red Lion recognized the ability of private actors to obstruct the speech rights of others, as well as the responsibility of the government to protect the public’s rights against the coercive power of broadcasters (Red Lion, 1969: 390).

Finally, the Red Lion Court was willing, albeit in a limited manner, to acknowledge the real world conditions in which broadcast speech operates and to interpret speech rights in light of these conditions. The Court granted limited speech rights to those who are denied a license to utilize a scarce public resource subject to technical market failure (Red Lion, 1969: 399–400). The Court reasoned that, as long as the government is in the position to grant broadcast licenses to some while denying others, it is justified in mandating fairness. The Court explicitly declined to consider whether other types of market failure might necessitate the protection of public speech rights in the broadcast media. However, its assertion that the law must determine speech rights in light of the context of scarce, government-licensed spectrum space resonated with an empowering approach to speech rights.

Tornillo and defensive speech rights

The philosophical assumptions underpinning Red Lion contrasted sharply with those of Tornillo. In Tornillo, the Court examined the constitutionality of a Florida statute that gave political candidates a direct right of reply to newspapers that had maligned them during an election.³ The case served as a testing ground for a theory of media access advanced by Tornillo’s lawyer, Jerome Barron. Barron believed that the real conditions of commercial media markets failed to support speech rights. According to Barron (1967: 1646), commercial media were economically compelled to cater to large audiences, to avoid offending advertisers, and to refrain from airing controversial or unpopular ideas that might adversely affect their business. Without a constitutional right of access, he argued, speech rights would be a reality for media owners, but not for the majority of people who lacked opportunities to speak in the dominant media of their era. In
Tornillo, Barron argued that the government should enforce the Florida statute as a means of safeguarding fair elections, an informed electorate and the dissemination of information about important public issues (Brief for Appellee Pat L. Tornillo Jr, 1973).

Although the Supreme Court had upheld the Fairness Doctrine in broadcasting, it unanimously rejected the Florida statute as a violation of the First Amendment rights of the print media. The Court gave several reasons for its decision. First, the justices stated that compelling newspapers 'to publish that which “reason” tells them should not be published' is no different from censoring newspaper content (Tornillo, 1974: 257). Both acts were perceived as impermissible government restraints on free speech. Second, the Court viewed the statute as a content-based restriction on the free press rights of newspapers that might cause newspapers to avoid potentially controversial speech (1974: 258). Third, the Court claimed that the statute authorized an unconstitutional intrusion on the function of newspaper editors (1974: 259).

Though ostensibly informed by legal absolutism, the Tornillo Court's decision makes use of a broadly defensive approach to speech rights. The Court rejected the claim that an economically based scarcity of speech opportunities justified government regulation or correction (Barron and Dienes, 1993: 393; Van Alstyne, 1984: 86). The justices reviewed the arguments of Tornillo, including the charges that the newspaper industry had become monopolistic, anti-competitive and highly concentrated; that entry into the newspaper market was prohibitively expensive; and that citizens generally lacked the means to participate in contemporary public debate (Tornillo, 1974: 250–4). After recounting these arguments at length, the Court quickly dispensed with them in its subsequent analysis. Whether or not these conditions did in fact prevail, said the Court, had no bearing on considerations of speech rights because any corrective mechanism necessarily involved government coercion (1974: 255).

The Tornillo Court categorically dismissed government remedies as legitimate solutions to scarce speaking opportunities in the newspaper market. According to the Court, such solutions were pre-empted by the fact that government action and government coercion are synonymous.

The implementation of a remedy such as an enforceable right of access necessarily calls for some mechanism, either governmental or consensual. If it is governmental coercion, this at once brings about a confrontation with the express provisions of the First Amendment . . . (Tornillo, 1974: 255)

Given its conflation of government mechanisms with government coercion, the Court could not recognize the critical distinction made in Red Lion between government actions that abridge or enhance speech rights. For the Tornillo Court, a press left to the exigencies of the marketplace was preferable to government policies inherently equated with coercion.
In addition, while the Red Lion Court had considered the First Amendment rights of both the public and broadcasters, the Tornillo Court addressed only those of newspapers. The Florida statute had suggested a view of speech rights that included the right of political candidates to provide information about their candidacy, the right of citizens to receive a range of information about political candidates, and the authority of the government to promote fair elections and an informed electorate. However, rather than evaluate the multiple speech interests involved or attempt to craft a balance between potentially conflicting interests, the Tornillo Court focused its attention on the speech rights of newspapers (Tornillo, 1974: 244). As long as the newspaper was left alone, speech rights were operative. The Court’s myopia was made possible by its belief that, in the absence of government coercion, the rights of all parties were adequately protected.

Red Lion and Tornillo established different speech regimes for print and broadcast media. What distinguishes these cases in the first instance is not the ostensible differences between the technological characteristics of print and broadcast, but rather the philosophical assumptions that frame the Courts’ analyses of speech rights. The reason why technical market failure counts in broadcast, while economic market failure fails to count in print, is that an empowering approach to speech rights permits the Court to look at the real conditions in which speech rights operate while the defensive approach does not. Furthermore, while an empowering approach acknowledges that government action may be necessary to protect the speech rights of the broader public, the defensive approach admits no conceivable justification for government-created speech opportunities beyond those supplied by the market.

Reinvigorating the First Amendment

Under a defensive approach, First Amendment law is incapable of protecting speech rights when markets fail to distribute communication resources widely or equitably. Participatory democratic theory finds this approach inadequate for democratic societies that need to ensure real opportunities to engage in social mediation in contemporary communications systems. For this reason, I suggest here that the future of democratic communication depends upon the rejection of the faulty logic of neoliberalism and the adoption of an alternative set of policy principles to guide interpretations of speech rights. These principles, which accord with the central tenets of participatory democratic theory, are (1) the government has a compelling interest in protecting and promoting democratic speech, (2) the First Amendment must be interpreted in light of the real conditions affecting democratic speech, (3) the media have a public function in
democratic societies and (4) hybrid regulatory models are an acceptable means of protecting democratic speech in contemporary media systems.

The government has a compelling interest in protecting democratic speech

Participatory democratic theory suggests that the government has a compelling interest in being able to implement content-neutral policies that protect democratic speech. While the state itself is a potential censor, it is also an agent of the public capable of protecting rights from a variety of coercive forces. Participatory democratic theory calls on the state to promote speech rights when widespread opportunities to engage in social mediation do not otherwise exist. However, state action must be carried out in a content-neutral way that enhances, but does not abridge, democratic speech rights. The notion that the government has a compelling interest in maintaining democratic communication systems is a critical starting point for reforming First Amendment law. In addition to permitting the government to act affirmatively to guarantee speech rights, this policy principle enables the courts to better analyse standard First Amendment legal tests that ask whether the regulation of speech is narrowly tailored to serve an ‘important’ or ‘compelling’ government interest.5

The First Amendment must be interpreted in light of the real conditions affecting democratic speech

In order to support democratic processes, communication systems must act as a means of expression for the broader citizenry at least some of the time. Interpretations of speech rights that eschew analysis of the real conditions that shape opportunities for democratic speech do a profound disservice to democratic societies. An empowering approach to speech rights insists that governments consider all factors – whether social, economic or technological in origin – which inhibit speech in contemporary communication systems. In addition, governments must formulate policies that mitigate the harmful effects of both governmental and non-governmental sources of coercion. To this end, Emerson (1970:15) and Sunstein (1993: 18–19) have proposed that understandings of speech rights be based on whether or not they create an effective system of freedom of expression in a particular social context. In order to maintain a system of free speech, governments must create a workable structure of principles, practices, institutions that respond to real conditions and which advocate realistic goals.
The media have a public function in democratic societies

Historically, the US has required its communication systems to perform a dual role. The media are economic enterprises that must succeed within market systems. At the same time, they are political entities enmeshed in the processes and institutions of democratic systems. As such, media inevitably have a public function in democratic societies. Barron (1967: 1669) argues that the public function of the media warrants that the law grants them a quasi-public status. This status is necessary if media are not to be treated simply as private property over which only media owners have rights. As Schiller (1989: 171) notes, information and communication are critical national resources that cannot be left entirely to private and unaccountable domains. According to this policy principle, the public’s speech rights should not be confined exclusively to public property, but must be applicable to all spaces that have a public function.

Hybrid regulatory models can protect democratic speech in contemporary media systems

With the advent of new technologies, greater bandwidth and sophisticated compression technology, media systems increasingly convey information to consumers over multiple channels or lines. Most cable systems offer 60 or more channels (Broadcasting and Cable Yearbook, 2001: xxx), direct broadcast satellites deliver upwards of 150 channels (Morgan, 1994: 32–3), and the possibilities for distributing content and services over the Internet are likewise great. With compression technology, even broadcasters will be able to increase the amount of programming they provide on their current spectrum allocation. In this multichannel media environment, regulatory models that blend different aspects of traditional speech regimes serve to balance the interests of media owners with those of the broader public.

For example, cable television has been regulated along a hybrid model since the late 1960s. Arguing that one party should not control the content of so many channels into the home (First Report and Order, 1969: 205), the FCC developed a speech regime for cable that drew on various aspects of print, broadcast and common carrier regulation. While cable operators were given speech rights over the majority of their channels, other channels were deliberately shielded from the operators’ control in order to protect the ability of third parties to act as independent sources of information over this multichannel medium. Unfortunately, while the Supreme Court has allowed this hybrid regulatory model to stand over the years, it has been uncomfortable doing so. This discomfort is itself an artefact of the dominance of the defensive approach to speech rights in communication law (Stein, 2000). Nevertheless, societies that aim to protect democratic
speech should develop hybrid regulatory models to govern technologies that are increasingly capable of providing multiple channels and performing multiple roles. Hybrid regulatory models allow democratic communication forums to coexist with forums devoted exclusively to media operator speech, and as a result everyone’s speech rights are protected.

**Conclusion**

Critical legal studies scholars argue that the acceptance or rejection of one legal theory over another ultimately turns on the selection of one normative theory over another (Gordon, 1990; Kairys, 1990; Unger, 1986). The notion that all law relies on a normative theory of social or political organization is the necessary starting point both for criticism of traditional legal scholarship and for the construction of alternative legal theories and principles. Although the aforementioned policy principles portend a significant change in how speech rights are presently understood, this change requires little more than the Court’s rejection of neoliberalism and acceptance of participatory democratic theory as the guiding philosophical framework for its analyses of speech rights.

Participatory democratic theory provides an understanding of speech rights best able to serve democratic societies. According to this theory, speech rights must support communicative processes that allow citizens to mediate their unique experiences and perspectives, thereby developing the knowledge necessary to self-governance. This view of communication differs from the neoliberal perspective, which assumes that social knowledge is created when individuals transmit autonomous and pre-existing ideas to one another (Peters, 1989). Participatory theory subscribes to what Carey (1988: 15, 18) terms a ‘ritual view’ of communication, or one that identifies communication with processes of sharing and participation, and rejects a ‘transmission view’ which defines communication as ‘imparting’, ‘transmitting’ or ‘giving information to others’. By definition, social mediation is not something that originates in one source or set of sources to be imparted to the masses, but must encompass the mutual exchange of insights and opinions among the broader public.

While neoliberal theorists are generally content to let speech opportunities be decided by market mechanisms, participatory democrats recognize that the exercise of rights requires spaces that are free from coercion of all types. These spaces can be opened up through public law and legislation. Whether situated within publicly or privately supported communication systems, it is critical that these spaces be defined by their commitment to the implementation of democratic processes (Mosco, 1996: 170). Thus, while these spaces are secured by the state, they are not the objects of state control. The state must make it possible for individuals to exercise their
speech rights without restriction or compulsion by either public or private agents, and it must implement neutral policies and laws that function in a predictable and unobtrusive manner.

In this article, I argue that conflicting understandings of speech rights relate directly to central conflicts within liberal democratic thought itself. Debates over the meaning of liberty or freedom, the proper role of state action and the conditions necessary to democratic communication are not discrete conceptual dilemmas, but are integrated aspects of comprehensive theories of democracy and democratic speech rights. For this reason, investigations into the normative meaning and function of speech rights must begin at the fundamental level of political philosophy. As I have shown, liberal political philosophy provides a framework from which to understand competing conceptions of speech rights, as well as to assess the ultimate desirability of one view of speech rights over another.

Notes

1. Pragmatists focus on the epistemological processes by which humans determine concepts of truth and knowledge. Within this tradition, democracy is viewed as a method for collective deliberation.

2. The Fairness Doctrine was a casualty of the deregulatory fervour of the FCC of the 1980s. The FCC dropped the Doctrine in 1987 after the Supreme Court decided, in *Meredith Corp. v. Federal Communications Commission*, that Congress had never codified the rule and that the FCC could repeal the Doctrine if it were no longer determined to be in the public interest. The FCC, under Chairman Michael Powell, dropped the personal attacks and political editorializing rules over a decade later.

3. The Florida statute, enacted in 1913, made it a misdemeanour for a newspaper to print an attack on the personal character of a political candidate without offering the candidate an equally prominent space in which to reply (*Newspaper Assailing Candidate in an Election: Space for Reply, 1973*).

4. While the arguments of access advocates are recounted in three pages, they are dismissed in one paragraph and the Court’s rationale for deciding in favour of the *Miami Herald* is accomplished in two brief pages.

5. Respectively, these are referred to as the ‘intermediate scrutiny’ and ‘strict scrutiny’ tests.

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Laura Stein is an Assistant Professor in the Radio-Television-Film Department at the University of Texas at Austin. She writes about communication law and policy, political communication, speech rights and
communication technologies. Her work has appeared in *Communication Law and Policy*, the Sage *Handbook of New Media* and *Javnost/The Public.*

**Address:** Department of Radio-Television-Film, University of Texas at Austin, CMA 6.118, Austin, TX 78712, USA.

[Email: LStein@mail.utexas.edu]
Exorcizing the ghost: Donovan Bailey, Ben Johnson and the politics of Canadian identity

Steven J. Jackson
University Of Otago, New Zealand

It’s not only what we inherit from our fathers and mothers that keeps on returning to us. It’s all kinds of old dead doctrines and opinions and beliefs, that sort of thing. They aren’t alive in us; but they hang on all the same, and we can’t get rid of them. I just have to pick up a newspaper, and it’s as if I could see ghosts slipping between the lines. (Ibsen, Ghosts, 1970: 76)

Introduction

Although Ibsen’s drama concerned itself with another time and place, its message seems to resonate within a contemporary Canadian context. Specifically, there appears to be a ghost slipping between the lines of the narratives and discourses that signify, represent and oppress visible minorities, and in particular black people, in Canada. Herein, the metaphor of the ghost is used in order to capture the elusive and haunting nature of racist-based discourses in Canada.

This article focuses on one metaphoric ghost of Olympics past, namely Ben Johnson, and his influence upon the contemporary politics of racial and national identity in Canada. In particular, the study examines the impact of Johnson’s legacy on Donovan Bailey, the man Canadians looked to for redemption in the years following the steroid scandal at the 1988 Seoul Olympics. One of Canada’s most celebrated athletes during the 1990s, Bailey retired following the 2001 World Track and Field Championships under less than ideal circumstances fighting age, injury and a loss of popularity. The height of his career was the 1996 Olympics when he won two gold medals and set a world record in the 100-metre event making him the fastest man on earth. Yet, despite all his achievements, Bailey has lived...
with the haunting legacy of Ben Johnson, the man who arguably brought all Canadian Olympic athletes under suspicion following his positive drug test at the 1988 Olympics. Highlighting Donovan Bailey’s experience may provide insights into the much more pervasive problem facing black people in contemporary Canada. To begin, I return to the infamous 1988 event that inscribed Ben Johnson and Canada on the world’s collective memory.

On 24 September 1988 Canadian sprinter Ben Johnson defeated American Carl Lewis in the men’s 100 metre final at the Seoul Olympics and, in the process of winning Canada’s first gold medal in the event since Percy Williams in 1928, established a new world record of 9.79 seconds. However, the best of times soon became the worst of times on 26 September, when it was announced that Ben Johnson had tested positive for the use of anabolic steroids, forcing him to forfeit his gold medal (Jackson, 1998a). News of the disqualification sent shock waves throughout the international sporting community. In Canada, the initial shock and disbelief quickly turned into either sympathy, or anger and resentment, as evidence of Johnson’s prolonged steroid use emerged (Jackson, 1998a). The ensuing Dubin Inquiry, which commenced on 11 January and concluded on 3 October 1989, involved 119 witnesses, culminated in 14,817 pages of testimony and cost Canadian taxpayers $3.6 million (Semotiuk, 1994). At its conclusion, it was described by one critic as: ‘an extraordinary pageant of irony, tragedy, and farce’ (Burstyn, 1990: 45).

Now, more than a decade after his Olympic disqualification and nine years since he was banned for life for a second positive steroid test, Ben Johnson remains one of the most infamous and controversial athletes in both Canadian and Olympic history. Despite exhausting almost every legal avenue available to him, including a rejected 1999 appeal to the International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF) citing ‘restraint of trade’, Johnson remains defiant. Johnson’s legal battle to make a sporting comeback, his steadfast claim that he is still the fastest human in history, along with his highly publicized, if somewhat ironic and short-lived role as fitness adviser to Argentinian soccer star Diego Maradonna, are all components of a carefully orchestrated plan to revitalize and reinvent his public persona. Arguably, the case of Ben Johnson marks the genesis of the modern steroid controversy and serves as the reference point by which all subsequent incidents have been judged (Jackson, 1998b). Moreover, the Ben Johnson affair remains a national embarrassment that continues to haunt the Canadian public, Athletics Canada and Caribbean-born athletes in particular (Jackson, 1998b). As Cecil Foster, author of A Place Called Heaven: The Meaning of Being Black in Canada, notes: ‘His is one of the most telling and tragic stories of what it means to be black in this country’ (1996a: D3). As such, the ghost of Ben Johnson’s legacy, if not Ben Johnson himself, constitutes one aspect of the contemporary politics of
Canadian identity and a defining feature of Canadian race relations (Jackson, 1998b).

This article explores how sporting ‘Others’, such as Ben Johnson and Donovan Bailey, are constituted by, and constitutive of, the politics of racial and national identity in Canada. Tracing the emerging media discourses surrounding these two ‘Jamaican-born’ Canadian sprinters, this study specifically examines: (a) the context within which Ben Johnson and the contemporary crisis of racial and national identity in Canada emerged; (b) previous research regarding the discourses that defined and redefined Ben Johnson’s racial and national identities before and after the 1988 steroid scandal; and, (c) evidence of the nature and extent to which the symbolic spectre of Ben Johnson haunts Donovan Bailey and other Canadian black people of Caribbean descent, as well as Canada itself.

**Contextualizing Canada in 1988**

Given this study’s focus on the media’s role in constructing dominant meanings of racial and national identity in Canada, it is important to recognize the relationship between discourse and identity. Hall, for example, notes the significance of the context of power relations within which the discursive formation of identity occurs:

> Precisely because identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies. Moreover, they emerge within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical, naturally-constituted entity – an identity in its traditional meaning (that is, an all-inclusive sameness, seamless, without internal differentiation). (1996: 4)

Hall, at least indirectly, acknowledges the cultural dialectic at work whereby the discursive formation of identity, and national identity in particular, serves to both include and exclude. Here, the concern is with how media discourses serve both to construct a dominant image of Canadian national identity and to demarcate particular racial/ethnic ‘others’ within specific contexts. Returning to Hall’s previous point, this study locates the social construction of identity in relation to Ben Johnson and Donovan Bailey within particular discourses and within the specificities of particular contexts. In turn, the analysis proceeds by drawing upon previous work related to the 1988 crisis of Canadian identity as it relates to the 1988 Free Trade Agreement (Jackson, 1992), Wayne Gretzky (Jackson, 1994) and the racial politics of Ben Johnson (Jackson, 1998a, 1998b; Jackson et al., 1998).
Arguably, Ben Johnson’s initial emergence as a national hero in 1988 and his subsequent haunting of Canada can only be understood by locating the complex context of historical, political, economic and social relations from which his ghost emerged. Several seemingly distinct, yet interrelated, factors may have contributed to what has been described as a ‘year of crisis of Canadian identity’ (Jackson, 1994), a part of which served as a defining moment in Canadian race relations. Among these factors are Canada’s renowned historical insecurity about its cultural uniqueness. As the dwarfed neighbour to the world’s most powerful nation, the United States, Canada’s fixation with its cultural identity has been referred to as an ‘obsession’ (Chaiton and McDonald, 1977), an indication of ‘collective schizophrenia’ (Kilbourn, 1988) and, more recently, as the ‘unbearable lightness of being Canadian’ (Gwyn, 1995). In 1988, Canadian anxieties about the fate of their cultural identity were exacerbated by the Canada–US Free Trade Agreement, (FTA) which nationalists feared would inevitably translate American economic colonization into the eradication of Canadian sovereignty (cf. Bowker, 1988; Davies, 1989; Lapierre, 1987; Scott, 1988). The significance of the Free Trade Agreement was highlighted by its pivotal role within the debates leading up to the federal election held later that year. Political factions that purportedly represented the left of centre, including the Liberal and New Democratic parties, argued that the FTA posed a clear risk and that it was time to protect and advance Canadian interests. Conversely, the ruling Progressive Conservative Party asserted that the cross-border trade agreement was essential for Canada’s survival. Reflecting on the context of the late 1980s Mackey notes that:

Desires for ‘Canada-first’ emerged at a particular moment in national and global history. While Canadian identity was proclaimed as ‘in crisis’ new forms of global capitalism filled the world’s stage, economic recession took its toll, forms of right-wing populism emerged, and the federal Progressive Conservative government was seen to have mishandled the job of managing the country. (1999: 153)

Arguably, the economic and cultural threat posed by the FTA, whether real or imaginary, contributed to a renewed search for anchors of meaning and symbolic markers of difference in order to confirm Canada’s unique culture and identity relative to the USA. On the popular cultural front two sporting heroes figured prominently in Canada’s search for identity in 1988, namely, Wayne Gretzky and Ben Johnson.

Nationalist fears about the threat of ‘Americanization’ were, for example, demonstrated in the impassioned debates surrounding the marriage and trade of ice hockey star Wayne Gretzky to ‘American’ interests. Within the span of one month in mid-1988 Canada’s prodigal sporting son not only married an American actress but was subsequently traded from the Edmonton Oilers to the Los Angeles Kings. Within the context of 1988
these events struck a particular nationalist chord. Indeed, judging by popular media coverage, Wayne Gretzky's trade foreshadowed Canada's economic and cultural vulnerability in relation to their powerful southern neighbour (Jackson, 1994). Gretzky's exodus from Canada, amidst popular and parliamentary debate, created a space within which Ben Johnson could emerge as a national hero and helps to explain why his eventual Olympic downfall was an additional blow to Canadian nationalism. As noted by one Sports Illustrated writer:

Johnson's transgression had sent an emotional wave sweeping over the country. . . . Children wept and sportswriters anguished in print over the disgrace of the man who had become the nation's No. 1 hero in the wake of the departure of Wayne Gretzky to Los Angeles. (Johnson, 1988: 38–9)

The anticipation of Johnson's Olympic triumph provided a rallying point for Canadians on several fronts. His gold medal victory at Seoul proved that Canada could not only compete with, but defeat, the world's best, and in particular the Americans. Moreover, according to one source, the rise and fall of Ben Johnson arguably represented an important moment in Canadian race relations as evidenced in the following editorial: 'It was so right, that victory. Not only did it do more for race relations than any number of human rights committees, but it came as a triumph over Carl Lewis, a superb athlete whose arrogance, glitter and artifice reminded so many Canadians of what they find objectionable in their mighty neighbour to the south. (Globe and Mail, 1988: A-6).

The previous quote reveals how Carl Lewis had emerged as the personification of what many Canadians resented about the United States. Moreover, reference is made to the fact that Johnson's victory may have contributed more to the improvement of race relations than numerous official state policy initiatives. Indeed, in 1988 Canada became the first nation to officially institute a Multicultural Act, formally known as the Act for the Preservation and Enhancement of Multiculturalism in Canada. On the one hand this signalled the Canadian state's progressive initiatives towards recognizing cultural diversity within the national formation. However, despite its intentions, the Act also embodied the capacity to demarcate and exclude racial/ethnic 'others'. As such, it could be regarded as a hegemonic device that could be strategically employed to serve particular interests. Thus, in contrast to the assertion made that Ben Johnson's initial victory facilitated better race relations in Canada (Globe and Mail, 1988), there is some evidence to suggest that the post-disqualification backlash against him reveals the selective evocation of the principle of multiculturalism within Canada. For example, consider the charge of one Jamaican-Canadian member of the public, June Eyton:

Multi-ethnicity as a Canadian ethos more than ever seems to be a mere artifice of necessity. . . . We employ the concept only when it suits us, and we discard
it at will . . . [this] is . . . the kind of attitude that will retard harmonious race relations in this country for years to come. (1988: D7)

Eyton’s comments reveal that state social policies, such as Canada’s 1988 Multicultural Act, operate within the existing hegemonic domain. Consequently, they are negotiated within certain constraints resulting in such policies being conspicuously highlighted when they serve dominant interests but, as Eyton puts it, ‘discarded at will’ when they do not (1988: D-7). To understand the nature and significance of Ben Johnson’s legacy it is important to gain some perspective on how Canadians, and in particular the Canadian media, reacted to and represented his success and failure. Consequently, the next section briefly outlines some of the Canadian responses to Johnson’s disqualification at Seoul and their role in creating the anabolic apparition.

**Ben Johnson and the politics of Canadian racial and national identity**

Though there were sympathizers as well as those who denied the very significance of the steroid scandal (Brehl, 1988; Lautens, 1988), within the ongoing media discourses there was overwhelming resentment towards Ben Johnson, revealing both racist and ethnocentric attitudes and practices within Canada. The emergent racism was expressed in several different ways, including a shifting signification of Johnson’s racial and national identities and the use of various racist stereotypes (Jackson, 1998b).

Although it is an admittedly oversimplified characterization it would appear that prior to Johnson’s rise to fame he was simply referred to as a ‘Jamaican immigrant’ or ‘Jamaican’ (Jackson, 1998b). Gradually, as his athletic achievements began to multiply he was re-labelled ‘Jamaican-Canadian’. Then, upon recording a landmark world record setting victory over Carl Lewis at the 1987 World Athletic Championships in Rome, and in anticipation of the Seoul Olympics, Johnson was more consistently referred to as ‘Canadian’. Finally, upon his disqualification at Seoul he was once again being represented in terms of his ‘Jamaican’ identity. Steroid use notwithstanding, Ben Johnson, of course, was the same person. However, his ‘national’ and ‘racial’ identities were socially constructed, deconstructed, reconstructed and reproduced through the media (Jackson, 1998b).

The late Canadian actor/comedian John Candy effectively characterized the identity politics of Ben Johnson stating that: ‘At first, he was closely related to Sir John A. Macdonald, the first prime minister of Canada. The moment he was disqualified, he came from Jamaica’ (US Magazine, 1989: 6). In addition, Sports Illustrated writer Michael Farber both confirms
Candy’s remarks and links them to Johnson’s role in haunting those who dare follow in his footsteps. Describing how the nation had exploded with the initial victory and then imploded with news of the positive steroid test, Farber notes that:

... the most identifiable Canadian in history was not a politician or musician or hockey player. He was a cheat. There was a disqualification at Seoul, a qualification at home. Johnson was now a ‘Jamaican-Canadian’. In losing the gold, he had gained a hyphen, and a silent legacy was established. (1996: 145)

Thus, in many ways Johnson’s ‘Canadian’ identity, which temporarily displaced the hyphenated racial signifier, that is, ‘Jamaican-Canadian’, was contingent upon translating his personal achievements into national sporting pride. Notably, the ‘hyphen’ plays a strategic role in the signification process. Hyphenated signifiers such as ‘German-Canadian’, ‘Italian-Canadian’, ‘Ukrainian-Canadian’ and ‘French-Canadian’, are not only common but often celebrated in Canada, which considers itself to be among the most multicultural nations in the world. However, as Mackey (1999: 20) notes: ‘While all these hyphenated forms all have their own histories of constitution, some groups are widely considered more “ethnic” than others. Others have the privilege of being simply “Canadian”.’ Notably, several authors have argued that, with respect to ‘Jamaican-Canadians’, the hyphen is both a ‘national’ and a ‘racial’ signifier; in other words ‘Jamaican’, despite the existence of white Jamaicans and blacks who are not Jamaican, is a euphemism for ‘black’ in Canada (Foster, 1996a, 1996b; Levine, 1988a, 1988b).

The use of the ‘Jamaican’ and ‘hyphenated Jamaican’ signifiers was one way in which Johnson’s racial and national identity was represented. However, the aftermath of Johnson’s disqualification also witnessed the advent of seemingly more blatant racist discourses structured largely within the framework of racial stereotypes. These discourses played an important role in defining his identity and in reinforcing his ‘otherness’. Various racial stereotypes linked to animal imagery (Janofsky, 1988; Levin et al., 1988), intelligence (Siegel, 1989) and derogatory humour (see Boyd, 1988; Farber, 1996) emerged following the Johnson affair at Seoul.

For example, consider nationally renowned editorial columnist Alan Fotheringham’s (1988: 64) remarks which, although not intended to condemn Johnson, arguably frame him within a racist discourse: ‘Ben – poor, dumb Ben . . . he’s stupid, but he’s not a criminal . . . more stupid are those who have used him, doctored him like a racehorse with strange substances, hoping to cash in on a $4 million bonanza.’ Here, Fotheringham links two racist stereotypes: intelligence and animal imagery (and, indirectly, a third through his reference to criminals). Admittedly, any insinuation that these discourses are racist simply because they use animal imagery could be challenged given that many athletes, including white
athletes, are referred to in such terms. However, it must be emphasized that it is the historical assumptions and ideologies underlying such racist discourses that not only allow them to be articulated in the first place but, further, enables them to be re-articulated at different conjunctural moments (Callinicos, 1993).

Another form of racist stereotyping that arose after Johnson’s disqualification operated under the guise of racist humour (a contradiction in terms). Remembering his own immediate response to the steroid scandal, fellow black Canadian sprinter Bruny Surin recalls that:

\[\ldots\] all the stories referred to a ‘Jamaican-born sprinter’.\ldots What the hell was that? It makes you wonder if it could ever happen to us if anything bad happened. Not drugs, but anything. The radio, TV, all you were hearing was jokes about Ben Johnson. Proud Canadian one day. Jokes the next. (Farber, 1996: 145)

While examples of the hegemonic use of the hyphen have already been presented there is evidence to support Surin’s observations about racist-based jokes. One insensitive ‘joke’ involved ‘Has-Ben’, ‘Bennie’ Johnson, responding to Olympic drug testing authorities: ‘Hey mon, I didn’t take no stereos.’ Another referring to the adjusted placing and redistribution of medals in the 100 metre final described it as: ‘Uncle Ben’s Converted Race’ (Boyd, 1988: A-3). The first example, articulates Johnson’s presumed ignorance of what steroids are with notions of criminal activity, itself articulated to race and deviance. The second example links Johnson’s disqualification with ‘Uncle Ben’s’ converted rice, a product whose advertising symbol is a black male represented in a traditional service role as a cook. The significance of these examples is that ‘humour’, as a particularly potent aspect of popular discourse, perpetuates, reinforces and naturalizes the assumptions underlying racial stereotypes.

In combination, the use of stereotypes and other racist discourses provide ample evidence of the backlash against Ben Johnson which serve to both dehumanize him and to question the authenticity of his Canadian identity. However, the nature and extent of racism is not always obvious in Canada. For example, writer Meredith Levine argues that, win or lose, Canadians would never have accepted Johnson as their Canadian ambassador, noting that it is important to understand how racism operates in Canada, that is, ‘subtly, covertly and insidiously.\ldots In Canada\ldots your enemies do not make themselves known to you’ (1988b: 8). Likewise, Foster (1996b: 320) describes this Canadian version of oppression as ‘racism with a smile on its face’. As Foster further notes:

It does not matter how much we protest; how much we might wrap ourselves in the Canadian flag and sing the national anthem. For, as is generally the case, when most Whites see Blacks in Canada, they see visitors or people who have not graduated to becoming fully accepted citizens. (1996b: 69)
Notably, in 1995, in the midst of fighting his lifetime ban for a second positive steroid test, Johnson directly charged racism arguing that: ‘My life ban stems from a white people’s campaign. I was getting too powerful as a black athlete. Every time a black man tries to succeed in life they try to put him down’ (Sunday Star Times, 1995: B20). In sum, the case of Ben Johnson confirms that racism manifests itself in differing forms and intensities within Canada (Bannerji, 1996; Bissoondath, 1994; Cannon, 1995; Foster, 1996b; Lazarus, 1980; McLellan and Richmond, 1994; Satzewich, 1992; Walcott, 1997; Wilson and Sparks, 1996, 1999).

The racist responses to the Ben Johnson scandal in Seoul reveal several aspects of his haunting legacy. First, he brought the end of the innocence to Canada’s highly self-idealized reputation as the ‘fair play’ nation. Canada’s response was strategic damage control initiated through the Dubin Inquiry, which not only demonstrated Canada’s willingness to seek the truth about its domestic steroid problem but, perhaps more importantly, revealed the epidemic of performance-enhancing substance abuse within international sport (MacAlloon, 1990). Second, Johnson left a legacy for black Canadians who were suddenly being viewed in a new light, illuminated by an array of displaced racial signifiers. And, third, Ben Johnson left a legacy for black Caribbean-born sprinters who were henceforth going to live under a microscope and always be compared to ‘you know who’. This pressure worked in two ways. Not only were ‘black’ Canadian athletes scrutinized so they would maintain a clean, drug-free reputation, they were also compelled to win given that Ben Johnson had proven that Canadians could beat the Americans and could be the fastest in the world. In sum, there is considerable evidence to support the haunting legacy of Ben Johnson with respect to black people in general and other black, Jamaican-born Canadian athletes, such as Donovan Bailey, in particular. Consider some of the following examples that constitute but a sampling of the many media quotes referring to the past, present and future influence of Ben Johnson on contemporary Canadian existence.

Ben Johnson has been erased as Olympic champion everywhere but in his own heart. . . . he remains a challenge to his country’s forgiveness and a phantom who haunts Canada’s men of speed. (CBC Television, 18 July 1996)

A country forgot about whatshisname. Those demons are exorcised for good, fading like Bailey’s jet stream down the straightway. (Young, 1996: D3)

Canadians have much to cheer. Donovan Bailey, with his gold medal in the prestigious 100-metre race, has erased the national shame still lingering from the Ben Johnson scandal. (London Free Press, 1996: B6)

Bailey exorcises ghost of Johnson in 100m sprint. (Otago Daily Times, 1995: 29)
Donovan Bailey and the ghost of Ben Johnson

To begin to explore the impact of Ben Johnson on Donovan Bailey it is worth noting some of the parallels between the two men. First, both are black Jamaican-born Canadians, who immigrated to Canada in their early teens, Johnson in 1976 and Bailey in 1981. Second, both grew up in single-parent families in Canada, and were late starters in their careers as sprinters. In fact, Bailey did not begin training as a serious sprinter until 1991 when he was 23. Third, both individuals have won World Championships, an Olympic gold medal (albeit temporarily in Johnson’s case) and set new world records. And a fourth similarity is that both competed in a context that featured an American rival. For Ben Johnson it was Carl Lewis. For Donovan Bailey, despite the fact that they only faced each other directly in one race, it was Michael Johnson. While all of these factors may have contributed to the never-ending comparisons between the two athletes, clearly the most salient feature is that they are both black, Jamaican-born Canadian sprinters who put the nation on the international sporting map.

Yet, we should not overlook the differences. For example, Bailey is a much more charismatic individual with relatively more refined verbal, and arguably, people skills. No doubt these qualities enhanced his attractiveness to potential sponsors such as Adidas, Air Canada, Maple Leaf Ltd and many others. In addition, Bailey was a successful businessman prior to his entry into elite athletics. And, perhaps most significantly, he beat the Americans, in two Olympic events (100 metre and the 4×100 metre relay), without cheating. Nevertheless, Bailey cannot escape the reflections, references and comparisons to the man in whose footsteps he has been forced to run.

A cursory review of the media coverage indicates that Bailey is repeatedly looked upon as a sort of saviour who is expected to cleanse Canada’s international sporting reputation and in the process erase the memory of Ben Johnson. Repeatedly, though without ever being asked directly, Bailey’s integrity is questioned with respect to his possible steroid use. And, repeatedly Bailey is asked to proclaim his allegiance to Canada, often in the form of a forced choice question, such as, ‘Do you consider yourself a Canadian or a Jamaican?’ To this extent Donovan Bailey (and others) is truly haunted by Ben Johnson. Notably, just prior to the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, Bailey expressed this sentiment in his own words when he stated: ‘I got irritated for a long time because Bruny [Surin] and I were compared to . . . the ghost’ (Donovan Bailey quoted during the CBC documentary Athens to Atlanta: The Olympic Spirit, 1996).

For the purpose of this analysis, three key events are examined that demonstrate the ongoing Canadian struggle over Donovan Bailey’s racial and national identities, and, in turn, his own sense of agency in constructing those identities. The specific events analysed include: (1) the Canadian
response following his alleged remarks published in *Sports Illustrated* concerning racism in Canada just prior to the 1996 Atlanta Olympics; (2) Bailey’s public statements following his 1996 Olympic gold medal victories; and (3) Bailey’s controversial actions following his victory in the 1997 ‘One-to-One’ challenge against American Michael Johnson, a race promoted as determining who was ‘the world’s fastest human’.

First, just prior to the commencement of the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games, Bailey was embroiled in a huge controversy as a result of an interview conducted with Montreal-based *Sports Illustrated* writer Michael Farber. In the interview Bailey was reported as stating that:

> Canada is as blatantly racist as the United States. . . . We know it exists. People who don’t appear to be Canadian – people of color – don’t get the same treatment. They associate you with your parent’s birthplace or your birthplace. . . . Look at our [sprint] relay. It’s an issue. (Farber, 1996: 145)

Bailey’s remarks were met with shock and surprise in some corners, and with heavy criticism in others. The Canadian sprinter’s condemning statements were even more stinging given that the United Nations had just declared Canada the best place in the world to live for the fourth time in the past ten years. Consider the reaction of Carol Anne Letheren, former CEO of the Canadian Olympic Association and a member of the International Olympic Committee in Canada (as well as being the Chef de Mission for the Canadian Olympic team during the Ben Johnson scandal at Seoul). She expressed extreme disappointed in Bailey’s accusations:

> I’m surprised by Donovan’s statement. . . . If there’s a tolerant country anywhere, it’s Canada, a melting pot of many nationalities. Sure, we had some difficulties since the big influx of immigrants to Canada during the past 40 years, but we’ve always been able to deal with it. We have certainly not discriminated against any of our athletes, no matter where they were born. In fact, we’re all looking forward to the 100-metre sprint in which Donovan Bailey and Bruny Surin are our big medal hopes. There’s a special excitement in our camp that Bailey and Surin will do the job and we’ll redeem ourselves by proving that the Ben Johnson affair was just a fluke. (Gross, 1996: 12)

Here, Letheren takes quite a defensive stance against the insinuation of racism in Canada. Although she acknowledges that there have been some difficulties due to the ‘influx of immigrants’ into the country, she is forthright in proclaiming that there is no racism against black athletes. Strikingly, like many others, she too refers to Bailey (and Bruny Surin) as potential vehicles of redemption for the Ben Johnson affair. Notably, Letheren’s statements are fraught with contradictions and are even more surprising given her role as official spokesperson following the Ben Johnson disaster at Seoul. In 1988, in conjunction with then Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, she contributed to the process of redefining fall-out from the Seoul Olympics as a ‘personal tragedy’ for Ben Johnson and subtly
identified his Jamaican roots (McMartin, 1988). Once again, the very attempt to proclaim Canada’s cultural diversity and progressive race relations reveals traces of ethnocentrism and racism.

Returning to Bailey’s original alleged remarks in *Sports Illustrated*, it is suggested that if the article had simply reported that Bailey claimed there was racism in Canada, the chances are it would have received much less attention. This contention is based on the fact that Bailey, Surin and other black Canadian athletes have occasionally expressed their personal experiences and frustrations with racism in Canada, though usually with little public reaction, or sympathy. However, by *allegedly* claiming that Canadians were as racist ‘as the Americans’ Bailey appeared to be offering the worst possible insult to the Canadian public. In hindsight, it is quite possible that there was an error in Farber’s quote, one which he freely admits is conceivable given that he was using handwritten notes and that he wrote the piece some time after the actual interview (*Globe and Mail*, 1996: E12). Bailey argued that Farber had omitted the word ‘*not*’ in the passage ‘Canada is [not] as racist as the United States’ and a careful reading of the article certainly seems to support the sprinter’s position. Yet, it is the response to the article rather than its overall content that is most noteworthy. As Klein indicates:

> The real issue is not whether Bailey told *Sports Illustrated* that Canada ‘is as blatantly racist as the United States’ or whether he was misquoted and actually said that racism here is less blatant, but still present. What is at issue is that Bailey dared to speak about race at all. . . . Donovan Bailey’s crime was letting the reality of North American racism seep in through the cracks of the sanitized Olympic bubble. (1996: H3)

Thus, Klein suggests that Bailey tainted the sanctity of the Olympics by politicizing them through an accusation of racism within North America generally. However, from the media coverage examined, there appeared to be a fairly strong backlash within Canada, whereas there was only a minor, and largely ambivalent, response in the US.

In a second key event, it is worth examining the candid statements of Donovan Bailey immediately following his 1996 Olympic gold medal performance in the 100 metres. Though he donned a Canadian flag during his victory lap, when Bailey was later questioned at the post-race press conference about whether he would consider sharing his victory with Jamaica he stated: ‘It’s not even Jamaica sharing. I’m Jamaican, man. I’m Jamaican first. You gotta understand that’s where I’m from. That’s home. That you can never take away from me. I’m a Jamaican-born Canadian sprinter’ (Christie, 1996: C2). Bailey’s response expressed a form of resistance to those Canadians who had questioned his loyalty throughout his career although he has repeatedly proclaimed pride in his dual citizenship and identity. By consistently acknowledging his Canadian
citizenship ‘and’ his Jamaican homeland throughout his career, Bailey appeared to have learned a valuable lesson from Ben Johnson. Well aware of how particular factions of the Canadian public had redefined Ben Johnson into a Jamaican-Canadian following the 1988 disqualification, Bailey empowered himself by deliberately and strategically proclaiming a dual identity; or, as Jackson and Meier (1999: 184) put it, he hijacked the hegemonic hyphen in ‘Jamaican-Canadian’. As Klein explains:

Perhaps because he knew that Canada would disown him if he failed, he would not let it own him completely in his moment of triumph. Because he would have been Jamaican had he stumbled, Bailey forced Canadians to see him as Jamaican when he won. . . . So when Bailey’s moment came, he didn’t erase the Ben Johnson legacy – he flipped it on its head and threw it back at the Canadian public, with all its lingering implications. (1996: H3)

Thus, Bailey invoked a sense of agency and control over his mediated identity by deliberately defining himself through his Jamaican roots and his adopted home in Canada. Yet this was only a temporary victory for Donovan Bailey, as evidenced in the aftermath of the third key event under analysis, one that once again brought Bailey’s identity into question.

On 1 June 1997, Donovan Bailey faced American sprinter Michael Johnson at the Toronto Skydome. The race, which was compared to both a Don King boxing match and the ‘World Wrestling Federation of track and field’ (see Christie, 1997: D12), was part of the Challenge of Champions and was billed as determining ‘the world’s fastest human’. To put the race into context, it is important to note that segments of the Canadian public, not to mention Bailey himself, felt that the American media had displayed its renowned ethnocentrism and arrogance by naming their own Michael Johnson as the fastest man in the world following the 1996 Atlanta Olympics (Longman, 1997; Patrick, 1996). The US proclamation was made despite the fact that historically the title of the world’s fastest man has always gone to the winner of the 100 metre event. Moreover, the American media had also predicted a US victory at Atlanta in the men’s 4×100 relay, which, without much recognition, was won by the Canadians anchored by Donovan Bailey. The post-Atlanta resentment was certainly being used to feed into the Challenge of Champions race in 1997. For example, Canadian newspapers reported on USA Today columnist, Tom Weir’s remarks following the American relay team loss: ‘Just as when the Toronto Blue Jays had help from the Dominicans when they won Canada’s first World Series, so did its relay have a distinctive Caribbean flavour’ (Houston, 1996: C9). In short, Canada was being accused of using ‘ringers’. In addition, pre-race hype was cultivated when it was announced that Las Vegas bookmakers were offering three to one odds in favour of Michael Johnson (Houston, 1996). Furthermore, the million-dollar race slowly
became personalized when Michael Johnson questioned Bailey’s willingness to really put the ‘fastest man’ title on the table (see Fish, 1997: 16E).

Arguably, the ghost had returned, for Michael Johnson became the embodiment of Carl Lewis from the 1988 race against Ben Johnson; once again, it was Canada versus the United States. The stakes were high: both Johnson and Bailey were to receive a $500,000 race fee just for showing up, but the winner also earned an additional $1 million. The race distance was set at 150 meters, a halfway point between Johnson’s 200 and Bailey’s 100 metre specialties.

The actual race was over in seconds with Michael Johnson pulled up with an injury at a point during the race when Bailey was clearly in the lead. At the conclusion of the contest, before a worldwide television audience, a very emotional Bailey asserted that:

He didn’t pull up, he’s a chicken . . . he didn’t pull up at all, he’s just a chicken. He’s afraid to lose. I think what we should do is we should really run this race over again, so I can kick his ass one more time. (CBC Television, 1997)

Bailey later apologized both to Michael Johnson and to the public for his uncharacteristic remarks. Nevertheless, many Canadians celebrated the victory as confirmation of their ‘fastest in the world’ status, and some even condoned Bailey’s unsympathetic attack on Johnson, revealing a deep contempt for the American media that had denied them their desired recognition in 1996. However, there were also many Canadians who were shocked and dismayed by Bailey’s poor display of sportsmanship (Christie, 1997: D12). Perhaps, the worst criticism of all, at least from a Canadian standpoint, was expressed when Bailey was accused of having ‘lowered his standard to the Americans’ (Christie, 1997: D12). Moreover, Brunt (1997: D12) describes how Bailey transformed a moment of nationalistic pride into a moment of shame through his actions as an ‘unquiet Canadian’.

According to Brunt:

When he crossed the finish line at the SkyDome, Johnson having pulled up lame, it was an occasion for one of those rare surges of patriotic emotion from a people not prone to let it all hang out. Not quite Paul Henderson. Not quite Ben before the fall. But close enough to do the trick. . . . And then, with the flags waving, with the anthem playing, Bailey had to go and act, well, so un-Canadian. (1997: D12)

Thus, for one moment in time, Donovan Bailey may have been a ‘Jamaican-Canadian-American’. To be clear, this specific tri-hyphenated signifier was not actually employed in any of the media discourse examined. What is important is the fact that Bailey, despite his achievements, was once again defined as the ‘other’ within the Canadian popular imaginary. Moreover, this example demonstrates how racism and particular
signifiers of ‘otherness’ do not have to be explicit, they are often subtle and may lie dormant. As Klein put it: ‘Bailey may haul in $5 million in sponsorships next year, but if history is any indication, he could get pulled over on the streets of Toronto for being a black man in a car’ (1996: H3).

Since the height of his career in 1996–7 Bailey has been struggling to maintain race form. He suffered a career-threatening Achilles’ tendon injury in 1998 and although he made a major recovery, a flu forced Bailey out after the second round of the 100 metre event at the 2000 Sydney Olympics. He did win the 100 metre final of the 2001 Canadian Games, but ended his career in Edmonton with an injury in the 100 metre semi-final at the 2001 World Championships. Yet, while there is some sympathy for him, the public’s affection for Bailey seems to have changed. It might simply be that he is no longer the world champion and that Canadians are demonstrating a bit of fair-weather fan syndrome. It might be the 1998 car accident that Bailey neglected to report or his more recent well-publicized speeding ticket. It might be the controversy surrounding Bailey’s reported illness at the 2000 Olympics and his being spotted, subsequently, at a Sydney nightclub. It may have been the open display of tensions between him and Bruny Surin over who should run anchor in the relay at the 1999 Worlds, culminating in the Canadian relay team dropping the baton and being disqualified. However, within the context of this study there seems to be at least some reason to suspect that there is more to it than that. As noted through this analysis, Bailey has continually been hounded by the legacy of Ben Johnson. Moreover, even after winning two gold medals ‘for Canada’ his loyalty, and hence identity, remained suspect. Ever since his rather arrogant, unsportsmanlike behaviour at the 1997 ‘One to One’ Challenge, there seems to be increasing scrutiny and criticism of Donovan Bailey. For example, Canadian journalist Allan Fotheringham described him as ‘the poster boy for today’s arrogant and selfish jock millionaires’ (1999). Likewise, Canadian discus champion Jason Tunks has been highly critical of Bailey’s prima donna attitude noting that: ‘He just talks too much and doesn’t perform like he’s supposed to be doing. He should just keep quiet and start running well or just retire’ (Starkman, 2001). Moreover, as Starkman asserts ‘Tunks’ views could be dismissed as sour grapes if there weren’t so many other Canadian track athletes and officials who hold the same opinion’ (2001). Even on the eve of his final race Bailey faced controversy. Upset that some critics were sceptical of his injuries, Bailey claimed that his achievements were not appreciated in Canada (Maki, 2001; Wharmsby, 2001).

This analysis of the media discourses surrounding Ben Johnson and Donovan Bailey indicates that they represent broader debates about racial and national identity in Canada. In order to better understand the articulations between such discourses and the broader debates of which they are a part, I have emphasized the significance of context throughout
our analysis. For example, in the case of Ben Johnson it was noted that his accelerated rise to the status of national hero in 1988 was predicated on several factors, including the emotional exodus of Wayne Gretzky and the intensified cultural insecurities of the nation in light of a pending Free Trade Agreement with its powerful neighbour, the United States. Likewise, it was suggested that the Canadian backlash against Ben Johnson following the steroid scandal can only be understood within the contextual specificities of a nation that was in the midst of a seemingly forged crisis of identity (Jackson, 1994). The alleged crisis was articulated through an apparent threat of Americanization, and anxieties about the future of a particular image of Canadian identity as a consequence of immigration and the emergence of the Multicultural Act. Arguably, this combination of factors (and no doubt others) contributed to the rather dramatic dissociative discourses and practices that became a dominant feature of the Canadian response to Ben Johnson’s fall from grace in 1988.

Evidence has been presented of racist and ethnocentric discourses surrounding Ben Johnson, a Jamaican immigrant whose achievements elevated him to the status of a Canadian national icon, but whose subsequent transgressions rendered him a virtual persona non grata in his new homeland. Yet, as indicated with respect to the politics of identity in Canada, the implications of the Ben Johnson affair reach far beyond one individual’s shameful involvement in an international athletic drug scandal. Indeed, it has been argued that the affair became a defining moment in Canadian race relations, one that seems to have left a haunting legacy for the years that followed. From this analysis of three key events in the career of Donovan Bailey there is little doubt that there is, at least figuratively speaking, a ghost that is haunting both him and other black Canadians.

Yet, this ghost cannot solely be defined in terms of Ben Johnson, for the lingering presence of racism could only be sustained by virtue of both an existing and an emerging struggle for a particular version of Canadian national identity, one which, by default, privileges some groups and individuals and marginalizes others. It is important to recognize that there are ongoing points of conflict, or what Appadurai (1990) refers to as disjunctures, that occur when the hegemonic, idealized image of a national identity, in this case Canada’s, is challenged. Certainly the 1988 ascent and descent of Ben Johnson, as the most internationally renowned black athlete in Canadian history could be considered a point of disjuncture that required some negotiation and accommodation. We see accommodation occurring through both the Canadian public’s, and Johnson’s personal efforts to proclaim and define his identity as ‘Canadian’ at the height of his success. Conversely, there is an apparent disjuncture following the steroid scandal, given that some of the Canadian public dissociated itself from Johnson, whereas, he continued to identify himself as Canadian. In fact, Johnson used his loyalty to Canada as part of his explanation for using steroids, that
is, he was driven to succeed for his country. Judging by the contemporary identity politics of Donovan Bailey, the struggle to accommodate racial/ethnic ‘others’ as national heroes continues in Canada albeit within a different and shifting cultural context.

For example, unlike Johnson, Bailey appeared to attempt to empower himself by deliberately and strategically defining his own identity within certain contexts. And, though the evidence reveals that he was able to gain some sense of agency, that agency was only able to win him a temporary victory. Despite rising to the top of the world, Bailey could not escape the media discourses that continue to define and construct his identity as a Canadian ‘other’.

Notably, at the time of this writing another controversy linked to a black Canadian athlete has broken. At the 2001 World Track and Field Championships Venolyn Clarke, a 100 metre runner, tested positive for stanozolol, the same steroid used by Ben Johnson in 1988. The opening lines of two newspaper articles reporting the story suggest that the ghost has not yet been exorcised: ‘In a steroid story that has disturbing similarities to the Ben Johnson scandal . . .’ (Christie, 2001) and ‘The fifth day of the world athletics championships was bleak for Canada, bringing back ugly memories of Ben Johnson’s positive test for steroids 13 years ago’ (Smith, 2001). It would appear that Clarke, like Bailey will need to suffer the consequences of her actions, but it is likely she will do so within the context of Ben Johnson’s shadow. As a consequence, Bailey’s rhetorical question still stands: ‘Will Canada ever love a Black man [person]?’ (Farber, 1996: 145).

Conclusion

To conclude, this article returns to, and expands upon, the opening quote from Ibsen’s *Ghosts*:

> It’s not only what we inherit from our fathers and mothers that keeps on returning to us. It’s all kinds of old dead doctrines and opinions and beliefs, that sort of thing. They aren’t alive in us; but they hang on all the same, and we can’t get rid of them. I just have to pick up a newspaper, and it’s as if I could see ghosts slipping between the lines. They must be haunting our whole country, ghosts everywhere – so many and thick, they’re like grains of sand. And there we are, the lot of us, so miserably afraid of the light. (Ibsen, 1970: 76)

Clearly there is some evidence to suggest that the ghost of Ben Johnson continues to haunt Canadians and black Canadians in particular. As indicated, there are numerous discourses that both anticipate and/or celebrate the successes of Donovan Bailey and other elite black athletes (such as the men’s Olympic gold medal relay team: Bruny Surin, Robert...
Esmie, Glenroy Gilbert), with respect to their role in erasing the memory of Ben Johnson, and cleansing and redeeming Canada’s reputation. Yet, the haunting legacy of Ben Johnson can also be traced to the existing politics of racial and national identity in Canada. Thus, like Ibsen’s ghosts, perhaps Canada is afraid to acknowledge and confront its own history of racist attitudes and practices, and is therefore haunted by its own past.

According to Bairner, ‘throughout the twentieth century, sport has been one of the most valuable weapons at the disposal of nationalists, whatever their situation and respective aspirations’ (2001: 177). As a consequence it is not surprising that Canada, like most nations, capitalizes on the opportunity to highlight the achievements of its internationally successful athletes, especially racial/ethnic minorities. The celebration of such sporting achievements, and the corresponding public displays of support, serve to show the relative superiority of a nation’s social and political system, and serve as demonstrable proof of the equality of all citizens. However, as Hargreaves argues: ‘it is extremely unlikely that media sport counteracts chauvinist, ethnocentric, and occasionally racist-tinged conceptions of national identity’ (1994: 172). In fact, he suggests that these very sentiments are often encoded into the ongoing media discourse such that ‘sport is but one aspect of a multi-layered process, whereby an exclusionist sense of national identity is reproduced by the media’ (1994: 172). The contemporary Canadian crisis of identity as constitutive of, and constituted by, the identity politics of Donovan Bailey and Ben Johnson supports this contention. In light of the increasingly international flow of economic and human capital in the ‘global sports arena’ (Bale and Maguire, 1994; Maguire, 1999), the struggle over nationhood, citizenship and the meaning, basis and authenticity of national identity are likely to remain among the most central fixtures of contemporary social theorizing, both within and outside sport.

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Dr Steve Jackson is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Physical Education, University of Otago, New Zealand where he teaches courses in ‘Sport, Media and Culture’ and ‘Sociology of Sport’. His research interests include sport, media, globalization and sport, and advertising and sport. A member of the editorial board for the Sociology of Sport Journal, Steve has recently published (with David Andrews): Sport Stars: The Cultural Politics of Sporting Celebrity (Routledge).
Address: University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand.
[Email: sjackson@pooka.otago.ac.nz]
Abstracts

Branding documentary: New Zealand’s minimalist solution to cultural subsidy

Mary Debrett

During widespread neoliberal economic reform in the 1980s, New Zealand’s public television broadcaster, TVNZ, was restructured as a ‘cash cow’. A new agency, New Zealand on Air, was established to address public service goals, subsidizing local production on TVNZ and the new privately-owned TV3. The result was two high-rating strands of local documentary in prime time. A decade later populist programming had begun to pall with the revival of public television emerging as an election issue. Helen Clark’s Labour government recently restructured TVNZ as a Crown-owned corporation and approved a new Public TV Charter but, with financial objectives intact, the changes appear more makeover than reform. Exploring the impact of funding changes on social documentary production, this article draws on interviews with key industry players in the context of documentary outcomes for 1998. At stake in this discussion is the relationship between social agency and cultural subsidy in the global era.

Keywords: cultural policy, deregulation, local content, neoliberalism, public service broadcasting

Localizing the global: ‘domestication’ processes in international news production

Lisbeth Clausen

In order to describe the micro processes of global news production in national news broadcasting, this article investigates the strategies used by national producers to assign meaning to international events by analysing the production and presentation of specific news. Through an analysis of news production at four analytical levels – namely the global, the national, the organizational and the professional – the article exemplifies how processes leading to both globalization (homogenization) and ‘domestication’ (diversification) of news content are at work in international news communication. The study is based on investigations of Japanese newsrooms and comparative content analysis.

Keywords: decision-making, East–West, framing, globalization, newsroom studies
A world in retreat: the reconfiguration of hybridity in 20th-century New Zealand television

Brennon Wood

The blurring of formerly distinct contents is a much-noted feature of contemporary television. By focusing on the development of reality TV, interpreters have misconceived both the complexity of these hybridizations and the novelty of their current forms. Analysis of 20th-century New Zealand television reveals a range of hybrid types whose relative standing has changed over time. Post-war contents were dominated by fiction and by hybrid forms that maintained a distinction between reference and invention. The late 1970s, however, saw the advent of hybridizations that identified fiction with fact. During the 1990s this identification was generalized to televisual discourse through a sharp decline in fiction levels and the ascendence of a new cross between fact and advertisement, the infomercial. Over the course of the 20th century, hybridity moved from the conventional sense of a transformable world to fatalistic and unimaginative cultures of self-improvement.

Keywords: advertisement, fact, fiction, infomercial, reality TV

The media representation of public opinion: British television news coverage of the 2001 general election

Rod Brookes, Justin Lewis and Karin Wahl-Jorgensen

This article examines the ideological assumptions and consequences of the media representation of public opinion through a study of television news coverage of the 2001 British general election. It discusses how a certain type of poll (the voting intention or ‘horse-race’ poll) is privileged, while other types of opinion surveys are ignored. But it also identifies less obvious means through which public opinion is invoked. First, casual and often unsubstantiated assertions about the attitude of the public are regularly made by anchors, reporters or politicians. Second, the views of individual members of the public are made to stand in for public opinion overall, either through vox pops or through the interaction of members of the public with politicians on the campaign trail. The article concludes that the consequence of the media representation of public opinion in the 2001 British general election campaign is to legitimize the hegemonic definition of politics as a sport played by political and media elites, thus reducing citizens to the limited and passive role of spectators.

Keywords: democracy, journalism, polls, public sphere, vox pops

Producing nature(s): on the changing production ecology of natural history TV

Simon Cottle

Over recent years natural history programmes have undergone dramatic change and evolution both in form and in their representations of nature(s). This article empirically examines the changing ‘production ecology’ of natural history television and how this has impacted on the changing nature(s) represented within this
popular genre of programming. The discussion explores the strategic and creative responses of organizations and producers, including those of natural history units based within national public service and commercial TV companies, international satellite and cable TV distributors, and medium- and small-scale production houses and independent producers. The concept of ‘production ecology’ is elaborated to help orient research precisely to the organizational dynamics and relations characterizing a particular field of cultural production and how these can permit differentiated responses to forces of change and creative adaptations of form. Attending to the production ecology of natural history programming reveals how and why transformations of genre have been enacted, and serves to underline the centrality of issues of form at the heart of the productive enterprise within different cultural fields. Considerations of form also help to explain the woeful natural history programme representations of ecology and environmental politics across recent years.

Keywords: critical political economy, cultural field, form, genre, media organization, production, wildlife history programmes

Understanding speech rights: defensive and empowering approaches to the First Amendment

Laura Stein

This article draws on liberal democratic theory to provide a philosophical foundation for understanding the relationship between speech rights and democracy. Utilizing the work of key political theorists, such as Mill, Friedman, Hayek, Green, Dewey and Barber, I argue that two conflicting theories of speech rights coexist within liberal democratic thought. I demonstrate how legal interpretations of the First Amendment manifest and reinforce these theories, which I label ‘defensive’ and ‘empowering’. Analysis of two Supreme Court cases widely recognized as pivotal in determining print and broadcast speech regimes, Red Lion Broadcasting v. Federal Communications Commission (1969) and Miami Herald Publishing Co. v. Tornillo (1974), highlights the role these theories play in legal thought. I conclude by arguing that empowering speech rights offer the best foundation for democratic communication, and by proposing a set of legal principles capable of revitalizing the meaning and function of speech rights in the USA.

Keywords: democratic communication, freedom of speech, liberalism, neoliberalism, participatory democratic theory, speech rights

Exorcizing the ghost: Donovan Bailey, Ben Johnson and the politics of Canadian identity

Steven J. Jackson

This article explores how sporting ‘Others’, such as Ben Johnson and Donovan Bailey, are constituted by, and constitutive of, the politics of racial and national identity in Canada. Tracing the emerging media discourses surrounding these two ‘Jamaican-born’ Canadian sprinters, this study specifically examines: (a) the context within which Ben Johnson and the contemporary crisis of racial and national identity in Canada emerged; (b) previous research regarding the discourses
which defined and redefined Ben Johnson’s racial and national identities before and after the 1988 steroid scandal; and (c) evidence of the nature and extent to which the symbolic spectre of Ben Johnson haunts Donovan Bailey and other Canadian black people of Caribbean descent, as well as Canada itself.

Keywords: citizenship, crisis, discourse, nation, steroids

Terhi Rantanen is best known for her work on the development of the Soviet era news agencies TASS and Novosti. This book incorporates that expertise and extends it to discussions of new communication technologies, television and advertising as they have developed in the Soviet and post-Soviet era. These case studies are combined with a consideration of what the experience of post-Soviet Russian media can add to scholarly debate on globalization.

Globalization, as Rantanen’s opening theoretical chapter argues, has tended to be viewed by media scholars as synonymous with ‘cultural imperialism’ and, in particular, American imperialism. It is a strength of her book that she begins with a rejection of this critical orthodoxy, pointing, for example, to the fact that ‘the boundaries between ownership, structure, distribution, or content are so overlapped and blurry that it is often impossible to say what the country of origin of a particular media product is’ (p. 10). She notes that in the 1970s and 1980s the Soviet Union, and not the United States, was ‘the largest purveyor of broadcast information in the world’, much of it distributed to client states in eastern and central Europe. She points out that, as well as the export of culture from the advanced capitalist to the developing world, there has been a lot of traffic the other way, from Brazilian soap operas to Japanese game shows. Boyd-Barrett’s critique of the media imperialism thesis as overly simplistic is cited approvingly, and Rantanen aims to follow in his footsteps with consideration of the Soviet/Russian case.

The book thus hopes to score on two levels: one, as a reasonably up-to-date survey of how important sub-sectors of the Russian media have developed since the collapse of Soviet power in 1991 (though, as all who have worked in this area know, the Soviet and post-Soviet media represent a fast-moving target); and two, as a contribution to the globalization/media imperialism debate, underpinned by authoritative understanding of an actually existing media system undergoing immense upheaval against the backdrop of a rapidly changing global media market.

Along the way, Rantanen presents some useful correctives to conventional wisdom on the real and imagined evils of cultural imperialism. ‘In the Soviet and post-Soviet context’, she writes, ‘media imperialism scholars must confront the unthinkable – Russian audiences actually wanted to have Western programs, to which they were denied access for decades’ (p. 10). As someone who spent a lot of time in the Soviet Union just as it was opening up in the mid- to late 1980s, I can testify to the fact that, for the average Muscovite, one of the most exciting cultural moments of those times was the appearance of the first Beatles albums in state-
owned record shops. Anything Western – and American, especially – whether
music, film, TV or literature – was eagerly snapped up by a population starved of
all but what was deemed good for them by the Party. Russians, especially the
young, aspired to and fantasized about the cultural and consumerist delights of
advanced capitalism, and measured the progress of Gorbachev’s perestroika by the
degree to which these became available. Making post-Soviet reality correspond
more closely to those fantasies remains the key political and economic challenge
for the current generation of Russian leaders.

Rantanen’s chapter on NCTs reminds us of the progressive role played by
communication technology in the ending of authoritarian Soviet power. Not an
original idea in itself, she adds her voice to the ranks of those who have argued
that the collapse of Soviet Communist hegemony was strongly linked to the
accelerating speed and growing reach of unofficial information flow in the 1980s.
As she puts it, ‘boundaries that were once considered impermeable became
permeable’ (p. 52) because of international tourism, the fax, the VCR and the
activities of global broadcasters like the BBC World Service. All of this, Rantanen
stresses, was part of the process of globalization.

The discussion of post-Soviet media trends is similarly lively, avoiding sim-
plistic denunciations of media imperialism, and preferring to stress the specificity
and distinctiveness of the Russian experience. On the subject of television she
notes that ‘the liberalisation of the market has introduced new channels and new
ownership forms’, but that ‘the ownership of Russian television has maintained its
own specific features’ (p. 104). Through these discussions Rantanen convincingly
paints a picture of globalization, not as something that bad western media barons
do to poor defenceless victims in Russia or elsewhere on the planet, but as a
process characterized by the interaction of the local and the global, governed at all
times by specific historical and cultural conditions.

In this Rantanen’s book makes a valuable contribution to the globalization
debate, as well as providing much-needed empirical material on the current state of
the Russian media. She also showcases the work of a new generation of Russian
media scholars such as Elena Vartanova, Andrei Richter and Ivan Zassoursky,
working hard in much more difficult conditions than those faced by their Western
peers to monitor, analyse and progressively shape the continuing evolution of the
media in what remains, for all its problems of democratic transition, one of the
world’s most important and influential countries.

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Brian McNair
University of Stirling

Yahya R. Kamalipour and Kul dip R. Rampal (eds) 2001 Media, Sex, Violence and

Media, Sex, Violence and Drugs in the Global Village takes the international
dominance of American cultural products and the American mass communication
media, as its twin foci. The editors, Yahya Kamalipour and Kuldip Rampal, quote sociologist Todd Gitlin as saying of American popular culture that it is ‘the latest in a long succession of bidders for global unification. It succeeds the Latin imposed by the Roman Empire and the Catholic Church, and Marxist Leninism imposed by Communist government’ (p. 1–2). This is clearly a very important issue in global media studies and this text provides a timely addition to the scholarship on American mass communication and its cultural impact around the world. The volume contains 15 essays; seven of which explore the American mass media, eight of which explore the implications of western media imports in specific countries and one piece of research on Internet web sites with sexual content.

The first two papers set the context for the anthology looking at ‘The Paradox of Media Effects’ and ‘Social Implications of Media Globalisation’. It was disappointing that whilst the meanings of ‘mass’ and ‘media’ were explored, the meanings of ‘sex’, ‘violence’ and ‘drugs’ were not, as these are highly contested concepts and the reader needs to know how this text defines them. What follows is a plethora of research approaches looking at different forms of media in a wide range of countries. This includes a survey of students in Turkey; analysis of three Hollywood films and of television talk shows in Lebanon; reviews of the historical context, legislation, social policy, organizations and literature in Egypt; secondary analysis of existing data on the effects of satellite television in India; a case study of Howard Jones (shock jock); and cross-cultural comparisons of effects of pornography in the USA, Hong Kong and China. This makes for a wealth of data and analysis. However, the anthology would have benefited from clearer organizing principles to guide the reader. Additionally, the breadth of coverage does not enable comparisons to be made across different cultures.

Although the chapters in this volume are uneven in quality, there are several thoughtful essays. Arnold de Beer and Karen Ross, for example, provide a helpful chapter exploring the ways the news media (broadcast and print) portray violence against women, which includes an overview of the political, juridical and sociocultural contexts in South Africa and a discourse approach looking at ‘rape’ and ‘domestic violence’. They conclude that violence against women and children is a global issue and that, since 1999, important steps are now being taken by the South African government to treat such violence with the seriousness it deserves.

There are two weaknesses in this collection of essays. The first is related to the difficulties inherent in work on the ‘effects’ of violent, sexual and sexually violent material, and the second is the lack of attention to the meanings of violence. The ‘effects’ research is problematic due to the difficult nature of connecting violent/sexual material with definite outcomes or impacts. This is linked to the second problem. What does it mean to particular people to see, hear or read about violence or sex? This anthology does not look at such meanings or the ways in which people construct meanings from film, television, news, etc. Such research needs to be both holistic and very specific, taking account of the specificity of each medium, the context of consumption, the class, gender, ethnicity and sexuality of the viewer/reader and wider cultural differences.

This book is therefore limited in its treatment of the intersections of identity and meanings of violence, but the sheer variety of topics covered will make it of interest and use to researchers, students and teachers in communication and media studies.

Paula Wilcox
Brighton University

The papers collected in this book originated as presentations to a European Consortium for Political Research workshop in Copenhagen in April 2000. Combining a range of methodological approaches with case studies allowing for international comparisons, the unifying theme is the questioning of routine ‘casting’ of politicians, spin doctors and journalists within the process(es) of political communication.

The book is divided into three main parts, with the opening section exploring differing ways in which political journalists operate. Examining the first Blair administration in the UK, Raymond Kuhn argues that command-and-control news management has become an integral part of government, not an optional extra. However, although referring to the traditional pro-Tory nature of the bulk of the UK national press, Kuhn does not make clear whether he regards this as a major cause of the Blair government’s control freakery. He points out that political journalists are not simply ‘willing accomplices or passive victims’ and ‘may accept, negotiate with or reject the proffered political spin’ (p. 62). The reason so many journalists bang on about spin is, he argues, so they can make themselves look big and clever: ‘By first demonising the power of spin, journalists can hope to create a positive image of themselves in the minds of their audiences when they then act subversively to reveal the machinations of the spin-doctors’ (p. 66). Along the way, Kuhn criticizes Stuart Hall’s concept of primary definition on the grounds that it over-emphasizes the structural power of government to define events; however, a more nuanced reading of primary definition would surely see government itself as only one, albeit a powerful one, among many potential ‘primary definers’.

Franca Roncarolo examines the different political culture in Italy and concludes that the integration of political and media elites there has taken its toll on journalists’ autonomy in political reporting. Olivier Baisnee’s study of coverage of the European Union (EU), meanwhile, shows how journalists from most European countries view EU issues without the domestic prism that dominates the agenda of UK reporters based in Brussels.

In another illuminating case study, Duncan McCargo analyses media in Thailand and draws wider conclusions about journalism in developing countries without state-controlled media: ‘[There] are deeply symbiotic ties between Thai journalists and politicians which undermine conventional notions of balance and objectivity. Power-holders provide a range of services . . . for journalists, who in turn reciprocate with favourable coverage’ (p. 106). He adds that such relationships are nonetheless ‘multifaceted and ambiguous’ (p. 106). The point is left unmade by McCargo, but the above description resonates beyond developing countries. As the editors comment, journalists in the West are involved in ‘a similar spiral of reciprocal exchange’ (p. 10).

Part 2 examines whether the dominance of a narrative of ‘scandal’ within political journalism leads to cynicism among citizens. Rodney Tiffen traces the ‘unruly process’ by which a particular scandal in Australia emerged, gathered momentum, took on a life of its own and was eventually ‘resolved’. Veronique Pujas takes a more conceptual look at scandals in Italy, France and Spain, pointing out in the process that ‘scandal’ is a social construction that is attractive to the media because events can be personified rather than discussed at the level of social forces. Kees Brants and Hetty van Kempen suggest that the more consensual political culture in the Netherlands has coincided with less cynicism among the Dutch electorate than in most other western democracies.
In Part 3, on the relationship between political journalism and democracy, Theodore Glasser and Francis Lee conclude that, despite its rhetoric of empowerment, US ‘civic journalism’ fails to confront the political and economic power of media conglomerates pursuing ‘private gain at the expense of public service’ (p. 219). For his part, Brian McNair takes the opportunity to restate his case against the ‘dumbing down’ thesis. For McNair, the public sphere in the UK is now both bigger and better than ever. Jeremy Tunstall also finds no evidence to support the idea that journalism has dumbed down. Using his conclusion to point out that journalists in 1900 used to look back fondly on the supposed ‘golden age’ of journalism in the 1860s, he argues that today’s audiences ‘use the media rather as consumers use the supermarket’ (p. 230).

Yet, as the contributors to this book are well aware, we are not simply consumers. We are also citizens. And this stimulating collection is to be welcomed because it can help us – as consumers, citizens, teachers and students – to read political journalism in all its guises.

Tony Harcup
Trinity and All Saints, Leeds, UK


The central concerns of this concise and timely book are with European democracy and communications. The author sees a truly democratic, unified Europe as possible only if the role of communications as an integrative, progressive force is recognized and policies implemented that will encourage the growth of a media sector in Europe free from both political and market influence. European media policy is examined against a background of what is known as the democratic deficit.

The book attempts to set out a normative model of public service broadcasting for the European Union (EU), which, while recognizing that although there are a variety of systems in operation, with some more effective than others, there is enough common ground between them on a normative level to provide a framework against which performance can be measured. Unusually for a book on policy and perhaps heavy going for the uninitiated (but welcome all the same), the author, in his discussion of the public sphere, takes Habermas back to his roots in Kant, in an attempt to provide a philosophical underpinning of the notion that political citizenship can be based upon a rational identification of common interest between polity and citizen, rather than the more normal conditions of shared culture and identity.

Ward takes issue with what he describes as an orthodoxy that has grown up in academic discussions of European audiovisual policy, which he says is mistaken in its conclusions. It has been widely held that EU policy to date has been negative, even destructive, weighted in favour of the market to the detriment of notions of the public interest and of public service. In this, he is in a minority of (qualified) support for EU policy-makers, including the much-reviled Commission. Though far from perfect, he contends EU media policy has on balance been much more public service friendly than is normally allowed.

To support his case he goes back to primary sources – the policies put forward and decisions reached by the various institutions of the EU. The policy analysis begins with the establishment of Europa (which foundered) and works its way through the European Commission’s decisions on state aid and public broadcasters,
to competition policy. Subsequently, Ward argues that challenges to public service broadcasters from the private sector have seen the Commission finding in favour of the former as it has accepted that it is the right of individual states to decide the shape and remit of their public broadcasters. The Commission has also, he contends, acknowledged the importance of media pluralism in its application of competition policy.

Moves towards privatization and the deregulation of the media were introduced at a national level, by individual member states prior to Television without Frontiers, not the other way round. If EU media policy subsequent to the early idealism of Eurikon and Europa has indeed concentrated on the media as an industry, that is because European governments have jealously guarded powers to regulate the content rather than the free movement of television services, and have been loath to relinquish control of such a vital component of national democracy to the centre. This is also reflected in current EU thinking on convergence, Ward maintains, which has abandoned an initial Bangemann report-led enthusiasm for the free market, and now devolves content issues to individual member states.

Finally, the author contends it is for those member states to see to it that the full potential of television as a mechanism through which European citizens can discuss matters of common interest rationally and critically, is explored. This is a serious and considered account of EU media policy, its arguments grounded in evidence. Through its discussion of the nature and causes of the lack of democratic legitimacy which plagues the EU, and its positing of a normative framework against which to measure media performance, the book also makes an intelligent contribution to current debates.

Anthony McNicholas
University of Westminster, London, UK


There are several concurrent venerations of movement, of mobility and travel in the worlds we live. For example, Tim Cresswell has recently argued, mobility is a favoured characteristic of post-structuralism, feminism and postmodern theory, one which has often been seen as having a privileged relationship to resistance, implying a sense of transgression of orderings, placings. Fixity, rootedness, belonging, have little place here; movement and circulations are the fascination. At the same time mainstream neo-liberal thinking, which has appropriated the term ‘globalization’, has it that the freedom of capital and geographical mobility of (some) people is also a necessary condition for economic prosperity. Here borders must also be broken through, limitations upon movement of commodities should be removed. Of course there are different stresses on the aspects of mobility within such differing approaches. The former (hopefully) critical, approaches may point out that not everyone has the ability to be mobile; that forced movement of people is not the same as being able to choose where to go on holiday, and that developing nations to being coerced to open up their economies in highly unequal ways compared to developed ones. In other words there are complex power-geometries at work in what we need to think of as the production of mobilities and localities. However, such views are often not central enough to postmodern approaches to mobility, while they are more or less ignored, or viewed as incidental costs, by neo-liberal acolytes.

This rather idiosyncratic collection by artists, cultural theorists, photographers, anthropologists and others, seeks – to its credit – to claim to ask questions about
the supposed benefits of increased mobility. How the varied essays achieve this is a different thing. But certainly the jacket blurb lets the book down in its claim to be questioning such benefits. Here, it is argued that ‘we live in an age of increased mobility’, one which ‘forms the hub of our global culture’, and asks ‘where does this freedom of movement take us?’ Such terms beg the question of who this ‘we’ or ‘us’ is, while the foregrounding of a perceived ‘freedom of movement’ only adds to this question of whose freedom? Few of the essays in this book focus on such issues. Most do seem to accept a sense of freedom of movement as existing, and it is often on this notion of movement and a sense of mixed locational identity that the essays muse.

There are some 19 written articles, photo-essays and conceptual art pieces in this book. The contributors range from cultural theorists Barry Curtis and Claire Pajaczkowska writing on location-envy and status, to the recently shortlisted Turner prize artist Fiona Banner with a rather irritating email piece on not arriving at an exhibition in Vilnius (it’s the not getting there that counts). In between we have the architectural historian Jane Rendall, taking an autobiographical look at some of the ways that writing allows her to find aspects of herself in encounters with others. We also find Peter Wollen giving a rundown of all the airports he can remember having been to with short anecdotes on why (he’s been to a lot).

So this is a varied and uneven book, it could not be otherwise. Yet, it is some of the artist’s contributions that are perhaps most problematic. Partly this is to do with the format of the book, and perhaps the book format itself. In several of the photo-essays the pictures are left to carry themselves, until in the back you find some written notes in an ‘Information’ section, which turn out to be informative and interesting, but which could easily have been located in user-friendlier places. Similarly, the documentation of the ‘street museum’ of exchange that the Columbian group Colectivo Cambalanche engaged in in urban centres around the world seems a provocative project. Here it is documented with photos of events, and lists of the kinds of objects exchanged, but again more textual context might have made the piece more interesting in this format.

There are other essays here that play on sometimes odd movements of people, or created locations: for example an ethnography of the Swiss Goa dance scene of the 1990s; an autobiographical essay on becoming a thang ka painter; and an analysis of Californian-style suburban gated communities near Hong Kong. All of this sounds diverse, and it is. But this is not really an academic book, more one that will appeal to those interested in reflecting in a slightly off-the-wall way, but perhaps not too deeply, on some mobilities, locations and their productions.

Reference


Chris Wilbert
Anglia Polytechnic University, UK
Books received


