

## Chapter Six

### **‘This is The News!’ An analysis of the statement, ‘News has long been considered the flagship of any T.V. Station...’<sup>1</sup>**

#### **Introduction**

The News is virtually the last area of local ‘live’ production still surviving in Western Australian commercial television, although today, the *NEW10 News* emanates from their Sydney studios. Although the News has always been a separate area of production, in terms of ‘entertainment’ it cannot be considered as a separate entity. Despite that truism, the News is important enough on its own, to warrant a separate specific chapter.

Like other television stations in the Eastern States, TVW7 was ‘calved’ from a newspaper group. Although some oral history contributors have maintained that there was even-handed treatment of all departments, others recall that ‘special’ emphasis was always placed on the importance of the News. There was a continuation of that emphasis at STW9. This chapter will look at reasons for this having been so.

There is examination of various facets of news collection including paid-for content (both written and pictorial) from local newspapers sources. There was also a need for extended film coverage of local happenings due to time delays in acquiring from the Eastern States (and overseas) suitable imported material for daily transmission . The chapter looks at the changes over the years with the introduction of satellites and ‘live’ crosses to occurring events. The impact of the Internet and the extensive news coverage by that medium is also a factor considered.

Censorship and perceived moral standards are commented upon, along with the subject of audience sensitivities, as is the 1970s saying ‘If it bleeds it leads!’ This dictum inherited from the newspaper world refers to the viewing audiences’ voyeuristic impulse to consume news material that is based on disasters occasioning suffering and hardship. The ‘nearer to home’

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<sup>1</sup> *Swan Television & Radio Broadcasters Limited, Annual Report 1979, 6KT-9*, Tuart Hill, 19 November 1979, p.4.  
See Chapter Eight, p.243

factor is important in news dissemination. News of the many thousands of dead Africans slaughtered in Rwanda in 1994 did not have the same impact or appeal for viewing the sensational, as did several thousand dead Americans, as evidenced at the time of the World Trade Centre demolition in September 2001.

### **What is television news and what does it do?**

In answer to such a basic question as this, MacGregor provides a succinct description by saying, 'News is by definition a volatile, time-critical medium where the constant changes in content which constitute its very essence are very often paralleled by changes in form.'<sup>2</sup> An un-named writer for the Glasgow University Media Group described television news thus:

For television news is a cultural artefact; it is a consequence of socially manufactured messages which carry many of the culturally dominant assumptions of our society. From the accents of the newscasters to the vocabulary of camera angles; from who gets on and what questions they are asked, via selection of stories to presentation of bulletins, the new is a highly mediated product.<sup>3</sup>

However, the GUMG invariably suggested the '...hypothesis that televised news systematically *favoured* dominant groups...'<sup>4</sup> Les Brown, looking at television news in the United States observed,

The mission of the news is not to preserve the status quo but to document change. News is a subhistory. To select for coverage only the stories that do not threaten the power structure, or to report fact out of the context of truth, is a blasphemy against the public's right to know which brings news perilously close to propaganda.<sup>5</sup>

According to Pierre Bourdieu, there can be little doubt that television news provides information to those who would otherwise not be well informed.

If I stress this point, it's because everyone knows that a high proportion of the population reads no newspaper at all and is dependent on television as their sole

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<sup>2</sup> Brent MacGregor, *Live, Direct and Biased Making Television News in the Satellite Age*, Arnold, London, p.2.

<sup>3</sup> John Langer, *Tabloid Television Popular journalism and the 'other news'*, Routledge, London, 1998, p.5, op.cit., GMUG, *Bad News*, Routledge & Kegan, London, 1976.

<sup>4</sup> David McQueen, *Television A Media Student's Guide*, Arnold, London, 1998, p.107

<sup>5</sup> Les Brown, *Television The Business Behind the Box*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., New York, 1971, p.223

source of news. Television enjoys a de facto monopoly on what goes into the heads of a significant part of the population and what they think.<sup>6</sup>

Putnis said, ‘Television news is unquestionably important. It plays a dominant role in telling people what is occurring and, perhaps even more importantly, ‘what the issues are’ in their region, nation and in the world.’<sup>7</sup> and Dahlgren reinforces that proposition with, ‘Defenders posit that since the emergence of television journalism, more people have become more informed about national and international questions’ and ‘Television journalism does – with many qualifications – foster forms of awareness and public knowledge conducive to the democratic character of society’<sup>8</sup> However, Martin Esslin warned of the dangers inherent in taking everything the television provides at face value:

The social ideology implicit in most of the programs broadcast on TV does not, I believe, express a true view of our own culture, but what is in fact a distorted one. The effects of having this image constantly before us rather than a truer reflection of our basic social ethos and philosophy, as I have noted previously, must give cause for some apprehension.<sup>9</sup>

It has been argued that every television station and network heads its evening program line-up with an evening News. In 1987 Fiske maintained that the prime reason is to entangle the senior male among the resident members of a specific television audience, although he did quote from Tulloch and Moran, who gave their source as an Australian program manager who said, “Get the kids in at 6, 7 or 7.30 and the parents will watch too. Older people will watch shows for younger people, but not vice versa”.<sup>10</sup> Sixteen years later there would be argument raised by some, that the titular ‘head of the house’ does indeed still occupy that position. Fiske also notes that the ‘...national news is primarily masculine culture...’<sup>11</sup> but often

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<sup>6</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *On Television*, New Press, New York, 1996, p.18.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Putnis, *Displaced, Re-Cut and Recycled: File-Tape In Television News*, Centre for Journalism Research and Education Bond University, Queensland, 1994, p.142

<sup>8</sup> Peter Dahlgren, *Television and the Public Sphere*, SAGE Publications, London, 1995, pp.47-47.

<sup>9</sup> Martin Esslin, *The Age of Television*, W.H. Freeman and Company, San Francisco, 1982, p.87

<sup>10</sup> John Fiske, *Television Culture*, Routledge, London, 1987, p.56, op.cit., J. Tulloch and A., Moran, “*A Country Practice: Approaching the Audience*,” paper delivered at the Australian Communication Association Conference, Perth, 1984.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p.281

concluded with “softer” stories having a more feminine appeal.<sup>12</sup> Spence said that ‘...there’s no doubt about it, women were pointed in the direction of certain stories. That is, a woman’s story. You wouldn’t obviously today [1999] – you’d be at some risk by suggesting it today.’<sup>13</sup>

In general, Turner asserts that Australian Television News and Current Affairs, display similar levels of ‘ethical standards and professional ideologies’ as their counter parts in other media.<sup>14</sup> Fiske places even greater trust in journalists by stating that, ‘News professionals in particular and broadcasters in general are keen to separate news from fiction...’<sup>15</sup> However, the additional power which lies in the visual component of television news does provide an advantage especially in the coverage of ‘live or ‘breaking events.’<sup>16</sup> Analysing Fiske, Dahlgren provides this outline of television news:

Fiske distinguishes between official, alternative and popular news. Official news is ‘serious’ and essentially speaks with the voice of the power bloc. Alternative news is the small minority of outlets, offering left radical perspectives. Popular news is the staple of the majority, the people...TV news must meet the key criteria of popular taste, those of relevance and pleasurable productivity.<sup>17</sup>

Fiske also said, ‘... [broadcast news] needs...to balance popular tastes and pleasures with educational, socially responsible criteria’.<sup>18</sup>

In 1997, Brent MacGregor quoted McQuail’s summary of the television news media content as being another useful tool that can be used when considering the general function of television news systems.

- \* Content reflects social reality (mirror metaphor).
- \* Content is influenced by media workers’ socialization and attitudes.
- \* Content is influenced by media-organisational routines.
- \* Content is influenced by wider social institutions and forces.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Terry Spence, personal communication, interview, Maylands, 27 April 1999.

<sup>14</sup> Graeme Turner, ‘Television news and current affairs: ‘Welcome to Frontline’’, in *The Australian TV Book*, Graeme Turner and Stuart Cunningham (eds.), Allen & Unwin, St. Leonards, 2000, p.90

<sup>15</sup> John Fiske, 1987, p.282

<sup>16</sup> Graeme Turner, 2000, p.90

<sup>17</sup> Peter Dahlgren, *Television and the Public Sphere*, SAGE Publications, London, 1995, p.51, op.cit., John Fiske, ‘Popular news’ in *Reading the Popular*, Unwin Hyman, London, 1989, p.185

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

\*Content is a function of ideological positions and maintains the *status quo*.<sup>19</sup>

As might be expected, John Hartley appears to have a slightly tongue-in-cheek definition of television journalism when stating:

Journalism is a *terra nullius* of epistemology, deemed by anyone who wanders by to be an uninhabited territory of knowledge, fit to be colonized by anyone who's interested... Social scientists exploit news stories as evidence of something real (beyond the stories) which will prove their case.<sup>20</sup>

However, there is another function to be considered when examining television news and that is its value as entertainment. John H. McManus in 1994 wrote 'Television Is Inherently an Entertainment Medium... When people sit down in front of a television, they are conditioned to expect entertainment.'<sup>21</sup> Van Zoonen, quoted the Dutch News Director Brusse as having said, '...emphasise its entertainment and emotional qualities instead. 'One tear on TV tells you so much more than ever so well described tears in a newspaper. Television made us communicate and participate in world affairs with tears. A news bulletin without a tear is not a really good one and that is what they have to learn here'<sup>22</sup> Martin Esslin said, 'Television is perceived by its viewers as a form of relaxation, of entertainment.' and 'TV therefore is perceived by its audience primarily as a medium of *entertainment* and all programming – including the news, documentaries and political broadcasts – is ultimately judged for its *entertainment value*.'<sup>23</sup> Casting some doubt on the validity of the close association between the news and entertainment, in 1998 John Langer said 'According to Clements. We are 'lulled by the entertainment values which often replace news values' and 'are left contentedly

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<sup>19</sup> Brent MacGregor, *Live, Direct and Biased Making Television News in the Satellite Age*, Arnold, London, p.82, op.cit., D. McQuail, *News and Journalism in the U.K.*, Routledge, London, 1994, p.82

<sup>20</sup> John Hartley, *Popular Reality Journalism, Modernity, Popular Culture*, Arnold Publishing, London, 1996, p.39

<sup>21</sup> John H. McManus, *Market Driven Journalism: Let the Citizen Beware?*, SAGE Publications, Thousand Oaks California, 1994, p.171.

<sup>22</sup> Liesbet van Zoonen, 'One of the Girls? The changing gender of journalism', in Cynthia Carter, Gill Branston and Stuart Allan (eds), *News, Gender and Power*, Routledge, London, 1998, p.43

<sup>23</sup> 'Martin Esslin, *The Age of Television*, W.H. Freeman and Company, San Francisco, 1982, p.53 and pp.61-62

confused'<sup>24</sup> Dahlgren appears to support Langer in referring to Postman, 'Postman (1985) in his broadside against television, asserts that everything the medium touches turns into show business, including news and politics: entertainment automatically overwhelms serious information.'<sup>25</sup>

In recent years the term 'infotainment' has come into the unofficial lexicon and is qualified thus by Jock Given. 'Although Tony Branigan, from the Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations (FACTS) stresses that 'infotainment' in Australia is not a single 'it' – there are reality shows, documentaries, docu-dramas... and others in what is only a 'loosely-connected range of genres'<sup>26</sup>, on the local news-front, Darcy Farrell asserts that modern-day news has lost its direction and puts today's bulletins in the category of 'infotainment'<sup>27</sup>

Journalist Brian Coulter agreed, with emphasis:

Money hungry television stations have proven that the power of television can be used to drip feed the public with crap (including what I call newfotainment) to the point where the viewing public now accepts this rubbish as 'normal'. News services are now totally driven by ratings, not real news information and accuracy. This year I rang a television station with an idea for an exclusive story which had major implications for Perth's water supply. All the necessary vision had been professionally shot – it was the only vision available because the event had passed. The entire story had an enormous additional visual potential and other angles. I was told: "Mate until you can convince me how to sell the story to Joe Wooduck and Betty Balga, I'm not interested." The story subsequently was the second lead story on another television station some weeks later.<sup>28</sup>

McQueen appears to support that view:

Definitions of news are constantly shifting: much that is regarded as news in television newsrooms today would have been rejected without hesitation 30 years ago, and vice versa. Not only has the criteria by which what is regarded as 'important and interesting' changed dramatically but also the way such information is packaged has

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<sup>24</sup> John Langer, *Tabloid Television Popular journalism and the 'Other News'*, Routledge, London, 1998, p.171, op.cit. Ian Clements, 'The ravenous half-shut eye manufacturing bad news from nowhere', *Media Information Australia* 39, 1986.

<sup>25</sup> Peter Dahlgren, *Television and the Public Sphere*, SAGE Publications, London, 1995, p.58, op.cit. N. Postman, *Amusing Ourselves To Death*, Viking, New York, 1985.

<sup>26</sup> Jock Given, 'Commercial Networks: Still the ones?', in *The Australian TV Book*, Graeme Turner and Stuart Cunningham, 9eds), Allen & Unwin, St. Leonards, 2000, p.49

<sup>27</sup> Darcy Farrell, Former News Editor TVW7, Personal Communication, Interview, 28 July 1999.

<sup>28</sup> Brian Coulter, TV Journalist, written communication, 29 October 2003.

evolved over the years into the format we recognize today. The dictionary defines news as *a recent event*:<sup>29</sup>

However, Dahlgren counters that contention with:

Defenders of traditional news values have been engaged in what Langer calls a 'lament' over tabloid news, attacking its triviality, its deflection of attention from more serious matters, its pandering to basic instincts, and so on. Yet we should be clear that, ultimately, there is not a difference of *kind*, only one of degree, between tabloid news and the more traditional news format. All television news contains tabloid elements.<sup>30</sup>

and then quotes Langer (1992)

What may distinguish unworthy news, however, are its excesses, its flamboyant gestures: It takes some of the codes and conventions of news in general and inflates, exaggerates and displays them more directly. The unworthy news may get its bad name, not because of the popularity or its shameless persistence in bulletins, but because it is unruly, more openly acknowledging and flaunting devices and constructions which the serious news suppresses and hides. Perhaps, in the end, this is why the lament is so harsh on this kind of news, because it is what news is, only more so.<sup>31</sup>

John Fiske says

News is negative. What is news is what disrupts the normal. What is absent from the text of the news, but present as a powerful force in its reading, are the unspoken assumptions that life is ordinarily smooth-running, rule- and law-abiding, and harmonious. [and]

The common complaint that our news is always "bad" ignores the fact that "the bad" is treated and read as a deviation from the norm, which is therefore constructed as "good", and that this normative assumption is all the more powerful for being unspoken.<sup>32</sup>

In 1998, John Langer said,

It has been argued, more in popular than in scholarly terms, that news is, and must be, obsessively 'bad (negative) news'. This claim is reinforced by examples of 'good news' newspapers or television programmes failing miserably in the market-place.

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<sup>29</sup> David McQueen, *Television A Media Student's Guide*, Arnold, London, 1998, p.91

<sup>30</sup> Peter Dahlgren, 1995, p.62.

<sup>31</sup> Peter Dahlgren, 1995, p.62, op.cit., J. Langer, (1992) 'Truly awful news on television' in P. Dahlgren and C.Sparks (eds), *Journalism and Popular Culture*, SAGE, London, 1992

<sup>32</sup> John Fiske, *Television Culture*, Routledge, London, 1987, pp.284-285

However, this argument is misplaced. On closer examination it can be seen that bad news may in fact be good news: the mediation of the contradiction between permanence and change in the 'other news' seems to provide an occasion to engage with a 'philosophical treatise' every night of the week. For those lamenting over television journalism having lost its way, these sorts of opportunities could hold out renewed hope, even if the news which does offer regular excursions into metaphysics is considered mostly 'bad' (negative and unworthy).<sup>33</sup>

Langer wrote the foregoing twelve years after his following assessment of British television news had evidenced this scathing attitude:

- Television news is primarily a commodity enterprise run by market-oriented managers who place outflanking the 'competition' above journalistic responsibility and integrity.
- Television is in the business of entertainment, like any other television product, attempting to pull audiences for commercial not journalistic reasons
- Television news has set aside values of professional journalism in order to indulge in the presentation of gratuitous spectacles.
- Television news is overly dependent on filmed images which create superficiality and lack information content.
- Television news traffics in trivialities and deals in dubious emotionalism
- Television news is exploitive.<sup>34</sup>

If these points do in fact still represent the current state of British television news and by implication that same area in Western Australia, the basic structures have indeed changed greatly since 1959. Former Perth television journalist Rex Haw agrees with Langer's 1986 Assessment:

Commercial Television news organisations have much lower professional standards than ever. Very few journalists and camera operators belong to a professional organisation such as the Australian Journalists Association. Therefore they are not publicly accountable as far as ethics are concerned (members are bound by a Code of Ethics). Wages are much lower so the more competent, more qualified and more experienced are not encouraged to come into the industry. News bosses tend to chase and broadcast "third tier" Police and crime stories simply because they are easy to get. (Minor crime car crashes etc.) and no longer have the resources to investigate really important issues. (The ABC's Four Corners program is one exception). The WA Inc scandal involving the Rothwells merchant bank etc. during the 1980s would never have done as much community damage had the WA news media been doing its job properly. We live in a one newspaper town with no competitors. Most people get their

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<sup>33</sup> John Langer, *Tabloid Television Popular journalism and the 'Other Oews'*, Routledge, London, 1998, p.144

<sup>34</sup> John Langer, 1986, p.1.

news fed to them by mediocre TV news coverage that finds it easier and cheaper to chase stories that come in the mail. News releases created by faceless spin doctors who have something to sell. It's not really news is it?<sup>35</sup>

Recent Australian writers Phillips and Lindgren have redrawn attention to the parenting role in Australian television. 'In the mid-1950s, as now, television was an expensive business. This meant potential players needed substantial cash-flow, and it was the local press barons with their print cash cows who became the pioneers in the budding television sector.'<sup>36</sup> Evolving from a newspaper background, as did most Australian television stations, TVW7 had no trouble in agreeing with the proposition that their evening News was of the utmost importance. The night before that station officially went on-air in 1959, the News, as part of a complete dress rehearsal for the first night was subject to a meticulously prepared dummy-run.<sup>37</sup> On-air hosting, program films and all other 'live' production were included. However, Sir James Cruthers, while admitting that *TVW7News* was extremely important, said that it would not be right to consider that it had top priority. He remembered that all facets of local production received equal treatment and '...I don't think our News was treated as the Number One...'<sup>38</sup> This was backed up by the first News Editor Darcy Farrell, who continued in that capacity for seventeen years, having started six months before the station began transmissions. While Cruthers said they did not give specific economic preference to *TVW7 News* in comparison to other areas of production, Farrell said 'It was well balanced.'<sup>39</sup> Because of his newspaper background, Cruthers' philosophical favour tended to be in that direction. Long time *STW9 News* Director Terry Spence, when asked if it appeared that TVW7 management favoured News said, '

Yes! Particularly so because of the culture of Channel Seven which came out of West Australian Newspapers, headed by a very successful and senior newspaperman in

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<sup>35</sup> Rex F. Haw, current TV Journalist, written communication, 4 November 2003.

<sup>36</sup> Gail Phillips and Mia Lindgren, *The Australian Broadcast Journalism Manual*, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, 2002, p.11

<sup>37</sup> Richard Ashton, TVW7 Opening Night Cameraman, Personal Communication, Interview, 18 August 1999.

<sup>38</sup> Sir James Cruthers, Personal Communication, Interview, 3 June 1999.

<sup>39</sup> Darcy Farrell, 1999.

James Cruthers, so that the culture was News and it was one local and very effective means of establishing real identity in the community...<sup>40</sup>

The TVW7 News-room under Darcy Farrell comprised one other journalist from *The West Australian*, a young man name Ross Cusack, whom Farrell described as ‘...an outstanding interviewer.’<sup>41</sup> Cusack stayed with television for three years before returning to W.A. Newspapers Limited.<sup>42</sup> There were two cinematographers in Keith (Dig) Milner<sup>43</sup> and Tom Hall. They both came from the photographic area of *The West* and two cadets were hired to assist them and learn the business. Darcy and Farrell did most of the journalistic work with help from ‘casuals’ once again brought in from *The West*. Two of Farrell’s protégés went on to excel in their profession. One was Peter Meakin, who, in 1999 was Head of News at the Channel Nine Network and formerly the Producer of *60 Minutes* ‘...for years.’ And the other Bruce Buchanan, ‘...an excellent reporter...’ who went on to work as a journalist on *A Current Affair* at TCN9 Sydney and the ABC’s *This Day Tonight*.<sup>44</sup>

Farrell also spoke highly of another local identity named Bob Cribb, whom he described as a reporter with a flair for the sensational. Farrell recalled that in 1962 a man named Brian William Robinson shot and killed a young couple in a car in Belmont, before murdering a policeman named Noel Iles. Robinson commandeered a taxi to take him north to the Gnangara pine plantation. Cribb was dispatched with technician Colin Gorey in the Outside Broadcast Van to cover the story. An Inspector Freddy Douglas, the Deputy Chief of the CIB mentioned that it would be good to have public assistance and Cribb broadcast that information. Cribb was reported as saying something like ‘...we want you to come out and sort of help us catch the Mad Dog Killer!’<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Terry Spence, 1999.

<sup>41</sup> Darcy Farrell, 1999.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. Cusack’s father was Deputy Editor of the *Daily News*. He became Associate Editor of *The West Australian*.

<sup>43</sup> Dig Milner was a personal friend, killed along with two others in a plane crash while filming news North of Perth in 1964. The fourth person the late Alan MacIntosh survived and became one of STW9’s original on-camera reporters.

<sup>44</sup> Darcy Farrell, 1999.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

Within a short time a great many citizens arrived; some on motor-cycles with shot-guns slung over their shoulders; some riding horses and armed with rifles and one elderly person with what appeared to be a blunderbuss.<sup>46</sup> Williams was wounded by police, arrested, tried, found guilty of murder and ultimately hanged in Fremantle Prison. There being no recording facilities at that time, it became a matter of legal argument at Robinson's court hearing as to whether what Cribb was reported to have said 'live' on-air prejudiced Williams' trial. Subsequently, television stations stressed the importance of always using the word 'alleged' when referring to criminal activities.<sup>47</sup> On the same Saturday night as the Williams' incident, John Button was arrested for allegedly running down his girl-friend with a car in Shenton Park. The multi-murderer Eric Edgar Cooke subsequently claimed responsibility for that crime and in 2003 Button was absolved of the crime.

In 1984 the Department of Communications examined the function of News in the 'local' setting. The conclusion was that items of 'immediate relevance and importance'<sup>48</sup> would generally be of greater interest to the 'local' viewer, thus in a city such as Perth, the concurrent happenings would be of more interest than those events in Eastern States capitals. This is perhaps in the category 'the world is not flat' but nevertheless, true. As in all other areas of their operation, those who were employed by TVW7 in News reinforced the notion of being 'your local station' at every opportunity.

When they first aired, TVW7 bulletins were of fifteen minutes duration and there was a *News Review* on Sundays.<sup>49</sup> The main source of information was of course the parent company and picture-grams which they received from overseas and interstate would be used to illustrate news stories. There was no way of wireless transmission locally, so these pictures had to be copied then physically obtained and transported by road from the W.A. Newspapers offices to the studios of TVW7. All News and photographic material was charged for by W.A.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Department of Communications, *Localism in Australian Broadcasting*, Department of Communications, Government Print, Canberra 1984, p.184

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

Newspapers Limited. According to Farrell, the advent of television had a very bad effect upon the sales of the *Daily News* and a certain animosity grew between the staff at W.A. Newspapers and TVW7.<sup>50</sup> The *Daily News* people resented the expected collaboration because ‘...the Boards were intermingled and they were a subsidiary...it continued...but not with good grace.’<sup>51</sup> Farrell said the West Photographic Department was an exception with full co-operation from Doug Burton, Max Holten and other senior people. This was probably because photographic people saw themselves to be in a similar medium as those in television, as both relied heavily on visual impact. Farrell said that in those days he went to work as early as 7 a.m., and was always there till dark, seven days a week.<sup>52</sup>

By the time that STW9 went on-air in 1965 the television news industry was serviced by a London organisation called Vis-News which provided news film and news footage. Each day a box of film clips would arrive and be distributed to each of the three stations. They would all receive the same selection. In 1967, STW9 discontinued its subscription because of costs, and apart from their own local filmed content, showed very little except for some Army Public Relations Handouts.<sup>53</sup> Vis-News (which later became Reuters) was an independent news service which serviced both sides of the Iron Curtain. As well as the East/West divide, Vis-News also provided for the Middle East and Asia. It was owned by a consortium including the BBC, NBC America, ABC Australia, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and Reuters also participated.<sup>54</sup> STW9’s first News Editor was Graham Walsh who continued in that capacity until 1968 when he left to take up a senior News position in Melbourne. His staff at STW9 included Alan MacIntosh from the *Daily News*, former 6IX breakfast announcer Terry Spence, and two English journalists, Kit Harding and David Gladwell. The News-cameramen were Brian Hooper and Bill Nelson. In 1967 one of the studio cameramen, David Green was co-opted to News and Scotsman Dave Gordon was also employed. As described in Chapter Five, there was one female secretary. The first newsreader was Sydney radio actor and producer Walter Pym who was quickly replaced by Alan Graham. In 1966

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Terry Spence, Former STW9 News Director, Personal Communication, Interview, 27 April 1999.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

actress Cornelia Frances was employed for a short time as a Presentation Announcer and there were some experimental News bulletin readings by her. In 1968 the Production Manager Denzil Howson decided on a dual presentation by Lloyd Lawson and Peter Dean. One of Howson's ideas was to build a News Desk Set which was the correct height for the presenters to stand to read the News. As an old actor, he reckoned that they would have better 'diaphragm control'.<sup>55</sup> Soon after, Howson was replaced as Production Manager and the practice lapsed.

Although commentary from the Eastern States suggests that, 'Commercial television is very quick to punish presenters for low rating for news. Constant research, and the necessity of finding blameworthy people to take responsibility for failures, provide a battery of means for sacking people.'<sup>56</sup>, because of their dominance as the sole commercial outlet in Western Australia TVW7 kept many of their newsreaders for long periods. However, at STW9, poor ratings saw regular changes in the first six or seven years. Among those who enjoyed a longer tenure were Lloyd Lawson, Gordon Leed, Trevor Sutton and Peter Barlowe. In the mid 1970s STW9 experimented with the 'mixed double' of Valerie Davies and Greg Pearce. Russell Goodrick and ex-ABC newsreader Anne Conti were also successful.

In 2003, TVW7 have had the same main team of Susannah Carr and Ric Ardon for twenty years. In the same year at STW9, Peter Holland (changing allegiance after many years as an *ABC News* presenter) failed to attract a bigger audience than management had hoped for and on week nights was replaced by two women. They are former sports journalist and weekend news-reader Dixie Marshall and radio journalist Sonia Vinci. Holland continues to read the weekend *STW9 News*.

The selection of news presenters has always been an industry 'art'. The personality and appearance of the newsreader (whether female or male) must embody an attractive but believably dignified figure, as the 'trust-worthiness of the particular station is always at

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<sup>55</sup> Peter Dean, Personal Communication, Interview, January 2001.

<sup>56</sup> Stuart Cunningham & Toby Miller, *Contemporary Australian Television*, University of NSW Press, Sydney, 1994, p.44

stake'.<sup>57</sup> McQueen said, 'As the newscaster became known to viewers, his professional grasp of his material, and his lively interest in it would make the news more authoritative and *entertaining*.'<sup>58</sup> Bonner confirms this with a qualification, 'What the viewer sees is the presenting persona not the person.'<sup>59</sup> And Esslin extends that concept:

The TV screen is both a frame, like Duchamp's pedestal, and a stage. Even when the news announcer reads has been forgotten, the character he creates, his personality, will remain in the viewer's memory. The news changes from night to night, but the character of the newscaster persists in the public eye and the public imagination... The final result is a dramatic performance, which moreover, filmed or videotaped, is definitely repeatable.<sup>60</sup>

Let Turner have the final word on this: 'The importance of the newsreader or presenter, for instance, is related to their embodiment of the trust-worthiness of the news service; the selection of the right personality for this task is a critical decision in both the production and the promotion of the news.'<sup>61</sup> When newsreader Peter Holland left the Perth ABC Newsroom for STW9, hoped-for results in the ratings were not immediately forthcoming and management decided that the removal of his 'trademark' moustache might help. In fact it made no difference.

At TVW7 the first newsreaders were chosen by Coralie Condon and were David Farr, Garry Meadows, Geoff Walker and Philip Edgely.<sup>62</sup> Eric Walters followed and Farrell rated him as the best in the voice department. In terms of '...functional and practical approach [Peter] Waltham was terrific.'<sup>63</sup> Farrell (who employed him) said that Waltham was very quick to pick up on problems and could cover them before the viewer knew that anything untoward had happened. The newsreader with the best presentation memory was the late Garry

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<sup>57</sup> Graeme Turner, 'Television news and current affairs: 'Welcome to Frontline'', in *The Australian TV Book*, Graeme Turner and Stuart Cunningham (eds.), Allen & Unwin, St. Leonards, 2000, p.8

<sup>58</sup> David McQueen, *Television A Media Student's Guide*, Arnold, London, 1998, p.93

<sup>59</sup> Frances Bonner, *Ordinary Television*, SAGE Publications, London, 2001, p.63

<sup>60</sup> Martin Esslin, *The Age of Television*, W.H. Freeman and Company, San Francisco, 1982, p.9

<sup>61</sup> Graeme Turner, 'Television news and current affairs: 'Welcome to Frontline'' in *The Australian TV Book*, Graeme Turner and Stuart Cunningham, (eds), Allen & Unwin, St. Leonard's, 2000.

<sup>62</sup> Coralie Condon, Personal Communication, Interview, 5 May 1999.

<sup>63</sup> Darcy Farrell, 1999.

Meadows who did not have the need for the auto-cue reading device. 'If it was a six-paragraph story he would memorise four of them and look straight in the camera and you'd believe he was using an idiot sheet. A very talented man.'<sup>64</sup> Waltham remained at TVW7 until 1982. Meadows went to Melbourne, but after meeting with little success returned to Perth in 1977 to work as a radio announcer and resume casual newsreading at TVW7. To emphasise the disappearance of other on-air personalities, when the Logies are allocated for Western Australia it is usual for the recipients to be on-air news presenters.

In these days of '...the fax, the laptop computer, the digital palmcorder, non-linear editing, the edit suite in a suit case and the multi-skilled practices they are bringing with them...'<sup>65</sup> Farrell sees the biggest changes in the area of technology, having been to the detriment of human endeavour. 'What it has bred...is probably some inadequacies in the energy and enthusiasm of the players.'<sup>66</sup> Farrell said that it was fact that a small group of employees had to film, process, edit and cut the stories. Although this had the effect of curtailing comprehensive coverage, it did engender more personal attention to the task in hand. He finds it amazing that News alone has survived in the area of local (live) production. Locally, NEW10 has ceased to have a Production Department as such for local consumption and its News bulletins originate in Sydney,<sup>67</sup> TVW7 and STW9 still have large and enthusiastic departments. However, technological advances now mean that on the studio-floor the cameramen have disappeared. At TVW7, the news cameras are mounted on tracks and remote controlled from the control-room with one person replacing three. This means that the

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Brent MacGregor, *Live, Direct and Biased Making Television News in the Satellite Age*, Arnold, London, p.2.

<sup>66</sup> Darcy Farrell, 1999.

<sup>67</sup> NEW10 at first required their news-presenters Chrissy Morrissey and Greg Pearce to commute to Sydney, so as to preserve the illusion of 'local' faces. By using a Sydney-based female-male duo on weekends they were able to 'wean' viewers to an acceptance of these 'new' faces. Morrissey resigned in 2002 and was replaced by the Sydney female and the same happened in the case of Pearce in October 2003.

floor-manager is redundant. The actual presentation of the News is controlled by one person with an auto-cue operator in the studio.<sup>68</sup>

Farrell is of the opinion that in regard to News, the facility in Australia is over-catered, particularly by the A.B.C., trying to sustain too large a volume of current affairs and talks programs. He gives as an analogy that at 18 million population, we are 12 million less than California but try to sustain the same level as ‘...an entire American network covering 260 million people.’<sup>69</sup> Current CNN anchor Michael Holmes refutes this contention and considers that the size of Australia’s news representation is its strength.<sup>70</sup> Former STW9 newsreader Russell Goodrick said,

[In the 1980s] Along with main news, management introduced more and more bulletins. Presumably to get sponsorship dollars. In those days I thought it was too repetitive. We’d read the same headlines over and over. Unlike today without the communications facilities, the satellites and we b links little would change. We were saturated, which I believe impacted on the main news. In the 70s and 80s I would sit in studio by myself waiting for the cue to read a one minute bulletin. Today most are pre-recorded... Today I look at most of the reports and think only the reporter, name and address have changed. The news is regurgitated to such an extent about the same old stories. Car crashes, rip-offs, disasters, parliament etc.

John C. Merrill includes Australia within his examination of Asian news services<sup>71</sup> and says that ‘The existence of myriad news services in Asia holds both hope for better information availability and the spectre of managed news flows’.<sup>72</sup> The latter part of that statement referred to the growth of government news agencies in Asia proper. In matters of overseas information, Farrell said that there was still a hang-over from the old days of newspaper monopoly where items of interest were sat on ‘for two or three days.’<sup>73</sup> He pointed out that

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<sup>68</sup> Jeff Thomas, personal communication, interview, 2 April 2001.

An auto-cue is a device fitted to the front of a television camera with a clear glass screen set at an angle onto which the words to be read are projected. From the camera’s and viewer’s perspective the words cannot be seen.

<sup>69</sup> Darcy Farrell, 1999.

<sup>70</sup> Michael Holmes, personal communication, interview, Doubleview, 15 October 2003.

<sup>71</sup> John C. Merrill, *Global Journalism – Survey of International Communication*, Longman, New York, 1991, p.230.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, p.234

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*.

stories that can be now read on the Internet when they happen, sometimes do not turn up here in *The West* [or on television] until five days later.

In remarking on television audiences in general, Langer uses a definition by Westerguard, in that they are ‘ “...a mass of ordinary people of ‘ordinary common sense”, men and women with their feet on the ground who take the world as it is’<sup>74</sup> There are arguably variations, as when asked to comment on the difference between the American and Australian public in political matters, Farrell said that the former ‘...have always been far more nationalistic in their approach to politics...and sharper generally. Australians have always been notorious for being apathetic.’<sup>75</sup> Langer also defines a difference between Australian and British audiences when saying, ‘The production of ‘news’ holds a strategic position in debates about television for its presumed, and often feared, influence on public life, a concern that has been heightened by the emergence of global cross-border television.’<sup>76</sup> Farrell said that while some Australians would subsequently only query the introduction of a policy briefly mentioned during an election as being unknown to them, Americans ‘know’ what is going to happen and the Government would not be elected if its policies were not understood or open to misinterpretation.’<sup>77</sup> Farrell maintained that while the Australian electorate might ‘grizzle’ about changes by an incumbent Government in avowed policy, an American government would not dare such tactics, as a more politically orientated populace in the USA would not accept such changes.<sup>78</sup>

### **Morality, Censorship and Common Decency:**

In 1995 Colin Shaw addressed the latter of the above and concluded that:

Taste is essentially an ephemeral matter, changing according to changes of fashion...  
Decency however strikes deeper chords...It includes respect for the dead...It extends  
to protection for children and regard for the cherished beliefs of other people...

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<sup>74</sup> John Langer, *Tabloid Television Popular journalism and the ‘other news’*, Routledge, London, 1998, p.20, op.cit., John Westerguard, ‘Power, Class and the media’, in *Mass Communication and Society*, J.Curran, M.Gurevitch and J. Woolcott (eds), Edward Arnold, London, 1977, p.108

<sup>75</sup> Darcy Farrell, 1999.

<sup>76</sup> John Langer, 1998, p.96.

<sup>77</sup> Darcy Farrell, 1999.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

Standards in broadcasting reflect a blend of the two...Offences against taste are acceptable...The World Council of Churches once declared that a television service without offence was itself offensive...Offences against decency are of a different order, carrying...the concept of some actual damage among members of the audience. However they too may be justified by the nature of the subject-matter and the quality of its treatment by the programme makers.<sup>79</sup>

Darcy Farrell said that the generally accepted societal standards of morality, censorship and common decency were those adopted by television in Western Australia at the inception of the medium and continued without much change until the late seventies and early eighties. Former *STW9 News* Director Terry Spence who started with the station in 1966 and at the time of the interview in 1999 was still producing weekend bulletins said,

On the standard of morals, we were certainly less intrusive as journalists in a news organisation than we are today. You know, the foot in the door type journalism I'm talking about. People confronted with [others] wearing cameras without being given the chance to say 'I don't want to be talked to', so, that just happened to be a standard at the times I think, it wasn't necessarily imposed overtly, it was just you know, we just weren't as aggressive. We would have been far more cautious about invasion of privacy or invasion of grief for argument's sake. Just another example, coincidentally or strangely it has gone back to that now, it's moved full circle. There is more concern taken now about barging in on funerals, well in fact you can't any more; you have to seek permission from cemeteries to go in. Permission from relatives to film funerals. That's an example you know?<sup>80</sup>

Graeme Turner sees Australian journalism in a favourable light when saying, 'News and current affairs on television share much the same ethical standards and professional ideologies as other forms of journalism; a commitment to impartiality and a clear differentiation between news and comment.'<sup>81</sup>

### **The De-sensitizing Effects of Televised Disaster, Accident and Personal Mishap:**

Spence was reminded of a telephone conversation in 1984 between him and me. An old woman, the victim of a house fire in Perth, had been shown being carried on a stretcher, with

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<sup>79</sup> Colin Shaw, 'Taste, Decency and Standards', in *Television An International History*, Anthony Smith (ed), Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1995, p.217

<sup>80</sup> Terry Spence, 1999.

<sup>81</sup> Graeme Turner, 'Television news and current affairs: 'Welcome to Frontline' in *The Australian TV Book*, Graeme Turner and Stuart Cunningham, (eds), Allen & Unwin, St. Leonard's, 2000, p.90

one bare foot protruding from a blanket covering the rest of her body. On being told that it was the station's 'duty' to report the news, I asked Spence the question that if the victim had been the mother of Alan Bond [then STW9 Boss] would she have been shown on television in the same manner. At the time Spence would not concede that incident was wrong, but in 1999 he said that '...now, we have very strict rules about blood on the pavement.'<sup>82</sup> John Langer commented upon this aspect of news thus.

As Hartley (1982:83) explains, when journalists are accused, as they frequently are, of 'rough handling' of events, it is the result not of personal factors which is the easily assimilable explanation but of 'the impersonal social process of newsmaking itself, as a professional practice...the routine mental orientations shared in a necessarily unreflecting way by 'busy' people.'<sup>83</sup>

Spence went on to explain that the responsibility is that of the News Director, governed by the broad policy guidelines on violence and intrusion as promulgated by FACTS (Federation of Commercial Television Stations).<sup>84</sup> When asked about the changing standards in regard to such things as birth control, condoms, sanitary napkins and such he replied

I don't think we necessarily impose controls upon them, because they weren't as talked about as they are today. If we had done, speaking of news, mentioned those things or concentrated on them or had items on them, there would have been at some point a criticism of us as being distasteful...<sup>85</sup>

On the matter of audience sensitivity, in regard to such changes in the 1960s concerning abortion, the contraceptive pill and the up-surge in the voice of youth, Farrell contends that it was the Kennedy political era with its changes to 'The Establishment' which previously had projected a moral face whilst misbehaving as it thought fit behind the scenes. In the 1950s and 1960s Ministers of the Crown were not considered to be 'fair game'. When questioned about viewer sensitivities and the showing of dead and burned bodies on television towards the end of the 1970s Farrell answered,

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> John Langer, *Tabloid Television Popular journalism and the 'other news'*, Routledge, London, 1998 p.42, op.cit., [John Hartley, *Understanding News*, Methuen, London, 1982, p.83

<sup>84</sup> Terry Spence, 1999.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

We already used those a lot. We used them in the 60s... We'd warn people and we'd actually – we'd even fade to black for 5 to 10 seconds to give people – '...if you wish to take your children out of the room please do so.' Showing stuff like the Kennedy assassination and things like that. I mean a world stunning event but then, pretty wary about using dead bodies on the ground around Perth.<sup>86</sup>

Farrell maintains that television has indeed had a desensitising effect on viewers and said,

Kids in particular who watch, not just News, but a range of programs where bodies are bodies. And I think they've actually just shown in ...the Colorado shootings that the kids with all the videos they watched are suddenly pinging people and it's almost make believe. I'm very much against it. I think television...motion pictures have become more violent, more dramatic, more everything. Once upon a time you used to go and see a movie to just totally relax and get away from it all and want a fun afternoon, or want an emotional afternoon watching *Mrs. Miniver* [laughs] or whatever it might have been or a fun thing with Jerry Lewis or something.<sup>87</sup>

Farrell did not consider that the voyeuristic aspect of television news equated with the enjoyment and 'gloating' of the public execution audience of by-gone days, but said that the 'chivalry of a fine society'<sup>88</sup> had become less civilised since the introduction of television. When asked if it was television which directed society or vice versa, he said that in regard to television program content, controllers are not always acting in the best interests of society and in some cases directed its course. Farrell equates the careless presentation of violence and overt sexuality with drug pushers.

Maybe you could view some of the people who dispense the material as, and they wouldn't like the comparison and maybe you don't like the comparison but maybe and I'm not saying there is that, maybe you might be able to equate them to the drug pushers. It's the same sort of thing.

PH: Would you?

DF: In some of the most violent things I've seen and some of the most suggestive things I've seen, ah, they are certainly peddling material which has got to have a deleterious effect on young people. I put that in sex too you know.<sup>89</sup>

When asked if there was a possibility that the trend towards the further breakdown of moral codes could be reversed, Farrell answered,

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<sup>86</sup> Darcy Farrell, 1999.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

...one would always hope and the hope that there will be a generation that will. I mean, I used to get very excited about things that I considered were wrong with society and felt we've got to do something and I used to go to Jim Cruthers and we used to do quite a few things. I think we were responsible for changing a few directions here, because remember we were virtually the only commercial television station. Nine didn't come on for five years and then it went down the sink with all sorts of economic problems. We were by far the most influential television station and we tried to make our mark on things that we thought was the right thing to do. Now maybe, I don't know, maybe there is going to be somebody but I think they are going to need a Government made of very tough people, men of steel or people of steel. Women and men who are going to say, 'I'm sorry, Australia is going to adopt the same policy as Malaysia. We will execute drug pushers.' Poomph! People will say, 'My God this is uncivilised!' But the drug pushers are uncivilised.<sup>90</sup>

Mario D'Orazio who (at the time of the interview) was Editor of *Today Tonight* on TVW7 maintains that there has been a cycle of acceptability in the forty years of television News. His opening comment can be examined in light of an observation by Edwin Diamond. 'In terms of reader [viewer] interest, "10,000 deaths in Nepal equals 100 deaths in Wales [or Oklahoma City] equals 10 deaths in West Virginia [or Queensland] equals one death next door.'<sup>91</sup>

MD: Like they say, 'If it bleeds, it leads!' [laughs] When we, when I first started in TV without the word of a lie, you could put a dead body on the News, guts hanging out, you wouldn't have a problem. O.K? Not a problem. If you do it today, the audience goes crazy. In fact, News and current affairs have really cleaned up. They've become a lot more, ah, cautious. Ah, if there's a dead body on the News these days it's by accident rather than by design.

D'Orazio continued '...in the seventies and early eighties the television companies were out to shock.'<sup>92</sup> and Langer confirmed this, saying 'Disaster, accident and personal mishap reportage has a long, if inglorious, history in journalism.'<sup>93</sup> Now, according to D'Orazio there was a backlash from viewers, the baby-boomers who have adolescent children of their own do not want those children viewing such disturbing material.

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Edwin Diamond, *The Tin Kazoo Television, Politics and The News*, The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Massachusetts, 1975, p.94.

<sup>92</sup> Mario D'Orazio, TVW7 Editor *Today Tonight*, Personal Communication, Interview, 28 May 2001.

<sup>93</sup> John Langer, 1998

So, the companies have, the stations have actually reflected that. I know for example in 1987 we could bare tits to air at half past six at night. We don't today. We used to put pubic hair to air. We don't today. We used to put dead bodies to air. We don't today. Wouldn't even dream of it.<sup>94</sup>

D'Orazio maintains that the fear twenty years ago that the audience would be de-sensitised has actually worked in reverse and said, 'What's happened is that the baby-boomers have become de-sensitized to it, but they have genuine fears for their kids.'<sup>95</sup> He claims that today's audience has become sensitised through previous de-sensitisation. D'Orazio continued,

You know, I can look at dead bodies on TV and it doesn't worry me because I'm a professional. My brother who is roughly my age looks at that and cares. Our vision of it all was shaped by those amazingly powerful images from the Vietnam War for example. Throughout the sixties and seventies when we saw those pictures, so that when we saw blood and guts, yeah, but my brother now has three daughters. He doesn't want his kids seeing that kind of stuff on TV at dinner-time and to me all of that's been reflected in the growth in the Code of Practice which is voluntary and taken very seriously. I know it is.

D'Orazio said that he constantly 'censors' material to avoid viewer complaints regarding 'nudity or violence' on the News. 'I look at a picture coming in from interstate or overseas or even locally and I say, "Do you see a drop of blood on that?" phht, cut it!'<sup>96</sup> When asked to define 'good news', D'Orazio said that generally speaking, in television 'bad news' was 'good news' and vice versa. Langer confirms this concept:

It has been argued, more in popular than in scholarly terms, that news is, and must be, obsessively 'bad (negative) news'. This claim is reinforced by examples of 'good news' newspapers or television programmes failing miserably in the market-place. However, this argument is misplaced. On closer examination it can be seen that bad news may in fact be good news: the mediation of the contradiction between permanence and change in the 'other news' seems to provide an occasion to engage with a 'philosophical treatise' every night of the week. For those lamenting over television journalism having lost its way, these sorts of opportunities could hold out renewed hope, even if the news which does offer regular excursions into metaphysics is considered mostly 'bad' (negative and unworthy).<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> John Langer, 1998, p.144

Former Perth radio journalist Katy Cronin, who went on to a television career with *Four Corners* and then was a reporter for *Lateline* on the ABC said,

I think you have to exercise judgement about what's appropriate to be shown in particular contexts and particular times of the day. If you're a witness to a horrible massacre, then it is a difficult thing to show that and remain within the bounds of what is acceptable, particularly in prime-time news, but at the same time, I think you have to endeavour to explain it, because those sorts of events are what makes our world, and makes what is news, and people should know about it, and if it's shocking, well it *is* shocking – that's the fact of it.

It's then a fine matter of judgement, and views will differ about what's acceptable and what's not. But I believe that news is there to tell what's happened and not to make people feel good, or to offer entertainment.<sup>98</sup>

In 1989, psychologist John Condry wrote how both arousal and desensitization were 'positively' related to aggression. 'That is, the more aroused, the greater the potential for violence and the more desensitized, the more violence will likely to be tolerated.'<sup>99</sup> He stated that,

Television not only exposes us to arousing, violent material, but it does so repeatedly, night after night, month after month, year after year...An obvious consequence is that one could become in a sense, "callous" and so accustomed to the constant parade of violence, that with each presentation one becomes less and less aroused, less and less interested.<sup>100</sup>

However, when the pictures of actual warfare became part of the nightly viewing, the audience perceived them in a different sense to that which accompanied the watching of movies... 'by the mid 1960s when the images of war in Vietnam began to be presented on the evening news every night. These real images of war were quite different from the images in the movies. 'Rather than being romantic and heroic, war was shown to be horrifying, painful and tragic.' Condry lamented that it was too late to investigate the actual feelings of those who were exposed in the 1960s but '...it would be possible to study the degree to which people who were used to television violence were either more or less sensitive to portrayals of actual (real) violence.'<sup>101</sup> Condry concluded 'Maybe television violence desensitized us to

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<sup>98</sup> Gail Phillips and Mia Lindgren, *The Australian Broadcast Journalism Manual*, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, 2002, p.156

<sup>99</sup> John Condry, *The Psychology of Television*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, New Jersey, 1989, p.109.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, p.112.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

fantasy or imaginary violence, but not to the real thing. It might even make us more sensitive to the real thing. This is a potentially interesting question for research.’<sup>102</sup> In that, he was forecasting an attitude which we have seen espoused by D’Orazio. As far back as 1982, Martin Esslin offered the following:

[regarding]...the impact of sex and violence on the viewing audience...The frequent attempts by psychologists, sociologists, government committees, and others to devise experimental procedures by which this impact might be measured and qualified have, on the whole, produced no decisive conclusions.<sup>103</sup>

In 1994, McManus said, ‘When news departments follow market logic their primary purpose is selling consumer attention rather than informing the public. Society may be harmed when news routines designed for selling conflict with those required for informing.’<sup>104</sup> At TVW7, clashes between News purity and commercialism were not unknown. Advertising management sometimes wanted to hide commercial content in the News. Farrell stated that whilst Cruthers said ‘You’ll make the News judgement and I believe in what you’re doing, so do it!’<sup>105</sup> he had ‘...some mighty clashes.’ with TVW7 Sales Manager Brian Treasure, when news which might have a bearing on loss of advertising revenue for the station, was aired.<sup>106</sup> McManus observed, ‘The simple fact is that the interests of advertisers and those of journalists diverge as much or more than they overlap.’<sup>107</sup> but Hartley was bold enough to state:

Like journalism advertising has a vested interest in constructing and instructing readership, and like advertising, journalism has to work on the basis of Lotmanesque mutual attraction to get its readers to look at its copy...Advertising and journalism have lived together since the outset of both and have come up with the same

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid, p.112

<sup>103</sup> Martin Esslin, *The Age of Television*, W.H. Freeman and Company, San Francisco, 1982, p.80

<sup>104</sup> John H. McManus, *Marker-Driven Journalism: Let the Citizen Beware?*, SAGE Publications, Thousand Oaks California, 1994, p.78

<sup>105</sup> Darcy Farrell, 1999.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> John H. McManus, *Marker-Driven Journalism: Let the Citizen Beware?*, SAGE Publications, Thousand Oaks California, 1994, p.79

techniques for attracting readers, techniques of course which include the use of pictures.<sup>108</sup>

Despite this inference of collusion to exploit the consumers of television, the conclusion can be safely drawn that in the early years at TVW7 at least, such was not the case.

The biggest and most extended disagreement between Farrell and Treasure was over the relative rates of pay between Journalists and Advertising Salesmen. Treasure's argument was 'I've got a sales guy who is capable of generating X number of hundreds of thousands of pounds...for the station. Your News bloke, he's a writer and he's paid twice as much as the sales guy!' Farrell's answer was 'It's a very legitimate point. I'd like to see your sales guy paid more but at the same time I think I can convert a journalist to become a salesman but can your fellow come down and write a script?'<sup>109</sup> Cruthers settled that by telling Treasure, 'Sorry, that is the way it is. We can't alter it. That's the AJA, the Australian Journalists' Association system and these people are paid that way. You can't avoid it. You'll have the Union down, or they'll shut the station down if necessary!'<sup>110</sup>

Farrell said that while Australians have followed America in most areas of news presentation, one example of exception is that in the U.S., programs will be interrupted for major news breaks or a Presidential address, but for this to happen in Australia the story would have to be '...aliens have just been discovered on the Moon.'<sup>111</sup> During his tenure at TVW7, Farrell remembered the two biggest stories of the early years as being the assassination of John F. Kennedy and the Landing of Men on the Moon. He said that because the television transmission was via Parkes in N.S.W. Australian viewers saw the latter a second or two before the Americans did at Cape Canaveral.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> John Hartley, *Popular Reality Journalism, Modernity, Popular Culture*, Arnold Publishing, London, 1996, p.198

<sup>109</sup> Darcy Farrell, 1999.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

Former TV Journalist Brian Coulter perceives that the world of television news has lost its way and was scathing in these comments:

I in no way regret my years in television – they were fantastic and among the most exciting in my life but you pay a high price on your family life. After leaving the television news industry, the biggest shock was to realise that we were not the ‘eyes and ears’ of the community. We were oblivious to what was happening in the real world (as opposed to the ‘reality’ world of today’s television). It may be best summed up by my observation while driving up Flinders Street (the news van highway) some years after leaving television news. Coming the other way was a news van heading off on a job. The cameraman (who I knew) was at the wheel and the reporter was in the passenger seat with feet up on the dashboard having a sleep. I thought to myself: “How is that stupid prick ever going to see a news story.”<sup>113</sup>

### **Sport:**

Undeniably, sport on television has always been part of the News, although David Rowe records, ‘It is almost impossible to imagine today, but the intimate relationship between television and sport was once very tentative and based on a high level of mutual suspicion’<sup>114</sup> It has been noted that ‘Sport and television are naturals together. They are both popular, both artistically damned, and both politically assaulted.’<sup>115</sup> Generally speaking, the public enjoys sport, as the recent 2003 Rugby Union World Cup proved. The final attracted the biggest viewing audience since the opening of the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney. Indeed, as Rowe says, ‘Watching sport on television is a complex and diverse social activity, ranging from ‘default’ activity when no better leisure options are available to greatly relished rituals of social engagement with family and friends.’<sup>116</sup>

‘Television in Australia was fathered by sport. And television in many ways over the past quarter century has mothered sport from a faltering, colorless tot into a well-fed, thriving technicolor giant.’<sup>117</sup> [a rare American spelling in Australian academic literature!] and ‘Sport

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<sup>113</sup> Brian Coulter, former TV Journalist, written communication, 29 October 2003

<sup>114</sup> David Rowe, ‘Sport: The genre that runs and runs’ in *The Australian TV Book*, Graeme Turner and Stuart Cunningham, (eds), Allen & Unwin, St. Leonard’s, 2000, p.130

<sup>115</sup> Stuart Cunningham & Toby Miller, *Contemporary Australian Television*, University of NSW Press, Sydney, 1994, p.63

<sup>116</sup> Rowe, 2000, p.140

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, p.65, op.cit., Brian Johnson, ‘Great Moments in Sport’ in Christopher Beck (ed.) *On Air 25 Years of TV in Queensland Brisbane*, One Tree Hill Publishing, 1984, p.167.

and the media ‘got together like bacon and eggs...Like algae and fungi in moss’<sup>118</sup> Although the latter simile may reflect a ‘toffee-nosed’ attitude by some to the whole concept of sport on television, in Western Australia the viewing public was amply catered for with various programs, more so than in the Eastern States where ‘...the ABC dominated the TV treatment of Australian sport in the mould of the BBC.’<sup>119</sup> There were programs which forecast (in the main) Australian Rules Football matches, their actual playing and subsequent Sunday dissections, particularly in the early years of TVW7. The high rating *Walsh’s Football Teams* run-down on TVW7 with ex-players Jack Sheedy and the late Austin Robinson was a ‘must-view’ on Thursday nights. *Football Preview* was aired at 9.30 p.m. on Fridays, *Sport at Seven* at 7 p.m. was in the main about the local game on Saturdays and at noon on Sundays, a panel of ‘experts’ attracted a large viewing audience. Affectionately known as ‘Dad’s Army’ (after the BBC comedy program of that name) the presenters included chairmen the late Brian Thirley, Ross Elliott (journalist and later Member of Parliament), champion footballer the late Frank Sparrow and Perth television’s ‘Mr. Everything’ Gary Carvolth. The panellists included ex-jockey Frank Flannery (a jocular man with a sharp wit – Perth television’s answer to Melbourne character Lou Richards<sup>120</sup>); ex-umpires Freddy Woods and Mick Cronin; and retired footballers Marty McDonnell, Steve Marsh and John Rogers. Although they tried to emulate the formula, STW9 had little success in this area and shortly after their opening, did not persist for long with studio based programs, although they did include general sporting activities in their nightly News bulletins. Horse-racing, (both pacing and galloping) both received extensive coverage on TVW7 and at one time the Trots from Gloucester Park were televised ‘live’ as part of a Saturday night show called *Anything Goes*.<sup>121</sup>

Former international jockey Jimmy Chadwick was a regular presenter on television for 17 years combining ‘on-camera’ work with producing and directing. He appeared on *TVW7*

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid, p.72, op.cit., Claeys and van Pelt 1986, p.98.

<sup>119</sup> Rowe, 2000, p.131

<sup>120</sup> James F. Chadwick, personal communication, interview, Victoria Park, 24 November 2003.

<sup>121</sup> See Chapter Seven – The Main Event Round One.

*News* for 15 years, their Sunday *World of Sport* ‘...races, trots and dogs.’<sup>122</sup> and then on *STW9 News* for a further two year period. Rogers gave high credit to the late Harry Kelly for his dedication to televised sport, saying that ‘...he was an exceptional producer/director and because of his skill with helping ‘on-air’ people we called him The Coach.’<sup>123</sup> Former Aussie Rules League footballer John Rogers had a 29 year career at TVW7 commentating on football, baseball, golf ‘...and anything else that was required.’<sup>124</sup> He also produced his own one-hour baseball replay program in the early 1990s. STW9’s ‘face of sport’ in the 1970s was the very popular personality, the late Frank Bird, who conducted regular sessions with the assistance of well known footballers Graham ‘Polly’ Farmer and Bob Shields. No less so was that station’s long-time Sport Director the late Bruce Walker, who was also recognised as Mr. Appealathon. After a journalism cadetship with *The West Australian*, Wally Foreman was employed as a sporting journalist with ‘on-air’ duties at the ABC and then moved to STW9 in the early 1980s.<sup>125</sup> Foreman rose to be one of the most recognisable commentators on television, along with perennial ABC presenter Trevor Jenkins who also had several stints on commercial stations.<sup>126</sup>

### **Television News Audience Survey Ratings:**

The ratings surveys show that TVW7 were overwhelmingly successful from 1965 till 1971 and in 1972 STW9 won a News rating for one particular night. It was not until 1977 that STW9 finally won a survey overall. Fortunes varied after that with a most competitive and constantly changing set of results until 1990, when after two years of operation, the newcomer NEW10 had then as yet failed to evenly split the market. In 2003, TVW7 remained the dominant News station, being the only Seven Network capital city station to consistently win the ratings. In the face of changing formats, it would appear that Western Australian viewers still prefer what they perceive to be the ‘local’ product. Further

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<sup>122</sup> James F. Chadwick, personal communication, interview, Victoria Park, 31 October 2003.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> John Rogers, personal communication, 7 July 2002 and written communication, 12 July 2002.

<sup>125</sup> Wally Foreman, written communication, 6 August, 2002.

<sup>126</sup> James F. Chadwick, 2003.

chronological analysis of these ratings results is to be found in Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine

**Conclusion:**

Because of the long-held belief that the station which leads in the News area has the ability to hold the greater share of audience for ensuing programs, News has always had a focus of pre-eminence. TVW7s introduction of this service to Western Australian audiences was meticulous in presentation and they have gone on to exhibit superiority over the years . STW9 had great problems in trying to catch up and lack of funds at one stage prevented the use of overseas pictorial content.

TVW7 were the front-runners in the area of female newsreaders while their counterpart STW9 did not use women on the News bench for many years. The advancement of technology has been seen to be at the expense of human endeavour and there is a claim that generally speaking, News services are over-catered for in Australia.

The question of censorship, morals and public standards of acceptance have changed greatly since 1958, but the claim is made that the insensitive use of graphic pictorial content in the 1970s has led to a greater responsibility today by the commercial television stations and an increase in community sensitivity. News continues to be the only regularly produced program on TVW7 and STW9 while that of NEW10 is transmitted from Sydney to Perth via satellite. Robotic cameras have replaced 'live' camera personnel and it would seem that the future for News, this last representative of local 'live' production could also be doomed to extinction.

Peter Harries March 2004