

**MANUFACTURING AUDIENCES? POLICY
AND PRACTICE IN ABC RADIO NEWS**

1983-1993

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**Anne Dunn
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Introduction

The analysis of news institutions' sense of their audience is "something relatively rare in the sociology of news" (Schudson, 1989, p.276).

Definition of the problem

While there have been many studies of news making, most have been of television or newspaper production, unlike this one, which is of radio news. Also unlike this, few have been done in Australia, compared to the extensive work in Britain or the United States, especially in the 1970s and 1980s. In the decades since those studies, which were predominantly sociological, theoretical interest and research attention have turned more towards understanding the social and cultural meanings audiences make out of news (and other programs) and away from what producers do, and the meanings thereby created. Broadly speaking, this can be described as a move away from the sociology of news production and towards cultural studies of news and audiences for news. It has tended to be characterised by a change in the focus of research, from theories of production to theories of reception.

However, news producers by and large remain blissfully unaware of this shift in academic attention. They go on working to attract and satisfy audiences that they have constructed from audience research, in response to organisational policy, from intuition, from each other, and out of their texts, the bulletins themselves. In returning to the sociology of news production, this thesis is concerned specifically with the interface between institutional policies and practices, and the construction of audiences.

The **problem** is that for all our knowledge of how and why news is produced and of news texts, there has been a comparative neglect by research of two things. The first is how news workers “audience”¹, that is, create images of their audiences. The second area of relative obscurity is our understanding of what are the institutional factors that influence the calling-up of audience images as they appear in the news bulletins.

Studies of what news workers do have in general been neglectful of the audience, which has had “a kind of phantom existence that the sociological study of news production has yet to consider in its theoretical formulations” (Schudson 1996, p.156). Conversely, studies of what actual audiences for radio and television news do (for example by Seiter 1999, or Gunter 1987) have tended to neglect the circumstances of professional practice and organisational policy under which the news is produced. Thus, there is a discontinuity between audience studies and production studies of news, which this thesis hopes in part to redress.

It describes and analyses how different audiences are framed within radio news bulletins, reflecting network policy and newsroom practice. Accordingly, the thesis investigates the relationships between news production, the practitioners’ perceptions and definitions of audiences, and organisational policies, using the radio news service of the Australian national public broadcaster, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). In so doing, the thesis demonstrates that production, in its institutional context, is a crucial site for the creation of audiences in the study of news journalism. Policy and practice are brought together in a way that is rare in the research literature, through a case study of how together they “manufacture” audiences.

¹ “Audience” as a verb (“audiencing”) is used by Fiske (1993) to mean being in the position of or behaving as an audience member. The thesis, however, most often uses it in the sense Tulloch appears to mean (in Alasuutari 1999, p.152), as referring to the ways in which news producers imagine their audiences.

The thesis uses a case study of attempts by ABC Radio News² over the decade 1983 to 1993 to conceptualise specific audiences for news, to match those that its radio networks were seeking to call into being. Ultimately, the separate “branding” of the radio networks succeeded and has persisted, but the tailoring of news services to those networks has not.

The timeframe of the study was a period of organisational and technological change not only for the ABC but also for other, comparable public broadcasters, in Britain and Canada. Albeit at differing periods of the timeframe, each nation experienced change, in particular around the impact of digital technologies. Over the same period, the political and economic philosophies of all three countries continued a movement, begun in the 1970s, to a contraction in government spending, which in turn put public service broadcasters under severe resource constraints.

The case study demonstrates that technological change and related policy decisions on the one hand offered the opportunity to call differentiated audiences into being through “tailored” news bulletins. On the other hand this opportunity contended with reduced funding and established production practices. The thesis develops the argument that the result was a kind of “struggle” over audiences.

This argument is developed through chapters on the history of ABC Radio news production in policy and practice, and of the ABC’s radio networks. Another chapter provides a detailed examination of differences between radio news bulletins on two networks.

Throughout there is critical examination of the assumptions of radio producers about their audiences, and of the extent to which news producers are also audiences for both news and non-news

² The thesis uses “News” with the first letter capitalised when referring to the department within the ABC, but a lower case “n” when referring to the genre.

programming on the stations they work for. The thesis also takes account of the conceptual frameworks of radio news journalism in the context of the national public broadcaster's history, policies and professional work practices.

A chapter-by-chapter outline of the thesis is provided in the final section of this Introduction, following the aims and objectives of the thesis, a description of the radio networks, and news bulletin types.

Aim and objectives of the thesis

News journalism, public service broadcasting and the medium of radio are all the subjects of this thesis through consideration of the problems they face: radio as a medium neglected by research, the continued justification for publicly-funded commercial-free broadcasting, and the contemporary identity of news as distinct from other kinds of programming. The concept that here binds these problems together is that of audience-making (Ettema and Whitney 1994, Alasuutari 1999).

The **aim** of this thesis is therefore to investigate the ways in which audiences are made through the relationships between organisational policy and news production practice.

In pursuit of the main aim, the thesis has a number of subsidiary **objectives**. These are:

1. To discuss the dilemma at the heart of public broadcasting in its relationship with its audiences, the implications of that relationship for adaptation in policies and practice to cultural and technological change, and the specific implications for broadcast news journalism. The thesis uses ABC Radio in the late 1980s and early 1990s, part of a

period of technological and organisational change for the Australian national public broadcaster, as a case study to explore:

- The argument (made by Johnson, 1988 and Tracey, 1998) that the inherent and unresolvable tension for public broadcasters is the simultaneous requirement that they be for all the people of a nation (an egalitarian ideal) and that they represent the highest quality in broadcasting (an elitist and inherently conservative approach).
- The solution to this problem for ABC radio network managers (program policy makers), which was to tailor the form and content of each network so as to call up different audiences for each.
- The dilemma peculiar to the news service of a public broadcaster. The meaning of the public service news bulletin may be described as the moment at which the broadcaster speaks to the nation (Tracey, 1998, p.270). It does so in a closed and mechanistic form (the news bulletin, marked off from other kinds of program with its distinguishing features of introductory fanfare, dispassionate reader voice and sequence of discrete items). This form and its meaning make it hard for public service news to adapt to changes in popular culture that are affecting the relationship between news and audiences in other, mainly commercial, media.
- The difficulties for public service news journalism of tailoring news to different assumed audiences, because it holds to an ideal or normative framework, which assumes that “news is news” (McQuail, 1992).

- The implications of changes in news journalism, in form and content, on radio, television and the Internet, for the ABC as a public service broadcaster, for journalism as a profession and for the communication relationship between journalists and their audiences.

2. To analyse institutional methods of audience construction and the theories underlying them. The thesis engages with:

- the discursive construction of audience, not only in the discourse of news but also in what producers say about their audiences;
- empirical constructions of audience, mainly from ratings and qualitative survey data conducted by or on behalf of the organisation; and
- ways in which these constructions of audience are manifest in organisational policy and day-to-day production practice.

3. To examine the ‘common-sense’ understandings held by producers and policy makers about their audiences. The thesis argues:

- that producers of radio and television programs - whether of news or other kinds of program - operate with varying levels of awareness of audience research. The important point for the purpose of this study is that they usually believe they know what their audience wants and does not want (Schlesinger 1978; Tuchman 1978; Gans 1980; Tulloch 1990);
- that producers also work within frameworks of policy - editorial policy, network policy, corporate policy - which is

generally imposed on them by managers, who are influenced by, among other things, the need to attract audiences;

- that the intersections between policy and practice contribute to constructions of the audience; and
- that network managers (policy) and news producers (practice) struggle over constructions of audience; that is, each may be attempting the manufacture of a different audience: for non-news network programming and for news, respectively.

The research was conducted using a triangulation approach to method, employing participant observation, textual analysis and in-depth, unstructured interviewing. Method is discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

The achievements of this study are threefold:

The first is that the case study offers a uniquely detailed descriptive and analytical account of ABC radio news production processes in this period, and the ways in which they were determined by editorial policies, network structures, changes in technologies, and views of producers, including consideration of audience.

The second outcome, and the primary focus of the thesis, is to show that audience construction occurs not just through actual text, nor via the production process, but through both *in combination with organisational policy*. It is the bringing together of all these sites at which “manufacturing audiences” occurs that is the principle contribution of the thesis to theoretical analyses of audience creation. Finally, this work makes a case for the importance of publicly funded, editorially independent broadcasting, and for the value to a democratic society of retaining a commitment to its maintenance.

The main parameters of the case study are the ABC Radio networks and the radio news bulletin types. These are described in the following sections.

The ABC radio networks: differentiating the “brand image”.

The starting point of the thesis is the creation of five domestic ABC Radio networks distinct from one another in sound and format and intended audiences, which began in earnest following the Dix Report³. By the early nineties, the years in which research for this thesis was conducted, each network had a clear ‘brief’. While the thesis looks at news on only two of these radio networks, it is important they be understood in the context of the differentiation that took place across all of them. As an illustration, the following descriptions are taken from an ABC presentation kit published towards the completion of this process - of developing distinct network identities - in January 1994. This kit was produced for key stakeholders, including senior ABC managers, as well as State and Federal politicians.

Metropolitan Stations

Consisting of eight AM and one FM transmitters at radio stations in Australia’s largest population centres, “Metro Radio” describes itself thus (using the original layout of the presentation kit):

Your local station is
 what your city is thinking
 saying
 and doing.
 It delivers radio which is:
 local distinctive intelligent
 contemporary and fun
 balanced
 interactive
 companionable

³ Dix (1981). [Committee of Review of the Australian Broadcasting Commission] *The ABC in Review: National Broadcasting in the 1980s*. See also ABC (1985). *ABC achievement and the implementation of Dix, 1983-1985*. ABC: Sydney.

authoritative
non-commercial.

Regional Radio

As at January 1994, this network consisted of seventy-four AM and one hundred and ninety-six FM transmitters, serving small towns and cities and remote settlements with programs made and broadcast from more than forty regional radio stations. It was described as follows:

Regional Radio is the major provider of quality, information-based radio for regional Australians and -

- is an active and highly valued part of the regional community;
- is distinctively regional, enjoyable, accessible and companionable;
- makes the most productive use possible of its resources, producing programs of a high standard of presentation and production;
- recognises and responds to the cultural and occupational diversity of the regional audience, its interests and concerns;
- breaks news, initiates discussion and is a leader in the analysis of issues relevant to the regional community;
- is committed to the ABC standards of independence, accuracy, balance and fairness.

Radio National

This is a national network, which began with transmitters only in the eight major population centres. Under the Second Regional Radio Network (SRRN) project to extend choice to regional and rural listeners, the network had expanded by 1994 to eighteen AM and one hundred and ninety-two FM transmitters, with more planned to open. Radio National programs were made predominantly in Sydney and Melbourne, with fewer programs and staff in other capital cities. This is its 1994 description:

Radio National seeks to provide a unique service which gives the Australian Community access to the world of social, cultural, political and economic ideas. It includes analysing, enquiring and provoking debate about 'why' and not simply 'what'.

This uniqueness will be maintained and enhanced by ensuring that the range and depth of specialist coverage (including Science, Arts, Education, Law, Religion, Women's Issues, International Affairs) is greater than any other media outlet.

Radio National aims to stimulate and entertain listeners, strengthening their curiosity and helping them to make sense of an increasingly complex world, through its programs.

Radio National programs will explore the capabilities of the radio medium itself and have the highest possible ethical and production standards.

ABC Fine Music

This service was renamed ABC Classic FM in 1995, on the appointment of a new network general manager. As at January 1994 it had fifty-six FM transmitters.

ABC Fine Music as a major cultural force across Australia aims to:

- entertain, inform and engage listeners by delivering accessible and enjoyable programs to all age groups all over Australia;
- deliver classical music, jazz, drama, features and news in a way that is balanced, friendly, companionable, and which reflects the interests of all Australians;
- focus attention on Australian composition and performance (including radio-relevant commissions);
- be a showcase for Australian concerts and classical music festivals.

Triple J

This network had FM coverage in nine major cities in January 1994 with plans in place to expand into regional centres on twenty new FM transmitters by the end of that year, with further expansion through to 1996 to a total of fifty-three transmitters.

Triple J is an entertaining, innovative and accessible voice for young Australians -

- forging a broad musical identity, giving emphasis to new and emerging music and artists including live performance by broadcasting at least 35% Australian music content annually;
- leading and contributing to the expression of youth culture, encouraging freedom of opinion and artistic endeavour;
- presenting independent, accurate news and challenging information in a global context.

Thus it can be seen that there were three “national” networks: Radio National, ABC Fine Music and Triple J, and two “local” networks: Metropolitan and Regional Radio. Radio National, Metro Radio and Regional Radio are all talk-based. However, clear differences are obvious from reading the network descriptions. The two networks of particular interest to this thesis are Metro Radio and Radio National.

The Metropolitan network of stations is described in the language of advertising. It addresses a single listener (“you”, “your city”) with a list of adjectives chosen with the aim of conveying a feel for “your” station and what it offers. In comparison, Radio National’s self-description is longer, conveying a sense of its own importance to the nation (note the capital letters: “Science, Arts...”), weightier altogether. It is also the only description to speak of “the Australian Community”, rather than “all Australians” for example; there is an assumption of a cohesive national identity. This, together with the specialist nature of its programs, reveals that of the ABC’s services including Television, it is Radio National that can claim to fulfil most of the corporation’s Chartered⁴ obligations. It also suggests the closest conformity with the traditional “Reithian” model of public

⁴ The functions and duties that the Australian Federal Parliament has given to the ABC are set out in the Charter of the Corporation, found in Sections 6(1) and(2) of the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act 1983*.

service broadcasting, with all the promise and problems that such a model entails⁵.

As the case study reveals, differences between the major news bulletins on each of these two networks in 1991 and 1993 reflected the contrasts between their self-descriptions. About three years after these network descriptions were written, Radio National and Triple J closely followed ABC Television programs *Behind the News* and *Hot Chips* in the first expansion of the ABC on to the Internet (Martin 1999, p.106). Triple J's commitment to innovation and youth culture made it an obvious candidate to embrace a relatively new medium, while the World Wide Web could overcome the transience of radio and offer a permanent online home to the sheer volume and diversity of content generated by Radio National.

What is missing from the list of networks quoted above is the Parliamentary and News Network (PNN), with its NewsRadio service, launched in October 1994. In the 1994-95 Annual Report, the ABC introduces this network under the heading "Leadership in News and Information" and describes it thus:

The introduction of the ABC NewsRadio service on the Parliamentary and News Network (PNN) further strengthened ABC Radio's position as Australia's leading provider of news and information. ABC NewsRadio provides a continuous news service on PNN when Parliament is not sitting. It provides a unique service of rolling news and live coverage of newsworthy events. (ABC, 1995b, p.36)

While NewsRadio was not in existence during the period of the research, it is a significant development in terms of the fate of tailored news bulletins on Radio National and Metropolitan radio stations. The

⁵ John Reith, the first Director-General of the BBC, is credited with creating a model for public service broadcasting with the threefold aim of information, education and entertainment. The problem lies in narrow and elitist assumptions made about what audiences "need", which was seen as superior to what audiences might "want" to hear and see.

shortwave international service, Radio Australia, is also omitted here, since it is not relevant to this study. The case study is confined to a comparison of selected news bulletins on the Metropolitan and Radio National networks because of their similarities as talk-based networks with overlapping audiences, and because the national bulletins for both were produced from the same newsroom, reasons discussed in detail in the next chapter.

ABC Radio produced three different types of news bulletin during the period of the case study. Each of these has different implications for news priorities, bulletin structure and story choice; as a result each produces a different set of meanings, a different view of the world and what is important in it, for the audience. It is important to an understanding of what was studied to identify the differences between the bulletin types.

Bulletin types: definition of terms.

The pattern of bulletins at the time of the thesis research was markedly different on each network. The following terms will recur throughout the thesis.

- A COMPOSITE bulletin is one written in a state newsroom (or, at the time of the research, at the state 'desk' in the Sydney newsroom) and uses the major State-originated stories to lead the bulletin, with national and international news following (unless of course the biggest news story of the day happens to be either national or international). The purpose of the composite is specifically to enable news producers to offer to listeners their local news first; the assumption being that people want their 'backyard' news before news of the nation, or the world.
- NATIONAL news means a bulletin produced in the Sydney newsroom, which at the time of my research, was also called 'the

national newsroom'. A national bulletin may contain international, national or state-based news stories, but the first two tend to predominate.

- STATE news means a bulletin produced in a State newsroom, in which local news predominates and which, on the Metropolitan network, usually concludes with some sports news, and a weather forecast.

Metropolitan stations run News on the hour, most of it in what is called the "composite" format. By contrast, Radio National news bulletins were not only more widely spaced but also predominantly of a different type. In 1987, Radio National ran a daily average of 97 minutes of news, only 31 minutes of it in the Composite format, while Metropolitan stations ran 145 minutes of news, of which 116 was Composite bulletins. Almost all of Radio National's news was thus of the National-plus-State format (ABC Inter-Office Memorandum, April 19, 1990). The effect for listeners of the National-State format is to bring them national and international news first, followed - up to 10 minutes later - by local (State-based) news.

In February 1992, Radio National changed the news schedule. The 7.15am bulletin was moved to 7 o'clock, and bulletins on the hour were introduced throughout the day, as there were on Metros. However, these were National bulletins, not Composites. Thus the focus on Radio National remained on national and international news predominating over local news - in contrast to the news priorities of the Metropolitan network. The argument, elucidated in later chapters, is that this reflects assumptions not only about the role of the Radio National network for ABC Radio, but also about the nature of the audience constructed for this network.

Outline of the thesis

Chapter One describes in detail the background, theory and methods of the thesis, including the decision to focus on the main breakfast bulletin from two out of the ABC's six radio networks and the use of participant observation.

This research was undertaken while I was working as a newsreader for ABC Radio and later while I was both reading and producing some breakfast bulletins and holding a management position in the Radio National network. In this chapter I argue that my "insider status" in the newsroom, while not wholly unproblematic, gave me a unique vantage point from which to observe and question the roles and values of the bulletin producers in ABC Radio's national newsroom in Sydney. My privileged access to documents of the period, to some of which I contributed, also provided a means of comparing and contrasting the twists and turns of policy decision-making in network management, with outcomes in newsroom practices.

Taken together, the ethnographic basis of the research and the documentary analysis provide an intriguing picture of the values informing the practices of news production in ABC Radio; and of the audience constructions made by both network managers and news bulletin producers.

Finally, the differences in these audiences are made explicit through a textual analysis of some of the news bulletins themselves, using framing theory. I have used the main or "flagship" breakfast bulletins on two contrasting networks. One network is national and based on specialist talks programs, the other local and intended to attract a general audience. The research identifies differences between the two bulletins in selected key features and suggests what audience for each

is being constructed thereby. Framing theory argues that news values inform decisions that journalists make not only about what constitutes a news story, but also about what angle to take on the story. I argue in addition that news producers' images of the audience influence, and are thus created in, the framing of the news.

Chapter Two surveys the literature analysing news values and news production, as well as approaches to audiences. It examines what identifies news as a distinct form of production, in terms of shared understandings among news workers and between news producers and their audiences. Moving through a survey of the foundational sociological studies of news to an examination of “news culture”, this chapter develops an argument for the construction of audiences both textually and institutionally. It thus relates framing theory to news values.

Chapter Three establishes the institutional context of the case study, through a brief history of news production within the organisational structure of the ABC. This chapter demonstrates that News was first established as an entirely separate division, then combined with Current Affairs into separate radio and television departments. Through subsequent changes to the organisational structure of the ABC, news and current affairs always remain “quarantined” from other kinds of program commissioning and production.

This placing apart emphasises the high organisational value placed on the independence of news, not only editorially but also from the organisational imperatives that make non-news programs more changeable, more susceptible to pressure to be “audience responsive”.

News has historically been given larger and more protected budgets in times of funding pressure on the ABC. Radio news is “privileged discourse” within the audio medium: for example, it is heralded by loud, fanfare-like or urgent music, and it usually also heralds the hour,

beginning at “the top of the clock”, a privileged position in the way radio segments time. Such features indicate its immediacy, and its urgent intrusion into other radio sound signifies its importance.

The chapter concludes with a consideration of changes to non-news programming, and how these affected the news service. These were changes that began in the years following the publication in 1981 of the report of the Committee of Review of the (then) Australian Broadcasting Commission, set up by the Federal Government and known as the Dix Report, after the name of the Committee’s chairman, businessman Alex Dix. These changes assumed the attraction or creation of distinct audiences for the different ABC Radio networks. It is a taken-for-granted of media production that non-news programming is tailored to create network identity or, to put it another way, to appeal to different audiences. It is not so taken-for-granted, however, particularly at the ABC, that network identity should affect news bulletins.

Chapter Four brings together the preceding three chapters, locating itself at the site of the case study, in what was at the time called the “national newsroom” of ABC Radio, in Sydney.

This chapter analyses differences in production practices and how they affected the “flagship” breakfast bulletins on Radio National and on the Metropolitan network. An enduring culture becomes apparent; a set of values, assumptions and production practices in ABC Radio News that has persisted through changes to the technology of news production, training and organisational structures. This news culture bears resemblances to that identified across the sociological literature described in Chapter Two, and shows some elements peculiar to public sector broadcasting in general and to ABC News in particular, as identified in Chapter Three.

This chapter introduces the differences between the bulletins as resulting not only from differences in the work practices employed in their production of the bulletins but also from differences in perceptions of the audience for each network. These and other key differences are taken up in the detailed analysis of the bulletin texts, in Chapter Five.

Chapter Five analyses in detail differences between the Radio National and Metropolitan radio breakfast bulletins in story writing, story choice and order, for their revelation of constructions of audiences; and these are considered in the light of what bulletin producers say about the audience for each network.

This chapter introduces a conceptual model of framing theory, which is defined and discussed in the opening section of the chapter. The chapter concludes that framing analysis clearly demonstrates the creation of different audiences for each of the Metropolitan and Radio National bulletins.

Chapter Six brings together the findings of the research and analysis to argue that it was impossible to sustain a unified attempt to “manufacture” distinct audiences for the ABC Radio News service. It was doomed to founder on a number of factors that are together described as a struggle over audiences. The sources of the struggle and the influences upon its course include the inherent contradiction in the audience obligations of the ABC, exacerbated by successive reductions in funding. Perhaps stronger even than these influences, however, were the professional norms and work practices of ABC radio news producers.

A key factor in the eventual abandonment of the attempt to tailor news on each of its network services was the ABC’s move to establish a 24-hour news service, NewsRadio, on the Parliamentary and News Network. More recently, ABC News Online has become an important

and growing news service, leaving a standardised and, it is argued, impoverished news service on the Metropolitan and Radio National networks.

The fragmentation of services made possible by technology, and the impact of globalisation, may be seen as a dual threat: to notions of professionalism in production and to the idea of a national, public broadcaster. However, these same features of the contemporary mediascape may also offer a way out of the historical dilemma for the ABC in its relationship with its audiences.

The thesis concludes in with a summary of its key argument, that research must restore production as a crucial site for the creation of audiences in the study of news journalism. This research establishes a conceptual framework for the identification of such audiences, using framing, thus reconciling the centrality of production with theories of audience creation.

Chapter One

Background and Methodology

Introduction

At the heart of this thesis is a case study, which is used to investigate, among other things, neglected areas in the literature on news and audiences. This chapter begins by exploring three background issues pertinent to the objectives of the study, and then describes in detail the methodological approaches used to conduct the investigation. These were participant observation in the Sydney newsroom of ABC Radio, in-depth unstructured interviews, documentary analysis, and textual analysis of selected radio news bulletins, using framing theory.

This chapter examines, explains and justifies the use of these methods, in the context of the aim for the overall study, to show that different audiences are framed within the news bulletins, for reasons reflecting network policy and newsroom practice. The combination of methods used, it is argued, provides a deeper and “more nuanced” understanding than any one of them could on its own (Seiter 1999, p.103). The specifics of the case study are here explained in detail: the choice of networks and news bulletins that were examined and why. The chapter thus provides the reader with a detailed understanding of the methods selected and why, and of the theoretical approaches that inform the aim and objectives of the thesis.

The first part of the chapter introduces three key background issues: (i) the historical cultural role of public broadcasters and the changing role of news in public broadcasting, (ii) the relationship between public broadcasters and their audiences, and (iii) the neglect of radio by research.

Following this background, the second part of the chapter is concerned with the approaches to theory and method of the thesis. In this part, I first consider the case study, its advantages and disadvantages. In the context of having selected a case study, the primary method used was that of participant observation, and the next section of this part of the chapter discusses what is meant by this term, identifying the centrality of participation, and therefore of the researcher, to ethnographic-inductive research.

My professional experience as a newsreader, news producer and radio network manager for ABC Radio from 1983 to 1996 has informed and enabled my role as researcher in the field, and this is discussed at some length. These roles also have implications for the documentary research carried out, both in ABC Archives and from my own records.

The last two sections of the chapter look first at the justification for the choice of networks and news bulletins, then introduce the theoretical approaches to audiences and analysis of the news bulletins.

Three Key Background Issues

1. Public service broadcasting: cultural roles and the changing role of news

Public service broadcasting in Australia, Canada and Britain (more often in Australia simply called ‘public broadcasting’) is widely described, both in academic and in popular literature, as ‘under threat’, and has been for some years. Titles such as *The Decline and*

Fall of Public Service Broadcasting (Tracey 1998) or *Normal Service Won't Be Resumed* (Williams, 1996.) illustrate the point. What is meant by this varies from the direct economic threat of funding cuts to a perceived cultural threat from commercialisation and privatisation. While most such descriptions are laments, they sometimes start from the conviction that public broadcasting is inherently elitist, patronising, and therefore inimical to democratic societies.

A related argument is that the public whom the public broadcasters were set up to serve has always in the majority been indifferent to their existence, most of the audience choosing to watch and listen to commercial broadcasters. This argument is less true in the UK than in countries such as Australia where commercial radio was established earlier than or at the same time as the public broadcasters.

Nonetheless, public broadcasting survives and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation appears to enjoy a level of support even among those who do not use it. Opinion polls invariably come out with a large majority in favour of its continued maintenance from the public purse. This is despite ratings share figures that suggest only between one fifth and one quarter of the available audience is tuned to the ABC's radio networks or its television service at any one time. On the other hand, measures of audience reach (that is, of the number of different people who tune into an ABC radio or television service at least once a week), suggest around 80 per cent of adult Australians make at least occasional use of their national public broadcaster.

An ANOP (Australian National Opinion Poll) survey commissioned by the ABC and conducted in 1990 showed that "86 per cent of Australians use the ABC every week, *primarily because of the credibility of its news and information programs and its non-commercial style*" (ABC *Corporate Plan 1991-1994*, p.4 – italics added). As this quotation suggests, in the context of public service broadcasting, the news holds a particular value for audiences of public broadcasters. The Australian people appear to value the ABC most for

its non-commercialism and its perceived freedom from political interference.

Posetti (2001/02, pp.12-13) has recently traced the consistency with which surveys reveal “the high standing of the ABC within the Australian community”. In 1998, 2000, 2001 and 2002, surveys by, respectively, the Australian Broadcasting Authority, “international consumer research and advertising agencies” and Newspoll all found a high degree of trust in the ABC, especially its news and current affairs programs. Newspoll’s “ABC Appreciation Survey” reported that “91 per cent of Australians believe the ABC provides a valuable service to the community – a 3 per cent increase over the findings of the initial survey in 1998” (Posetti, p.28).

At the time she published the information just cited, Posetti was both an academic and a senior political journalist with the ABC. Her concern for the editorial independence of ABC journalism – that is, for the independence of public broadcasters from government and commercial influence – is typical of public broadcasting managers and producers. Independence is seen as causally linked to an impartial, balanced and accurate news service. The ABC’s internal documents, including policy statements and newsroom training materials, maintain the essential quality of this description of its news. The sociological literature of journalism identifies accuracy, balance and impartiality as the ideal values of “good” journalism. Equally, it has critically deconstructed what journalists mean when they talk of “objectivity” (see for example, Gans 1979, pp.182-213 and Tuchman 1972). Such studies have not, however, affected popular attitudes towards and understanding of news as much as has postmodern cultural theory.

Postmodernism offers not the first but perhaps the greatest challenge to the “common-sense” meaning of concepts such as truth and objectivity. This is an attack on the heart of what news journalism has

long thought it is about. Such attacks are not new in media theory, but most have stemmed from what Matthew Kieran calls “the ideological presumption” (Kieran 1997, p.79) of critical and cultural studies; that is, the presumption that all news judgement displays what Gans calls “unconscious ideology”, which is politically, socially and culturally conservative (Gans 1979, p.190 and p.205).

The theoretical approach of postmodernism to journalism is not to attack it for having an ideological code, as postmodernism takes for granted that journalism shares this with *all* texts. What is most important among the “textual feature[s]” of journalism is “the fact that it counts as true” (Hartley 1996, p.35), and it is this feature that is challenged by a theory that assumes all texts – and their “truths” – are socially positioned. The way in which postmodernism has affected news is in its reaction against “the normalising function of modernism” (Storey 1993, p.155).

The very nature of the news bulletin as a discrete program is in question, as much in commercial media as for public broadcasters, as its centrality and popularity decline, challenged by other sources of “news” such as talkback programs on radio or panel-based comedy/talk programs on television⁶, or from the always-available Internet.

Technological change is another source of diversity in the form and sources of news. Such aspects of digital convergence as digital audio and video capture and editing, computer networking, audio and video

⁶ For example, *Good News Week*, a program that began on ABC Television in 1998, attracted a large audience in the under-40 age demographic, then moved to the commercial Channel Ten, where it was – in commercial terms – less successful and came off air at the end of 2001. Other programs that perform a similar function are *The Panel*, also on Channel Ten, *The Fat* and *The Glasshouse* on ABC TV. In each case, the format is to have three or more presenters, aged in their 20s or 30s, usually only one of whom is female, perform to a live studio audience a combination of stand up comedy, panel discussion, and facetious quizzes or other forms of audience participation. These programs are hybrid in both form and content. The content is nearly always a combination of topical political events and issues, and stories about celebrities and other well-known figures in popular culture.

“streaming” via the Internet have made it possible not just for producers to tailor news to ever more specific markets but also for individual audience members to tailor their own news, at least to a degree. What this means is that the definitions of news and journalism are adapting to a more diversely situated audience. In broadcast journalism this is most obvious on radio and television stations that are targeted to a youth demographic (listeners and viewers aged between 14 and 39 years old).

For example, in mid-2002 I became aware that the young female reader of a short news bulletin towards the end of the breakfast session on the ABC’s youth music radio station, Triple J, was regularly interrupted by the two male presenters, with quips and comments on the stories. To a middle-aged ABC listener and journalist such as me, this was initially shocking. Closer listening made it clear that the stories for comment were selected to avoid distasteful juxtapositions of humour and tragedy, for example, and that the newsreader would pause obligingly after such stories, in order for the men to jump in with their quips. The effect was to make the news, which research suggests would be the least interesting part of the breakfast session to Triple J’s target audience⁷, a source of entertainment as well as information for them.

The only bulletin in which I heard this interpolation occur was at 8.30am, while the ‘top of the clock’ bulletins at 7am, 8am and 9am were not interrupted. This reflects the way in which the position of the news in the “radio clock”, at the start of the new hour, acts to reinforce its authority, something that is addressed in more detail below. Even Triple J, historically the exception among ABC radio networks’ approach to news, was not prepared to break completely with this form of production. Nonetheless, this is an example of news

⁷ Research by the Australian Broadcasting Authority, for example, has found that among people aged 14 to 29 – the target market for Triple J – there is an overwhelming lack of interest in such serious news staples as national politics and economics (ABA, 1996).

on an ABC radio network adapting to what might be called “the postmodern condition” of its audience.

On the networks and in the time period under scrutiny in this thesis, the response by news producers to the policy of more precisely targeting the radio networks was modernist rather than postmodern: an attempt to “manufacture” the desired audience as defined by each network. This is one reason, but only one, it could not succeed.

The role of news within the cultural history of public broadcasting, particularly the ABC, is an important background issue to the case study that forms the basis of the thesis. This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three, which also includes consideration of the impact on the ABC as a public service news organisation of cultural and technological changes to news and to journalism that have taken place during the period of the research.

One important aspect of the cultural role of public broadcasting is its relationship with its audiences.

2. The relationship between news producers, news bulletins and audiences

News bulletins are produced using knowledge acquired from a variety of sources. By “knowledge” is meant not only skills, but also that experience which constructs a view of the world, including expectations, values, assumptions and beliefs about what is real. The sources of news journalists’ and producers’ knowledge include socialisation into an occupational news culture, the work practices of the newsroom and the policies of news and network management. All of these assume the existence of an audience (or audiences) for the output, the news. But the audience, however well or little known, is not the primary influence on the shape and delivery of the news. Studies of news organisations demonstrate over and over that however

‘audience-focused’ the media outlet, the product we recognise as ‘news’ is shaped by organisational and professional forces stronger than perceptions of audience (e.g. Schlesinger 1978; Tuchman, 1978; Gans, 1979; Fishman, 1980; Ericson, Baranek & Chan, 1987 and 1989; Tiffen, 1989).

Of course, there is continual competition for audiences among and within media organisations, not only for the biggest audience but increasingly for the *right* audience; that is, the particular audience for whom the product (network, program, station, bulletin) is tailored.

This is as true for public sector broadcasters as it is for commercial organisations. The audiences for whom the media compete are both real listeners (or viewers or readers) and constructions. They are what Hartley (1987, 1992) called “invisible fictions”, institutionally defined by audience research conducted on behalf of media organisations (Ang 1991). Jacka (1994), responding to Hartley (1992) and Ang (1991), has argued that this dichotomy, between the “actual audience” and the institutionally constructed one, is “too easy” and based on an “epistemological confusion” (Jacka 1994, pp.45, 46). This is a dialogue the next chapter returns to, but it is introduced here to make the point that the highly contested nature of media audiences means that there needs to be clarity about which definition of audience is being used, each time the word is used.

In the discussion that follows, “audience” is used in two senses, both of which refer to aggregates. The first is institutionally defined segments of the audience, which are, not insignificantly, referred to by media producers and policy makers as “targets”. The second is sociological and cultural. In this sense, the audience is defined by its identity, which may be unified, for example, by nationality (“Australians”) or divided by socio-economic (social class) status.

The tailoring of media content to attract specific markets or audience segments is taken for granted by media workers and managers, especially as digital audio, video and data broadcasting offer an unprecedented opportunity for niche marketing or fragmenting the audience. Framing news content for audiences also involves decisions about what to include and what to leave out, and for the most part this is as unconsciously done by news producers as their views about audiences are held. But for Australia's national public broadcaster, particularly for ABC News, tailoring the product "news" to specific audiences is more problematic.

The problem begins with the observation that the ABC is in a historical and cultural bind in its relationship with the audience. Johnson points out in her cultural history of radio in Australia, *The Unseen Voice* (1988), that the taxpayer-funded national broadcaster is both supposed to represent everyone (to be for all Australians) and is supposed to maintain the high end of the cultural spectrum, an intrinsically elitist position. Tracey, writing about the BBC, describes this as "an inherent tension between the programme-maker and the audience" (Tracey 1998, p.269); inherent that is to all public service broadcasting, not unique to the BBC. Nonetheless, this dilemma was created at the creation of the (then) Australian Broadcasting Commission, is present to this day in the ABC Charter, and is still unresolved. While Johnson maintains it is "incapable of resolution", others disagree. Craven for example argues that the ABC "relates in the most crucial way to the interface between popular culture and high culture and it whispers the secret that there is no distinction" (in Williams 1996, p81). This dilemma is especially acute for the medium of radio, for which the most appropriate presentation style is intimate, personal and pervasive (Johnson 1988; MacFarland 1997; Shingler & Wieringa 1998).

On the other hand, when news is viewed as a cultural form, there are persuasive arguments for it being, as Schudson puts it, "a more

important forum for communication among elites ... than with the general population” (Schudson 1996, p.156). Studies of news production have demonstrated the extent to which news sources tend to be found in elite institutions in society - government, the law, big business - and the extent to which news stories are dominated by those whom Gans (1979, p.8) called “the Knowns”: well-known and powerful members of society, be they politicians, business tycoons, police commissioners or royalty. Both Gans and Schudson point out that there is an acknowledgement by news producers of the general audience in stories such as those which expose corruption, sexual scandals or other wrongdoing by officials. This “regular opportunity for elites to be effectively embarrassed, even disgraced” (Schudson 1996, p.156) is an aspect of the democratising role news can play, but very often does not.

The problem for the ABC with tailoring news stems not only from defining the corporation’s relationship with its audience but also from the role that the news plays in the national broadcaster. To quote Tracey again: “more than any other programme, that is the moment when the public broadcaster speaks to and for the nation” (1998, p.270). The news service is a primary site for fulfilling the Charter obligation to provide programs “that contribute to a sense of national identity”. The existence of the Charter within the Act of Parliament governing the ABC (the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act* 1983) is seen within the Corporation as a vital protection for the work of the public broadcaster precisely because it acts as a restraint on fundamental change. Add to this the closed and mechanistic nature of the form of radio news - that is, those elements of the text that make it identifiably “news” for a listener - and the result for ABC news is a product and a production process which are peculiarly resistant to change.

Declining audiences (in size) - especially among younger people - for traditional forms of news in all media present an unprecedented

challenge, which media theorists have been quick to observe and to which practitioners seek responses. Theorists such as Wark (1994), Hartley (1996), and Lumby (1999) argue that “news” as a specific broadcast format and as a genre is not where younger adults in particular get their news. Hybrid forms of media entertainment, such as the television program *Good News Week* or *The Panel* (see Footnote 1), which combine elements of stand up comedy, the quiz show, the late night chat show and current affairs television, are a greater source of knowledge about “what’s going on” for younger audiences. Such programs nonetheless still rely upon the presenters having a good knowledge of (and ability satirically to deconstruct) what is “in the news”, as presented by newspapers, television and radio news bulletins and via the World Wide Web; and on the audience having sufficient knowledge to recognise and appreciate that this is what is happening. In the face of falling audiences for early evening television news bulletins and loss of newspaper circulation, owners of commercial media organisations, as much as the ABC, are turning to the Internet, and to specialist subscription services, as ways of attracting audiences for news.

There are two phenomena to be identified here: one is the fragmentation of the globalised audience as a result of technological change (satellite distribution and digital convergence). The other is what has been referred to as the “tabloidisation” of the news; in other words, the blurring of form and content between news and not-news. This has been slower to happen in radio than in any of the three traditional news media. Newspapers have introduced more feature and human-interest material onto the front page, the traditional site of “hard news” stories, and “lifestyle” supplements have proliferated. Television news may have retained the traditional half-hour or one-hour early evening bulletin but the content mix has altered, in some cases to the point where the traditional mainstays of federal politics and national economics are little more than passing references, or are presented as personalised into “human interest” angles on government

decisions, for example, where once the human interest angle would have been supplementary to the “straight” news presentation of the story.

Journalists have expressed concern about these changes to the nature of news, arguing that they represent a decline in quality, due to the neglect or ignorance of central “news values”, values which in turn, it is argued, are aspects of the maintenance of a healthy public sphere (Gratton 1998; Langer 1998; Baker 1999). Some media analysts reject this lament, asserting rather that “these developments are part of a dissolution of a prescriptive, rigid, social and cultural hierarchy” of media values (Lumby and O’Neill in Schultz 1994, p.154). What is not in doubt is that digital convergent media offer the potential to change the genre “news” considerably, not least in terms of their relationship with the audience; the phenomenon of World Wide Web “logs” (“Web logs”, more often just called “Blogs”) is an example.

For the time being, however, there have been few challenges to the dominant model of news production and presentation in radio. No matter what the radio station being listened to, the listener can usually immediately identify the newsbreak. Some highly recognisable features of the form (not all present in all bulletins) include: time pips up to when the bulletin begins, at the “top of the clock” - a significant position in the way the radio medium segments time (MacFarland 1998) - and/or dramatic, fanfare-like introductory music (a call to attention); read by a deep male voice and/or with an authoritative, portentous delivery of the script; it *is* scripted (in contrast with the intimacy and apparent spontaneity of most spoken word radio).

The effect is to keep the newsreader at a distance from the listener, reflecting the “truth”, objectivity and authority of news. Youth music stations tend to try to minimise this distancing effect, using female newsreaders with young voices and a chatty presentation style, but rarely to the point of disrupting the flow of the bulletin, as described

earlier as happening in one bulletin on Triple J. Radio news also usually employs spoken headlines, followed by stories which display the repetitive structure of a “copy read” (that is, an introduction read by the newsreader) then voice report from the journalist, perhaps with a “grab” of “actuality” or sound from the location at which the story took place and/or from which it was filed. Taken together, even if not all features are present, listeners recognise this radio sound as news, and distinctive from other kinds of sound on radio.

ABC Radio eventually abandoned the one experiment it did make in news, which was to allow the youth music station 2JJ its own news service. 2JJ originated in Sydney in January 1975 as the Contemporary Music Unit (CRU) and in August 1980 began broadcasting on the FM band as Triple J. From 1989 it began to expand beyond Sydney, to become a national stereo FM network, broadcasting in all state and territory capital cities and regional centres around the country.

Triple J still has its own bulletins, but the news producers are integrated into the main newsroom and the language of the bulletins is much closer to that of other networks. This move, at the beginning of the 1990s, coincided with a conservative trend in the overall sound of the station and was made partly on the grounds that news quality would remain “poor” as long as young Triple J news producers remained located too far away from the influence of senior news producers. This judgement can be seen as based on an acceptance of a “good” set of news values which can best be learned from experienced practitioners; that is, by being socialised into their way of doing things. It was a move also justified on the grounds that it would be a more efficient use of resources if the Triple J news producers could be called upon to contribute to bulletins on other networks. The news on Triple J thus returned to the news production model, away from a station-centred program production model (but see the recent evidence of disruption to the form, described earlier).

In radio news at the ABC the most obvious change since the mid-eighties has been that bulletins have become shorter but more regular. In 1987, Radio National was still running fifteen minutes of news not only in its main breakfast bulletin at 7.15am but also at 12.30pm, 1.30pm. and 7.00pm. There was also a fifteen-minute news program called *Newsvoice*, which ran fewer, longer stories at 5pm. Bulletins at other times usually ran for ten minutes, although there were relatively long periods of the day without any news bulletins.

By 1992, the network was running news on the hour every hour but in the great majority of cases the bulletins were of just five minutes duration, running to ten minutes at 7.00am, 1.00pm, 5.00pm, 6.00pm and 7.00pm. Overall there were more minutes of news each day in total on the network because of the increased number of bulletins. However, it can be argued that it is not possible to create a bulletin in the same depth or breadth if it runs five minutes, compared to one that runs for fifteen.

By 1994 the ABC was offering a 24-hour Parliamentary and News Network (PNN), also called NewsRadio, which promises the listener will not have to wait longer than eight minutes before hearing the latest Australian news, followed by a world news update (except when Federal Parliament is sitting). Between these short bulletins is more extended reporting, including analysis and commentary, which provides the depth that shorter bulletins inevitably lack. It is outside the scope of this thesis to analyse PNN in detail, but its presentation style, deliberately less formal from its inception than that of the traditional ABC news bulletin, has become still more “chatty” over the past two or three years. By 1999 ABC News Online offered continuous “updating” of the news, as well as a news archive. At the time of writing, the online news service offers not only written copy but also streaming media, in video and audio.

The differentiation of the ABC audience, begun with the separate “branding” of the radio networks (see Introduction and Chapter Three), is now affected by the new distribution means of the Internet. This, however, is to anticipate what lay ahead, at the time of the case study used in the thesis.

3. The Neglect of Radio by Research

The importance of this work lies partly in its contribution to our understanding of a neglected area of research in Australia: of radio in general and of radio news in particular.

While the radio medium has recently experienced something of a revival as a site for academic research⁸, the neglect of radio in studies of news production is striking. The May 1999 issue of *Media International Australia incorporating Culture and Policy* contained a major themed section on Radio. In his introduction, Turner discusses the lack of academic research in contemporary Australian radio. Speaking of 1990, he says there was then “almost no analysis either of the medium’s products or of the regulatory environment within which it then operated. Its position was far worse than that of other media forms.” He goes on to say that things “have improved a little since then. ... Radio, however, remains the poor relation” in its academic literature (Turner, 1999, p.1).

In a basic media studies text such as Hartley (1982), there is almost no consideration of radio, the emphasis being on newspapers and television. Given the size of audiences for television news, and reports that television is the “most trusted” source of news for most people, perhaps this should not be seen as surprising. Yet newspapers, a declining source of news for most people and

⁸ Alasuutari (1999a) and Garner (2003) both make a case for the importance and vitality of recent radio research.

considered less “trustworthy” than radio, continue to be the focus of research, while radio news continues to be relatively neglected. This is in the face of evidence (ABA 1996) that at the time of this research, Australians were spending more hours per week listening to radio than watching television; and that they own on average four radios, but only two TVs.

Radio is the older of those two media and still very influential in news and current affairs, attracting substantial audiences to peak bulletins and programs; certainly, no politician on the hustings would neglect radio as a medium, particularly for reaching specific segments of the population. A perception of radio as more true, more authentic, emerged in the earliest days of radio news, in relation to newspapers (Petersen 1993) and it persists, reappearing particularly in times of social or political crisis (Kolar-Panov and Miller 1991; Jackson 2002⁹). This is markedly so for ABC Radio news, partly as a response to a long-established reputation for independence, quality and trustworthiness, a phenomenon also true of the BBC (Wallis & Baran, 1990).

Most studies of news production processes have been done not only in television but also in places other than in Australia. The classic studies are American or British (although Schlesinger did look at BBC Radio as well as BBC Television). Edgar(1980), Henningham(1988, 1995) and Tiffin (1989) are notable contributors to the field in Australia. Wasburn (1995, p.73) comments how “few studies have examined this electronic medium of political communication”, referring to work in the USA.

⁹ An increase in ABC Metropolitan Radio ratings in the final survey of 2002 was attributed by commercial rivals to the prospect of Australia, Britain and the United States going to war in Iraq: “To a body, the ABC’s competitors put its success down to the turbulent nature of world events, which they say has temporarily driven listeners to *trusty news shows* such as *AM* and *PM*.” Jackson, S. (2002). Talk tough in radio war. *Media, The Australian*, December 12-18, p.4. Emphasis added.

The ABC itself, despite its constant exposure to journalistic scrutiny, has also been relatively little studied by academic researchers, especially in its radio news services. Henningham's 1988 study of journalists' professional values was conducted in ABC Television. The exceptions to this are historical studies (Inglis 1983; Petersen 1993), and the reports, either internally or externally initiated (Dix 1981, Mansfield 1997 etc.), which provide some descriptive assessment of the structure and values of the radio news service. A small number of books and other publications has been written explicitly in defence of the ABC in response to perceptions of particular threat, such as that by ABC veteran broadcaster Robyn Williams (1996), *Save Our ABC* (Fraser and O'Reilly, eds 1996) and ABC journalist Quentin Dempster's *Death Struggle* (2000).

This thesis is therefore the first detailed research study of the news production processes of ABC Radio news, taken at a particular point in time (1983-1993), and considered in the context of the development of ABC Radio network policy over that decade, with respect to the impact on news practice of policy and programming changes in two key networks: the national network Radio National, and the locally-based Metropolitan network. In so doing, this research addresses what Cottle (2003) has called "the relatively unexplored and under-theorised 'middle ground' of organizational structures and workplace practices (including) ... the dynamic practices and daily grind of media professionals and producers engaged in productive processes" (Cottle 2003, p.4). It is also unique in its attempt to make connections between the discourses of audience theory and the practices and views of news producers, news journalists and radio network managers.

From these key background issues, the second part of the chapter turns now to the approach taken to the study.

Methodology

“Case study” is used in the sense that Mitchell defines the term: as “a description of a specific configuration of events in which some distinctive set of actors have (sic) been involved in some defined situation at some particular point in time” (Mitchell in Ellen 1984, p.237). The “specific configuration of events” in this case is made up of technological and policy changes, and the writing of ABC Radio news bulletins that was affected by those changes. These events include my own participation in the case study, since I was working in the newsroom (that is, the site of the fieldwork) as a newsreader, then working as an ABC Radio network manager, over the relevant period of time.

The “distinctive set of actors” is those people observed and interviewed for this study, made up of ABC Radio news producers, the Chief Producer, and various ABC Radio network and news managers. I also make observations of myself; that is to say, of my roles as newsreader and network manager. That I was an actor in the situation is significant. One critical change – the decision to roster a single producer to the 7.15am Radio National bulletin across Monday to Friday mornings – was a policy change made in response to my observations of differential treatment of breakfast bulletins on the two networks, Radio National and Metropolitan Radio.

The “defined situation” encompasses both ABC Radio’s national newsroom in Sydney, and the corporation as a whole, in the context of contemporary Australian society and public service broadcasting. The “particular point in time” must be defined to include both the period of fieldwork (1991-1993) and the period over which the changes significant to the case study took place, the decade 1983-1993.

The task of this thesis has been more to develop theoretical insights than to prove hypotheses; what Kellehear (1993) calls the 'ethnographic-inductive design' and Mitchell 'analytical induction' (in Ellen 1984, p.239). Research began with *in situ* observations, moved to asking questions, then to face-to-face interviews with selected news journalists, producers and managers. Amongst this there was collection and analysis not only of the selected news bulletins themselves but also of news style manuals, network policy reports, memos and newsletters, audience research reports and corporate editorial policies. The various techniques of data collection assemble between them as complete an account of the case study as possible. The in-depth interviews enable "the gathering of more comprehensive information than might be possible in participant observation alone" (Newcomb, in Jensen and Jankowski 1991, p.101). The variety of evidence a case study can deal with - including documents, interviews and observations - has been described as its "unique strength" in understanding "complex social phenomena" in all their "holistic and meaningful characteristics" (Yin 1994, pp.3 and 8).

As the researcher in the field, I carried with me a lot of "history", having been a freelance reporter and researcher for ABC Television throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s, and a fulltime ABC Radio employee from 1983. It would be fair to say I had that "prolonged immersion" in the life of the organisation, in the course of which I learned a great deal about "people's habits and thoughts", which is said to be the central technique of qualitative fieldwork (Punch 1986, p.11). However, it was not until 1991 that I began systematic research in my workplace. Membership of the group I studied thus preceded analysis (Manning 1987, p.15).

Participant observation of news production is a well-established practice in the literature of the sociology of journalism. Studies of journalists at work include ones by those who have themselves been journalists, such as Park (1940) and Gans (1979). Many others have

been undertaken by sociologists such as Schlesinger (1987), Tuchman (1978), and Ericson, Baranek and Chan (1987 & 1989). Although researchers such as Gans attended news conferences and the like, most of them were not actually engaged in the work of a journalist, news producer, reporter or newsreader, during the period of fieldwork. Exceptions include Fishman (1980) and Lester (1980). Fishman worked as a reporter for several months on a local newspaper, while Lester undertook what in Australia would be called work experience, or an internship, at a national daily paper (see Tuchman 1991, p.85).

Most of these researchers also conducted interviews, asked casual questions, took notes, and in some cases, used documentary analysis. Few if any, however, had the level of privileged access to people and papers that I enjoyed, in my capacity as a member of radio management. Taking advantage of this dual level of entry (as news worker and as manager) led inevitably to an ethnographic approach to understanding the relationships between the processes of news production and those of network policy-making, and the role that constructions of audience played between them.

An observer with true “insider status” may have as many problems with field observation as a method, as any other observer. The “insider” may be even more susceptible to being highly selective in their observations, attracted by the unusual and overlooking the taken-for-granted (Kellehear 1993, p.128), and this may affect how interviews are framed. More importantly, the organisational status of the “insider” may have a direct and significant effect on what interviewees are prepared to disclose. Certainly, I found this to be the case once I became a more senior manager within the Radio National network. Of course, the interviewees’ perceptions of the nature and status of the interviewer is a factor in all research using open-ended interviews as a method. On the other hand, the true insider may have not only privileged access but also a deep level of understanding of what is important in what is being observed, a level that could not be

expected of even the trained observer from “outside” the group, community or organisation. In common with much participant observation, the fieldwork in this study is characterised by “relatively unstructured observation, close involvement in the field, and deep identifications with the researched” (Punch 1986, p.12). As with any participant observation study, the “trade-offs between the opportunities and the problems have to be considered seriously” (Yin 1994, p.89).

This applies to documentary analysis as well as to observation. Corporate documents, such as memoranda, board papers or official policies, cannot always be taken at face value; they may be examples of “intended, conscious attempts at impression management” (Kellehear 1993, p.61). Since I was either working in the areas at the time many of the documents referred to in the thesis were written, or participated directly in their production, I have an intimate understanding of the context from which most of them came. This contextual, historical knowledge is an aspect of what I have called my “insider status” and provides some - I do not claim complete - protection against misinterpretation. It also offers a rare opportunity to add to understanding of the impact of socio-cultural and technological factors on news production in the Australian cultural context, specifically in the context of the national public broadcaster, the ABC. The analysis of policy documents, memoranda and reports therefore concentrates on (a) specific events that have a tendency to trigger changes or developments (such as the 1981 Review of the then Australian Broadcasting Commission – known as the Dix Report – or the invention of the multi-user digital recording, editing and replay system D-Cart), and (b) emergent themes, which suggest values and assumptions about ABC news, about the ABC and its role, about ABC Radio and the individual networks, and about audiences.

It is evident that occasional use of the first person singular is inevitable and appropriate to the methods of this thesis. I will not

discuss the history of “the proper attitude” of the fieldworker towards involvement (see Manning 1987, pp.11-22). Suffice it to say I have tried to use my personal experience, including empirical knowledge, to describe in the richest way possible how ABC radio news workers and network managers made the professional decisions they did, and on what basis. I have tried also to engage in that “sober reflection” that Punch recommends as “essential to a credible scientific enterprise” (Punch 1986, p.28). There may thus be detected at times two authorial voices in the thesis: that which speaks more clearly as participant and that which steps back into the role of observer, and analyst. One of the strengths (and vulnerabilities) of the method is that the researcher can – I would argue, must – speak with both voices and speak reflexively of both.

Another way of expressing this duality has been put by Tonkin (in Ellen 1984, pp.216-223). She argues that in ethnographic research, the fieldworker “is the method”, in the sense that the researcher is “the medium *as well as* the recorder and interpreter of his/her research” (Tonkin 1984, p.222, italics added). As a means of acquiring diverse knowledge and enabling valid conclusions, she advocates a diversity of methods, such as is used in this thesis. Apart from the fieldwork that informs the case study, the interviews and the document analysis, the thesis also uses the insights of the sociology of journalism. While one of the virtues of the qualitative methods used in this research is its internal validity, reliability and generalisability are more limited and this may be described as a weakness. Nonetheless, case studies and interviews can provide both interesting and valuable insights in the “historical academic context” in which they are conducted (Schroder 1999, p.45). Schroder argues that “*validity*, defined as the ideal that the study should adequately capture the real-world phenomena it seeks to explore, is the starting point and *sine qua non* when planning empirical research about cultural meaning processes” (Schroder 1999, p.51. Italics in the original). It was

beyond the resources of this research to undertake the strategies Schroder goes on to suggest for increasing the reliability of qualitative studies. However, in relation to generalisability, the study makes modest claims for the representativeness of the results, asserting only that it is “appropriate to the problem at hand” (Roe 1996, quoted by Schroder 1999, p.54) and provides original and powerful explanations within a specific context.

Timeframe and scope of the research

The research took place over a period of some years, years in which there was major technological and structural change affecting ABC Radio. It began in 1989 informally, with observation in the newsroom where I was working. In 1991 I obtained permission from the then General Manager of News and Information Programs to interview producers and journalists, if they were willing. I also circulated a letter to newsroom personnel describing my research and explaining that I would be taking notes for research purposes (see Appendices). Since I had been a newsreader for many years and therefore my presence in the newsroom was unremarkable, it would not have been necessary to announce my research. Doing so was both an ethical consideration and made it easier for me to ask questions about what was in the bulletins; questions that might otherwise have been interpreted by news producers as impertinence or criticism of their work.

The situation was complicated by perceptual and structural issues. I was not by this time a full-time newsreader, but only reading the bulletins for the new national breakfast current affairs program on Radio National, called *Daybreak*. For the rest of the working day I returned to a job within the management of Radio National, with the title of National Presentation Co-ordinator. Most of my field notes

were made and most of the ten interviews conducted during this period, between April and October 1991.

The bulletins collected were for April, May and June of that year; just the 7.15am Radio National 10-minute national bulletin and the 7.45am Metropolitan 10-minute national bulletin, in hard copy - that is, the paper copy printed out for the newsreader.

By 1993 when I collected the same bulletins for comparative purposes, I was no longer working in the newsroom. By this time I had been promoted to a position within the management of Radio National that reported directly to the General Manager of the network; a fact that did not go unnoticed by the people I wanted to interview in that year. They, rightly, perceived me as having a vested interest in the Radio National network and occasionally alluded to this and its influence on their answers. This is an aspect of the more general danger of analysing interview transcripts as if they were “a pure and direct expression of the mind of the subject” (Seiter 1999, p.29); however, my awareness and that of my subjects of the researcher’s role could hardly have been higher or more transparent.

The ten interviews were conducted between September 1991 and the end of 1995, with the Head of ABC Radio News, the General Manager of Radio National and ABC-FM, and news producers of the Radio National and Metropolitan breakfast bulletins. The Chief News Producer was interviewed on two occasions. Each interview took between sixty and ninety minutes and was relatively unstructured. I prepared the questions I wanted to ask, but allowed the interview to follow a conversational pattern¹⁰.

¹⁰ For a typology of bulletins, see the Introduction, for details of the interviews and the bulletins collected, see Chapter 5. All interview transcripts and all bulletins collected may be inspected by request to the author.

Justification of network and bulletin selection

This study confines itself to only two scheduled news bulletins on only two of the ABC's seven radio networks. The ABC Radio networks, most of which are described in the Introduction, are: Radio National, Metropolitan, Regional, ABC Classic FM, Triple-J, the Parliamentary and News Network (PNN, also known as NewsRadio) and the short-wave Radio Australia. PNN was launched in 1994 and the government funding cuts to the ABC of 1998 led to reduction in the size and reach of Radio Australia, although a partial restoration of funding occurred in 2000. Radio National, and the Metropolitan network and the "flagship" breakfast bulletins on each are those used in this research.

At the beginning of this study in 1989, the two networks chosen, the Metropolitan stations and Radio National, both had quite distinct network identities, in terms of the service and overall "sound" each was expected to provide to its target audience. The sound and framing of their news bulletins was also distinct. To some extent, however, the two networks were competitors, since audience research suggested there was significant overlap in those listening to each network. Those people who listened mostly to the Sydney Metropolitan station (2BL), for example, also listened at least sometimes to Radio National, and vice versa (ABC, 1993d). The selected networks presented a contrast between a national and a local service, but both were talk-based and both claimed the centrality of news and information programs to their service, with Metropolitan Radio intended to be popular and "entertaining" and Radio National to offer more specialist programs. During the period covered by this study Radio National had about one third the audience size of the Metropolitan network. Both had been restructured throughout the mid 1980s as part of a re-definition of network identity across ABC Radio, which is described in some detail in Chapter Three. I also had much

better access for research purposes to these two ABC Radio networks, particularly Radio National, than to others.

The two news bulletins selected for study are the 7.15am news bulletin on Radio National (RN), and the 7.45am bulletin on Metropolitan stations. In February 1992, the 7.15am RN bulletin was replaced by a 7am bulletin; this change is discussed in Chapter Three. These bulletins were chosen because each is the major breakfast-session bulletin for its network, what is referred to as the “flagship” bulletin of the network. Since these bulletins attracted the largest audience each network could hope for, they might have been expected to epitomise any intention to differentiate the networks and their audiences. The selected bulletins were collected over two three-month periods, the first in 1991, and the second in 1993.

Approach to bulletin analysis

Framing is used as the basis for analysis of the ABC news bulletins, as evidence supporting the argument that different audiences are inscribed both in the production practices and in the textual practice of the two bulletins under study. Framing is a metaphor of the ways in which journalists define some events as news and exclude others, and for how they tell news stories (Tuchman 1978). The theoretical status of framing, which has been described both as “a fractured paradigm” (Entman 1993) and as “multiparadigmatic” (D’Angelo 2002) is discussed in Chapter Five.

In using framing the thesis refers to agenda setting, as an aspect of media effects theory. News is central to media effects and agenda setting theories of mass communication (McCombs and Shaw 1972). In news research, framing has mainly been used to identify how a dominant meaning for a news story is constructed (e.g. Blood et al.

2001); here, it is used to identify how a “dominant *audience*” is constructed.

The analysis of the bulletins (in Chapter Five) shows differences in the audience constructed for each, by the choice of stories, the story order of the bulletins, the language of the stories, and in the use (or not) of headlines. The function and importance of such generic features of radio news as its placement hourly at “the top of the clock” and the use of fanfare-like theme music to announce it are also discussed. Radio news is of course written to be spoken; however, unlike most radio speech, news is also written to be read aloud, not to sound as if it is spontaneous speech. Like speech, radio news stories use language to construct “versions of social reality” in order to perform “specific social functions”(Buckingham 1991, p.230). Analysis of the “discourse” of radio news as well as of structural elements of bulletins (story order, choice of stories, headlines), thus serves two purposes: to identify differences between the Radio National and the Metropolitan national breakfast bulletins, and to suggest what audience for each is being constructed.

The approach of the thesis to framing thus considers both structural and rhetorical levels of analysis of the bulletins. However, the thesis goes beyond framing analysis of the bulletins to incorporate institutional documents and personal interviews in identifying the audience constructed by all of these.

Approach to audiences

The textual analysis of the bulletins could on its own offer only a speculative picture of the audience. One of the problems inherent in the semiotic approach is that of becoming what Lewis (1991, p.34) calls “alarmingly presumptuous” about what has been called “the textual subject”, that is, the audience inscribed in the text. The

obvious gap is some account by the audience of their understandings of the text. This research does not investigate that, except to supply information about the characteristics of ABC Radio audiences collected by the ABC's own audience research and by commercial audience surveys (the ratings). The reason is that this research aims to reveal more about whom news producers think is "out there", listening to their bulletins, and about the ways in which media managers make policy on behalf of assumed audiences.

Managers - not just in the ABC but throughout the broadcasting industry - make use of empirical forms of audience research (the shortcomings of which have been exposed by critics such as Ang, 1991, and defended as appropriate for media organisations' purposes, by Jacka, 1994). News producers - certainly at the time of this study - make far less use of such research, relying on professional instinct and experience. Neither managers nor producers have much contact with "real" audience members, apart from relatives, acquaintances and colleagues; yet they have well-defined ideas about the nature of their audiences. Managers have very clear ideas about what audience they *want*, hence the development of network and programming policies designed to attract that audience.

The approach of the thesis to audiences is thus interpretive. It examines the available empirical evidence gathered on behalf of the ABC about its audiences, but is primarily concerned with what policy makers and news producers say about their audiences, and the construction of audiences through the discourse and framing of the radio news bulletins. Such an analysis has not been done before in a way that connects organisational policy with newsroom practice and with theories about audiences. As was stated in the Introduction, it is part of the aim of this thesis to redress that omission.

Audience theory has tended to polarise, initially around production and subsequently around reception. Ethnographic studies of audiences

(Morley 1980; Tulloch 1990; Fiske 1993; Seiter 1999) have tended to concentrate on television viewing behaviour; but, as has earlier been discussed, the methodological approach of observing people in their own environment as unobtrusively as possible yields unique insights. In this case it is the producers and journalists who are observed, not their assumed audiences.

Empirical studies of news reception (Iyengar 1991, Iyengar and Kinder 1987, Gunter 1987) have tended to focus on retention and interpretation of news stories. Nearly all reception studies (of “actual audiences”) are conducted in isolation from the context of news production, yet no producer works without the context of an assumed audience. Moreover, it is clear that news producers are also primary audiences for news; in that sense, to study news producers is also to study audiences for news. Production and reception may thus be brought together.

The approach of the thesis to audiences is very similar to what Alasuutari describes as the “third generation ... of reception studies”, which recognises the audience as “a discursive construct” (Alasuutari 1999, p.6). Although he calls it reception studies, Alasuutari’s approach necessitates a consideration of production, including as it does, “questions about ... frames or discourses” and about the “audiences inscribed in the programmes themselves” (Alasuutari 1999, p.7). It is thus implied in the aim of the thesis to develop a conceptual framework for the identification of audiences, through an interdisciplinary analysis of journalism practices and institutional policies.

Conclusion

This chapter has established key issues and the methods of the thesis. The thesis is interdisciplinary in its approaches, using the sociology of journalism, participant observation and interviewing, and document

and textual analysis. The insider status of the observer over the timeframe of the study justifies the use of the first person in much of the analysis. Even though this may at times produce a duality of authorial voices, the description is the richer, the analysis and conclusions the stronger for it.

The next chapter is informed primarily by the many sociological studies of news. It examines the occupational culture of news and the professional ideology of news workers. Through this literature survey and discussion the first picture emerges of the relationship between news workers, news culture and audience creation.

Chapter Two

News production and audience-making: a literature review

Introduction

The previous chapter talked about the methodological approaches used in the thesis to investigate the perceptions and definitions of audience by practitioners, that is, by news workers and radio network managers. It is important to understand how these appear in the values and practices of news production; that is, in what way these are *audience-making*.

The aim of this chapter is both to provide an understanding of the assumptions about news values and production practices that inform the thesis, and to identify a relatively under-researched area, in that the sociological perspective tends to neglect the concept of audience. In total, the chapter provides essential background to the original research conducted in the ABC Radio newsroom and on the bulletins and other documents. It introduces and analyses the understandings of what news is and how it is made, which are shared by news workers, including ABC Radio news journalists.

The chapter first discusses the findings of some of the foundational sociological studies of news values and news production. These studies are valuable in identifying the professional norms of news workers' practice and the routine organisational constraints on journalists' work. This first and longer section of the chapter includes an examination of news values and "news culture". The second section of the chapter reviews studies of the relationship between news workers and their audiences. This section concludes that, while research has identified news journalists as having a limited and

unexamined knowledge of their audiences, there has not been much exploration of this unsatisfactory relationship between news production and audiences. On the other hand, whatever constructions of audience there are in the minds of ABC radio news producers, they undoubtedly influence the bulletins themselves, as the case study shows.

The sociology of news.

The classic sociological studies of news and news production that opened up these concepts and processes to our understanding include those by Galtung & Ruge (1965), Tuchmann (1972, 1978), Epstein (1973), Altheide (1976), Schlesinger (1978), Schudson (1978), Gans (1979), Golding and Elliott (1979), Fishman (1980), Ericson, Baranek & Chan (1987 & 1989), and in Australia, Edgar (1980), Henningham (1988), and Tiffen (1989). The prevalence of references dating from the late 1970s through to the end of the 1980s points to there having been a decade or so of intense interest in sociological approaches to news values and news production, part of a particular generation of mass communication studies in a predominantly but by no means exclusively North American tradition. The Marxist-influenced critical, European approach, which has evolved into what is now commonly called a “cultural studies” approach to media theory, has analysed news not only through the production process and the “rules” which govern it, but also by examining its discourse (language and pictures) and in terms of its political and cultural contexts (for example, the Glasgow University Media Group 1976, 1980; Hall 1973; Hall et al. 1978, 1980; Hartley 1982, 1996).

Ericson, Baranek and Chan (1987) point out that “the search for members’ norms or rules has been the dominant approach in the study of journalists’ decisions” (Ericson, Baranek and Chan 1987, p.130). This is certainly true of Schlesinger when he uncovers the “routine

practices” of the national newsrooms of the BBC (Schlesinger 1978, p.47ff). It is equally true of Tuchman when she talks about the “frames” or “nets” of time and space within which the press operate (Tuchman 1978). These authors provide models of the various stages of news production. The research examines these in relation to the production of ABC Radio news, and suggests a better framework is that offered by Golding and Elliot (1979), who identify a news cycle comprising planning, gathering, production and presentation. While this study pertains specifically to the ABC, there is some comparative reference to BBC Radio and to commercial radio in Australia (see for example, Petersen 1993, Johnson 1988, Potts 1989 and Moran 1992).

The sociological approach has been extremely useful for holding up to journalists themselves what Schlesinger calls “newsmen’s [sic] mythology about their work” (Schlesinger 1978, p.47). In Australia, Edgar (1980) grouped together essays that take much the same approach to the analysis of what journalists do and how news is defined. How news workers define the news is a preoccupation of much of the literature, from Park (1940) onwards. The recognition (not by news workers but by sociologists) that the definition of what is newsworthy is predictable by its conformity to certain criteria was closely followed by analyses of the way news is produced, regardless of the medium, as subject to institutional factors. “Among reporters, professionalism is knowing how to get a story that meets organisational needs and standards” (Tuchman 1978, p.66). Similarly, Schlesinger: “News... is seen [by journalists] as a kind of recurring accident ... Rather, the doings of the world are tamed to meet the needs of a production system in many respects bureaucratically organised” (Schlesinger 1978, p.47). This is certainly also true of the ABC.

The analysis undertaken in this thesis explores this and goes further than the publications so far cited. They tend to stop at the bureaucratic demands of news practice, although Gans (1979) and

especially Schlesinger (1978) consider how wider organisational policies – outside the newsroom – affect that practice. This research explores the impacts of the organisational power vested in radio network managers on the work of the radio news department, especially as it affects their respective ideas about the audience and their relationship with the audience.

The sociological accounts of news production show a relative neglect of the audience, although Schlesinger (1978) includes a revealing chapter on how news workers perceive and make judgements about their audience, and Gans (1979) talks about why news workers must “reject” the audience in order to retain journalistic objectivity and independence. Compared with the way other kinds of programs are treated by media sociologists and cultural theorists, the sociological analysis of news has made little reference to the ways in which journalists create the audience in their work¹¹. In any analysis of television drama, for example, the role of the audience (both real and imagined) is seen as crucial (e.g. Tulloch 1990, 1999). There are exceptions from early studies such as Bauer (1964) and de Sola Pool and Shulman (1964)¹², the latter in particular addressing the audience for whom journalists imagine they are writing. However, not only are such studies few in number, they seldom integrate the perspective of the actors with that of the organisation, as this one does.

Despite the considerable historical and recent work on the distinctions between “tabloid” and “quality” journalism – distinctions that are highly contested – and their assumed audiences (e.g. Schudson 1978; Langer 1998; and cf. Lumby 1999) there has been little analysis that looks at perhaps more subtle forms of tailoring news to different

¹¹ Hagen (1999) provides a valuable overview of the literature on “media images of the audience”. It is worth noting that very little of it is more recent than the 1980s.

¹² Both articles are from a section called ‘The Communicator and His Audience’, in Dexter and White (1964), which includes studies by White and Breed that also consider news workers’ audience images.

assumed audiences. Accordingly, the second element of the literature review will pertain to theories about audiences.

What is news? News values and news culture.

The traditional notion of what is news, as practised in most newsrooms and taught in most journalism courses, takes news as a given. According to this view, news is produced by the impartial, accurate reporting or recording of events that really happen in the world. “Accuracy, Impartiality and Objectivity” is the title of section 4.3 of the ABC’s Editorial Policies (ABC 1998b). Journalism educator and former journalist Keith Windschuttle writes in a book on theory and practice in journalism that “journalism is committed to reporting the truth about what occurs in the world. Journalists go out into society, make observations about what is done and what is said, and report these observations as accurately as they can” (in Breen 1998, p. 17). Windschuttle represents one side of the divide in journalism research (and between research and practice) but it would appear the losing side, at least as far as academic research is concerned.

Since the late 1990s in Australia there has been vigorous debate between on the one hand, academics who research and teach journalism from what its opponents call a “media theory” perspective (at risk of simplifying too much, the phrase conflates cultural studies and influences on it of the earlier Marxism-derived critical approach), and on the other hand, those who teach journalism as a craft and profession, many of them from an “industry” background as practising journalists (for contributions to both side of the debate in one volume, see *Media International Australia incorporating Culture & Policy*, 90, February 1999, pp.1-90). Underlying the debate has been the very different “world view” of journalism held by most news workers from that of many academic researchers. Schlesinger (1978) refers to and

defends this difference in the introduction to the major study of BBC news he conducted in the second half of the 1970s, using the classic description of the role of the ethnographic researcher:

I hope that my having seen the ‘inside’ will to some extent meet the criticism put forward by many newsmen during fieldwork ... that sociologists’ analyses are incorrect because they are ill-informed and “don’t know what it’s really like” ... To arrive at a sociological analysis, however, one must go beyond immersion. One must become disengaged and reconstruct the data gathered ... [T]he answers [to the research questions] from an outside sociologist diverge from those given by the BBC’s journalists. (Schlesinger 1978, pp.11, 12).

Peter Golding (1981) has schematised the differences between the journalistic perspective and the sociological perspective and in so doing explains the antagonism that can arise between them:

Journalists ... are concerned with the short-term and deliberate manipulation of news, and with its immediate and direct effect on viewers. The sociologist has a different perspective, being concerned rather more with the long-term, routine and non-deliberate manufacture of news, and by corollary, with the long-term and cumulative influence on viewers ... What the sociologist describes as a necessary consequence of the organization of production, the journalist sees as an accusation of bias or incompetence. (Golding 1981, pp.66, 67)

James Carey (1988, 2000, and in McKnight 2000) has also argued that social science approaches to the study of journalism are “conducted from the outside rather than from within”, and that as a result they “almost always reduce journalism as a practice to its least and lowest common denominator” (Carey in McKnight, 2000, p.17). Given Carey’s description of what journalism is (“a social practice, a historical phenomenon, part of the political discourse of a nation and a people, and ... a form of the art of storytelling”), any study of news production has to be interdisciplinary (McKnight 2000, p.19).

The following section explores two things:

1. Those characteristics of news production that most journalists would recognise and agree with (which I am calling “news values”). These have been largely identified by sociologists of journalism, often employing qualitative research methods including field studies. Many, from Walter Lippman (1922) onwards, have explored the “norms or rules” to which Ericson et al (1987) refer, as governing journalists’ decisions. In addition to these news values, there are characteristics of the news and its production that sociologists and cultural theorists have identified, some of which news workers take issue with as, at best, irritatingly wrong and at worst (as described by Golding above) insultingly so. Often underlying these are:
2. Those organisational and cultural criteria by which events are identified as newsworthy and by which news is constructed and framed. Much of this work has been done not only by social scientists but also by theorists working from a critical perspective, using discourse or textual analysis as well as content analysis.

These two things to some extent overlap, and together may be said to constitute a news “culture”, which will be explored in this section of the chapter, including in its peculiarly ABC manifestations.

News Values: the journalist-centred approach

In 1965 Johan Galtung and Marie Ruge published what McQuail describes as “the first clear statement of the news values (or ‘news factors’) which would be most influential in deciding whether or not a potential news ‘event’ would be noticed by the news media and brought into the distribution channels” (1994, p.214). Galtung and Ruge identified twelve interrelated factors - both organisational and cultural - and argued that to the extent that events in the world satisfy these factors, so the events are more likely to become “news”. The model was developed in the analysis of the presentation of foreign news by the press, but subsequent work by other researchers on

selection processes in domestic news and in media other than newspapers, strongly supports Galtung and Ruge (see Schlesinger 1978 or, for an Australian perspective, Baker in Edgar 1980).

One of these factors is novelty, defined by Galtung and Ruge as “the unexpected [or rare] within the meaningful and the consonant”, and this clearly is a factor in news selection in ABC News. An ABC radio news producer mentions that a “big consideration” in deciding the story priority in a news bulletin is “unusualness ... I mean, how often does this sort of thing happen? Is this a one-off, you know, or is this a very rare event? That is, if you like, a criterion...” (ABC radio news producer, personal interview 1991). The “newness” of news is a fundamental criterion for journalists, referring not only to the recency and timeliness of reporting but also to the necessity of updating a story. The opening page of the 1990 Journalism Training Manual for ABC Radio carries the line: “NEWS = IT’S HAPPENING NOW. News is only news while it’s new” (ABC 1990, p.1, upper case in original).

Interviewed in late 1991, the newly appointed Head of Radio News at ABC Radio complained that until the late 1980s the ABC had been “a very tardy old Auntie”, failing to get news on air quickly and failing to exploit the immediacy of the radio medium. Compared with commercial radio this was true, for ideological and bureaucratic reasons. Neville Petersen (1999) has documented the way in which a belief within ABC news in “detached public service” and the importance placed on separating “fact” from “opinion” produced very restrictive news gathering and presentation methods. Claims by the Talks department to have a prerogative for recorded voice material successfully prevented News from using voice pieces until the 1960s, while resistance from sub-editors to the use of voice pieces persisted until well into the 1970s. A failure to provide training and technology, and rivalry between the separate radio departments of News and Public Affairs contributed to the way in which the ABC’s

news service fell behind its commercial counterparts in the use of the radio medium (Petersen 1999, p.17ff.).

Closely connected with the newness of news are concepts of *perishability* and *predictability*. It is an axiom of news workers that news is perishable, living “only when events themselves are current”(McQuail 1987, p.204); there is no more scornful rejection of a story than that it is “yesterday’s news”. In its advice to news cadets ABC Radio stresses the importance of following a story throughout their shift, “freshening” it as it unfolds: “Radio news is instant and constantly moving ... Updating and freshening are essential ...” (ABC 1988a, pp. 1, 4). In a single paragraph, the radio news training manual uses the word “fresh” four times:

The reporter is in the business of communicating fresh information in a fresh, sparkling listenable way; but the reporter is also in the business of communicating repetitious news in a fresh way so that it sounds new and spontaneous. The demands on the reporter to make news sound fresh requires ultimate professionalism (ABC 1990, p.4).

One of the things that emerge in the analysis of the bulletins themselves, is that the bulletins on one network feed off those on another network, as a way of “freshening” each. So there are borrowings from the 7.15am or 7.00am Radio National bulletin, for example, in the headlines of the 7.45am Metropolitan bulletin, and this is something that is followed up in Chapter Five.

The ABC’s Head of Radio News in 1991, recruited from a career in commercial radio, criticised the service as he heard it in the late 1980s for failing to update its bulletins. He distinguished between rewriting bulletins to keep them fresh, and following the development of a story:

I suppose I also had a perception that the ABC didn’t still quite have the idea of updating its copy to the extent that perhaps it should; that it used to have a lot of repeats of stories in bulletin after bulletin. And it was difficult to fathom, given its hundreds

of journalists in its employ, why that was proving to be an apparently difficult task, or whether it was just an entrenched philosophy ... But it's not so much rewrites I'm interested in. I'm interested in new angles and keeping the story evolving, to show we're an active medium and we're very much up with the latest as well as aggressively chasing reactions to stories that we either break or report on. (Head of Radio News 1991, personal interview).

Robert Park, formerly a journalist and an early sociologist of news, identified news as characteristically predictable in his 1940 article 'News as a Form of Knowledge':

[I]f it is the unexpected that happens it is not the wholly unexpected which gets into the news. The events that have made news in the past, as in the present, are actually the expected things. (Park 1940, p.45).

Twenty-five years after Park, Galtung and Ruge (1965) expressed the view that "'news' are actually 'olds', because they correspond to what one expects to happen". However, it remains true that most broadcast journalists in particular (because of the greater immediacy of radio and television, over the print medium) retain a sense of news as being not only recent but also *unpredictable*, liable to change or "break" at any time: "Urgency. This is the forte of radio ... It can't be overemphasised that radio news is about immediacy" (ABC, *News Cadets Course Notes*. 1988a).

The routine aspect of news is recognised and acknowledged by the ABC's journalism training manual. Indeed, it advises: "The good reporter knows that much of the work will often be routine". However, this routine aspect is defined in terms of professional readiness and practice, rather than in terms of organisational predictability: "... reading, keeping up with current affairs, listening to every news bulletin, checking names, asking questions about apparently unimportant details, and taking careful notes." (ABC 1990, pp. 4, 5).

Predictability is one of those characteristics of news on which practitioners and sociologists of journalism differ. The news producers interviewed describe quite clear routines of news production; however, they also refer to “breaking stories”, to uncertainty and sudden changes (“if the story demands a high turnover, if [events] are fast moving...”), in terms of the content and production of the bulletins. Sociologists have identified the organisational predictability of routines of production and the stability not only of the hierarchies of newsrooms, but also in the way news is constructed. Events, issues and people are identified as newsworthy according to established criteria, news material then gathered, selected and finally presented to audiences. These stages of news making can be observed in almost any newsroom, regardless of the news medium, across the world. To news workers, however, there remain not only the criterion of “freshness” but also the possibility of having to respond quickly to what appears to be the unexpected, and therefore the persistent view that news is “unpredictable”.

The routines and stability of which researchers speak are taken for granted by news workers, normalised as part of the definition of news production. In journalists’ view of their work, seen as both a profession and a craft, while “a good story” is something you can learn to recognise by observing more experienced practitioners, there is nonetheless some mysterious quality (a “nose for news”, “news sense”) that good journalists possess instinctively¹³. Hall (1973) describes these routines of production as a “‘deep structure’ whose function as a selective device is un-transparent even to those who professionally most know how to operate it” (Hall 1973, p.181). The organisational manifestation of this selective device is encapsulated in Fishman’s observation that “the journalist’s view of the society as

¹³ The evidence for this appears not only in sociological writing, such as Golding (in Katz & Szecsko 1981, p.64) but also in textbooks for student and cadet journalists. See, for example, Herbert, 2001, Conley, 2002.

bureaucratically structured is the very basis upon which the journalist is able to detect events” (Fishman 1980, p.51).

Both news organisations and academic researchers identify “interest” (ABC 1990) or “importance” (Tuchman 1978) as a criterion for newsworthiness. What is important is usually defined by reference to audience interest or “the public interest”. The public interest is used to mean both what is interesting to the audience, and knowledge or information that the audience has a right to know and the news media (particularly public broadcasters) have a duty to provide. The ABC told its trainee journalists: “We give the audience what it needs to know as well as what it wants to know” (ABC 1990, p.1, emphases in original).

The definition of what is of interest to the audience can encompass unusual or unexpected events, celebrity and that whole range of “human interest” stories that Langer calls “the Other News” (Langer 1980,1998). The “right to know” definition of public interest leads journalists to the doings and sayings of individuals and institutions that are powerful and influential in society (the “Knowns”) (Gans 1979, p.8).

Journalists argue that the politicians and the bureaucrats make decisions that directly affect our lives and therefore, in a democratic society, the public needs to have reported to them the actions and statements of such people. This is the ‘public communication’ function of the news, and is seen as placing a solemn responsibility on journalists to be impartial and accurate in order to maintain the authority and credibility of the news. Sociologists argue that the emphasis in the news on powerful individuals and institutions is a result of organisational elements of news gathering, such as “rounds” or “beats”, in order that journalists might have a steady and reliable source of news from official agencies (Schudson 1996, p.147; Ericson et al 1989, p.3ff; Cottle 2003, p.15).

Other factors that Galtung and Ruge (1965) identified include the recency and proximity of events, whether or not they can be readily simplified, personalised, and can be covered within the time constraints on the particular medium. These factors were identified and exemplified repeatedly by researchers, especially in the late 1970s and early 80s, such as Tuchman (1978), Schlesinger (1978), and Gans (1979).

The Chief Producer of ABC Radio News, interviewed in 1991, attributed the reason for the development of the so-called “composite” bulletin (see the typology of ABC Radio news bulletins, in the Introduction) to the proximity factor. In the composite bulletin format local producers combine state, national and international stories as they see fit, as opposed to the traditional ABC News bulletin, which begins with national and international news, followed by a separately produced bulletin of state-based news.

[T]he composite evolved because the [State] radio managers didn't want to have to wait until five minutes into a news bulletin before they heard about the fact that [for example] all the schools in South Australia were gonna be closed that day. So the idea was that, given ten minutes of news, where they could do their own mix of everything, they could then highlight a story that would normally, in a National bulletin, probably be a lot further down (ABC Radio News Chief Producer, Personal interview, 1991).

Langer, writing in Edgar (1980) cites the language of television news stories about natural disasters as an example of how the weather is personalised in such stories. If an event can be seen “in personal terms as due to the action of specific individuals” (Galtung & Ruge 1965, p.57) it is more likely to become news. In Langer's study, an attribution of individual action is made to the natural phenomenon of the weather. The weather is presented as “an actively disruptive participant” in human affairs (Langer 1980, p.32). This is not the

same as selecting an event from the totality of world events (always assuming such a universe were available to journalists) because it already fits the criterion of personification. In this example, the news has reported an event in such a way as to make it fit the news value. In other words, a new reality has been constructed by the news production process.

And it is this argument that is irreconcilable with what McQuail calls “the view from the media” (McQuail 1987, p.208), that is, the professional view of journalists themselves. The occupational culture of news certainly acknowledges selection, but does not accept creation or manufacture. The notion that “there is an objective reality on which the news media report more or less accurately” (Rosengren 1983, p.189) has been comprehensively challenged not only by the media research of the 1970s and 80s but also by postmodern theorising of the last two decades. The “view from the media” clings on, however, as is evidenced by the earlier quotation from Windschuttle, published as recently as 1998: “Journalists go out into society, make observations about what is done and what is said, and report these observations as accurately as they can” (Windschuttle, in Breen 1998, p. 17). Little wonder then that: “Social scientists who study the news speak a language that journalists mistrust and misunderstand” (Schudson 1996, p.141).

News values: a construction of reality

While most journalists today would probably accept that they “make” the news in the sense of selecting from all the world’s events known to them at any one time what will go into the news bulletins or pages, most would probably still agree with the former president of CBS News, Richard Salant, when he said: “We don’t make the news; we report it” (in Shoemaker 1987, p.5). This is the traditional role of news workers, described at the beginning of this chapter.

Shoemaker classifies this as one of five theories of news content and calls it “content as a reflection of reality” (Shoemaker 1987, p.5). Critiques of this approach have not found that news is a figment of reporters’ and editors’ imaginations; indeed, for the most part, news media report information quite accurately. Rather, the difficulty with this theory lies in the selectivity of the news, in what is omitted, as well as in what is included. News media content may be accurate, but unrepresentative. What news workers choose to include (and to omit) brings us back to the criteria for newsworthiness already discussed, into which new journalists are socialised, as well as to the organisational demands of journalistic routines. Together, at least one theorist has argued, these things “promote a way of looking at events which fundamentally distorts them” (Altheide 1976, p.24).

The criteria for newsworthiness discussed above are nonetheless closely related to journalists’ views about what it is to be a “professional” journalist. Tuchman (1978), Schlesinger (1978), Henningham (1990) and others have described the ways in which journalists are socialised to an understanding of professional practice and attitudes. The ABC has formal cadetships that include this kind of training (see ABC 1990).

Shoemaker (1987, p.8ff) has summarised media routines and the ways in which they act to construct a “news reality”. For example, deadlines force a journalist to stop searching for or including more information, in order to file the story. Already mentioned is the way in which the organisation of newsrooms into specialist ‘rounds’ institutionalises and therefore privileges the access of certain sources to the journalist, making it difficult for non-institutionalised sources to get their issues and stories into the news. The actual medium for news can affect the priority given to content: television emphasises pictures, radio prefers ‘actuality’, that is, sound from the people or events being reported, preferably from the location at which events occurred and captured by the news organisation’s own reporter. New

technology can materially affect news content: Shoemaker cites a study that found VDT (screen-based) editing of copy was more accurate than hard copy editing (Shoemaker 1987, p.9).

To argue as Altheide (1976) does that these institutional routines “distort” events is not to say that the news is “lying” or “wrong”, but to argue that news media offer particular constructions of reality. These constructions are influenced not only by the factors discussed so far – criteria of newsworthiness, routines of news production and the socialisation of journalists – but also by institutional variables (Shoemaker, 1987, pp.14, 15). Of these variables, extrinsic to the journalist, the ones that most concern this study are management/organisational policies and media audiences.

News, audiences and news workers

Audiences for news have been studied both from a social science perspective (McCombs and Shaw 1972; Iyengar and Kinder 1987) and a structural, cultural studies perspective, including using an “ethnographic” approach (Morley 1980, 1992). And of course, audiences are measured and described using ever more sophisticated techniques by companies such as A C Nielsen or Oztam, to provide an abundance of detailed aggregate information about media audiences and their component parts: size, demographics, choices, reactions, preferences, desires and so on. This kind of information is collected and distributed mainly in order to deliver audiences to advertisers, although the ABC also makes use of this kind of audience research, what Ang calls “institutional knowledge” and “commercial knowledge” about the audience (Ang 1991, pp.17, 45).

Media audiences have been theorised as occupying a variety of relationships with professional communicators. Ettema and Whitney

(1994) argue that, “paradigmatic upheavals” notwithstanding, the dominant model of audiences positions them as receivers:

The predominant theoretical function of audiences is still to receive (i.e. “selectively attend to”, “process information from”, “make sense of”, “be gratified by”, “be socialized by”, “be subjugated by”, “offer resistance to”, “ritualistically partake in”, or just “veg-out with”) media messages. And the predominant theoretical function of communicators is to make those messages (i.e. “report the facts”, “distort the facts”, “make the news”, “repair the news”, “represent reality”, “invent reality”, “manufacture popular entertainment”, “create popular art”, “process symbols”, “produce culture”, or just “put on a show”) for the audience. (Ettema and Whitney 1994, p.3).

All these approaches make the assumption that media messages have some power and effect, and position audiences along a dimension of more or less “activity” or “passivity” in their relationship with media messages (McQuail 1997, p.22). Underlying this is a “sender-receiver” or transmission model of communication; a model which has been challenged (see Sless 1986, 1987, 1993; Penman 1986). Both Sless and Penman have argued that the transmission model fails to take account of the “positions” of parties to a communication relationship, which are always subjectively experienced albeit mediated by “rules” that are variously available to both parties. There are shades of Hall’s encoding-decoding theory (1980) in the way Sless talks about the parties’ manipulations of the “rules”. Sless assigns a creativity and a degree of freedom to people (“we can play the game by the rules, we can cheat, or we can invent new rules”) that other theorists would dispute, arguing that there are political, economic and cultural influences at work in mass communication which may mean “we” are not all the same in our freedom to play as we wish with the “rules” (Sless 1993, p.7). As McQuail points out, the “media source” is often “more powerful, expert and prestigious” than the audience member (McQuail 1997, p.7). However, in a world in which the presence of radio and television is becoming almost literally unavoidable, audiences and communicators, no matter what their social distance, may be assumed to have a wide range of shared

knowledge, expectations and understandings or shared codes, by which to produce and interpret meanings.

Audience research has been characterised as having the aim either of “controlling” the audience in some way, or of representing it (in the sense of speaking on its behalf) (McQuail 1997, p.15-16, Ang 1991, p.4). The “control” end of the spectrum is by far the larger, and tends to be associated with empirical and quantitative research methods. That end of the spectrum which is “on the side of the audience”(Nightingale 1986) or concerned with what Ang calls “the social world of actual audiences”(1991 p.14) is linked by her with qualitative methods. She cites her own study of viewers’ responses to the TV soap-opera *Dallas* (1985) and Morley’s study of audience interpretations of the TV news magazine *Nationwide* (Morley 1980), among other examples.

Manufacturing audiences

The words “control” and “autonomy” are emotionally loaded in our society, and there is a strong sense of disapproval (of the control end of the spectrum) pervading the work of theorists such as Ang. This has been interpreted by Windschuttle (1998) and others as a disapproval of what media producers do, which is try to attract and hold audiences, the larger the better usually, and sometimes preferably of a particular sex or age-range. However, Ang’s fundamental argument is with the fact that “the institutional point of view” *constructs* (or manufactures) an audience, which it then treats as “a conceptually nonproblematic category, consisting of a definite, unknown but knowable set of people”(Ang, 1991, p.11). While this may be a “predicament” for academic knowledge, it is less often so for institutions. As Jacka (1994) has pointed out, “[T]elevision networks and advertisers don’t want to know everything about how every audience member relates to TV in its infinite variety ... they want good enough numbers so that they can agree on a price for

advertising time” (Jacka 1994, p.48). The interest one has in the outcome of research and the position from which one seeks knowledge of the audience must affect the way in which that knowledge is pursued and how, once obtained, it is interpreted. So it is possible to argue (as Jacka does) that cultural studies academics are just as likely to be “engaged in a construction of the audience” (Jacka 1994, p.49) as AC Nielsen’s audience researchers or – this thesis argues – as news journalists are.

One example of how it is possible to speak of the “manufacture” of audiences is Hartley’s (1996) argument that the audience for journalism was created by the existence of the press.

[R]eading publics, and indeed the very idea of the public in the first place, are products of theory, journalism and literature, *and were literally brought into being* – out on to the streets, acting as the public – *by the press*. Pulitzer may have sounded grandiose and self-serving in his claim that “a press will in time produce a public...”, but regrettably this does not automatically mean he wasn’t right. (Hartley 1996, pp. 53, 54, italics added.)

No less than in the study of news values and news production, there have been fashions and traditions in approaches to audiences. Seiter (1999, p.14) writes of there being “a generation gap, a disciplinary split, and a continental divide” in audience research, between “ethnographic” research, from a European, critical (and more recently, cultural) studies perspective, and the mass communication research of those trained in the methodology of the social sciences, more often found in the USA and Canada, and very influential for many years in Australia.

It is possible, however (and this writer would argue, desirable) to investigate audiences in different ways: focusing on aggregate data about media use, or close attention to relationship with media of individual audience members in their social context, or on “how communicators make audiences” (Ettema & Whitney 1994 p.4). The

last is the focus of this investigation: the perceptions and definitions of the audience by practitioners.

To say that an audience is – or may attempt to be – “manufactured” is not to assert that there are no real audience members, able to “make decisions about what they read and watch [and listen to] based on their own tastes and their own free will” (Windschuttle 1998, p.16).

Rather, it is to recognise that “knowing” the audience must always be a matter of the perspective from which and the contexts (political, cultural, temporal) within which that understanding is built.

News workers’ constructed images of their audiences

It has been remarked upon by researchers studying news production, that news workers are confident that they know their audience, largely on the basis of “peerless professional instinct” (Tiffen 1989, p.55).

Schlesinger (1978) argues that there is a “missing link” between news and the audience at the BBC, because of the organisational culture in which the news is produced:

[B]roadcast news is the outcome of standardized production routines ... these routines work themselves out within an organizational structure which has no adequate point of contact with the audience for broadcast news; and that there is, therefore, no sense in which one can talk of a communication taking place which is truly alive to the needs of the audience (Schlesinger 1978, p.106).

Leaving aside for the moment the question of what an “adequate point of contact with the audience” might be for news, Schlesinger’s interviews took place in the mid-seventies, within a very secure public broadcasting culture, the BBC, then largely unconcerned by its limited commercial competition. In Australia, where commercial radio predates national public broadcasting, the ABC has never been able to be quite as complacent about competition for audiences; although news workers coming from commercial radio to the ABC found its news culture relatively unaware of the audience, at least as it is

defined by “the ratings”. It is also important to acknowledge the insight of Schudson when he says that sociological approaches to the study of news “often ignore possibilities for change in the nature of news” (Schudson 1996, p.155).

There is no doubt that the nature of ABC radio news has changed considerably since the independent news service began in 1947. It has changed in the context not only of other programming changes but also in response to economic and political changes inside and outside the corporation. Among these changes is a greater consciousness of audiences than Schlesinger’s “newsmen” at the BBC manifested; but not necessarily great *knowledge* of their audiences. If anything, the relationship between news workers and their audiences is more complex and less knowable than in the past, because of the proliferation of global media services and the development of the Internet.

Lumby (1999), writing of the rise in Australia in 1996 of the reactionary One Nation party and its leader Pauline Hanson, argues that:

Hanson is a living refutation of the idea that the mass media blithely manufacture the consent of the masses on behalf of political and business elites ... Hanson and her supporters are highly sceptical, if not deeply paranoid, about both the mass media and existing political systems (Lumby 1999, p.13)

Lumby perhaps conflates “the mass media” unduly here. Certainly, “the Hanson phenomenon”, as it became known, demonstrated a level of scepticism, if not paranoia, about the *news* media, and journalists in particular, among the general population, that temporarily bewildered many news workers (see Kingston 1999). The One Nation party also, as Lumby goes on to describe, demonstrated a sophisticated use of the Internet. But as quoted earlier from Schudson, “the news media have always been a more important forum for communication among elites ... than with the general population” (Schudson 1996, p.156).

Reaction not only to Pauline Hanson but also to news media representations of her, brought this fact home to news workers in Australia as perhaps never before, as audiences refused to form the usual “relationships within the media institution” (Ettema and Whitney 1994, p.6).

Nonetheless, the mass media, including news organisations, continue to create an image of their audience, because they have to. Where Ang speaks of media audiences as “institutionally-produced” (Ang 1991, p.3), Ettema and Whitney talk of audiences as being “constituted within the institutional arrangements of mass communication” (Ettema and Whitney 1994, p.6). These are the constructions of the audience, characterised by Hartley (1987) as “invisible fictions”, and necessary to media production because without them there is no way to define or control the communication relationship (as reporters, editors and commentators trying to deal with the One Nation party found out). But the “Hanson phenomenon” is not an entirely new thing; audiences have confounded news editors’ and journalists’ assumptions and expectations of public opinion before, as Page and Tannebaum (1996) document in a study of talkback radio callers.

In his sociological study of journalists, Gans (1979) made a very similar discovery to Schlesinger’s, about their view of the audience. Assuming they would be highly conscious of their audience, Gans was surprised to find that journalists working in commercial news media “had little knowledge about the actual audience and rejected feedback from it” (Gans 1979, p.229ff.). He found instead that journalists had two kinds of relationship with the audience: that which pertains to standards or values within which the audience is assumed to operate (matters of taste or political value) and therefore affects the limits of what can be written or broadcast; and a set of assumptions which provide them with a constructed “image” of the audience. For the most part, journalists “filmed and wrote for their superiors and for

themselves, assuming ... that what interested them would interest the audience” (p.230). Schlesinger also found that news journalists’ primary audience was their professional peers and their superiors.

In Australia, Henningham (1988) and Tiffen (1989) found much the same thing. Tiffen speaks of “the apparent certainty of news executives and sometimes reporters about the audience” (Tiffen 1989, p.55), a certainty not always justified by the findings of audience research surveys. Tiffen concluded, much as had Schlesinger and Gans from their work in Britain and the United States of America respectively, that for Australian journalists

Despite the paucity of evidence, questions about the audience are not issues of live concern for journalists and hardly seem to enter into decisions about stories ... The final source of knowledge about the audience is thus a combination of professional assumptions, of informal discussion with colleagues and, less importantly, others nearby, including friends and sources. (Tiffen 1989, p.55)

Gans and Tiffen both observe that news workers tend to distrust the findings of audience research, feeling it to be unreliable and largely irrelevant, and also reject feedback in the form of letters and phone calls from audience members, as unrepresentative (Gans 1979, pp230-232; Tiffen 1989, pp.53-57).

Producers “on the floor” of the ABC radio national newsroom had very little exposure to the information provided to managers by audience research, beyond whether the audience was growing or shrinking. As analysis of the news bulletins (detailed in Chapter Five) shows, news workers’ constructions of audience affect the language and structure (the framing) of the bulletins. The content, on the other hand, is relatively impervious to constructions of audience and far more responsive to news values and criteria of newsworthiness.

Conclusion

The sociological and cultural studies of journalism have produced a detailed picture of the ways in which journalists work and in which news is constructed. The culture of ABC radio news shows routines and values that the literature has identified as characteristic of news organisations, in the factors that identify events as newsworthy, and in its concern with timeliness or freshness of news. At the same time there were cultural and historical reasons for the ABC being slower to exploit the immediacy of the radio medium than commercial radio news services.

The research literature that examines news production finds the relationship between news workers and their audiences is a curiously ill-informed and indifferent one on the part of the journalists. One source of information about audiences not discussed in the literature is the programming flow that news interrupts. This research addresses this gap in the literature in following chapters.

The history of the ABC radio news service and the impact of changing technology have both affected the development of network and news policy. Senior radio managers made policy decisions about how the different networks should sound and what audiences they should target, without necessarily considering the significance of news in calling these audiences into being. The next chapter investigates the connections between news practice and organisational policies, as together “manufacturing” audiences.

Chapter Three

Policy: News and Networks, Technology and Tailoring

Introduction

Through a survey of relevant research, the previous chapter analysed the professional values and culture of news workers and related this to the literature on the relationship between news, news workers and audiences. This served to introduce those things that are broadly generalisable to the production of news in developed Western societies and cultures. As the thesis uses a case study of ABC Radio news, this chapter turns now to the historical background that formed the particular values and culture of the ABC's news service. It also describes in detail the changes to ABC Radio network policy that are material to the thesis; in other words, the implied audiences in the network policies.

The function of this chapter is to identify ways in which specific historical and contemporary factors affect the radio networks and the news service of ABC Radio. These factors are both internal and external to the ABC, and encompass political, economic and technological forces. All inform the case study, in the sense that it is only by becoming aware of these influences that one can understand why and how policy and practice might combine to construct distinct audiences for the breakfast news bulletins on the two selected networks.

This chapter opens with a brief look at how the ABC's independent news service began. After this it turns to selected recent ABC policy and training documents and considers how they have defined the radio news service. The chapter then discusses how the ABC interpreted the Dix Report with respect to radio news and the radio networks, especially the Metropolitan radio stations and Radio National. The development of the "composite" bulletin on Metropolitan radio is cited as the first example of tailoring news to an audience assumed to be more interested in local than in national and international news. The next section of the chapter provides an overview of how the principal new technologies of news production, introduced in the late 1980s, affected news workers (that is, journalists, sub-editors or news

producers, technical producers, administrative assistants and newsreaders) and the radio news service.

The chapter concludes by describing how a combination of resource constraints and production practices reversed the situation which held briefly in the early 1990s, of “tailor-made” news bulletins for the radio networks. Instead, what we are now seeing is a distribution of news output between the original networks, a dedicated news network (the Parliamentary News Network or NewsRadio), and an online news service.

ABC Radio News: uncertain beginnings

In the ABC’s Annual Report for 1993-94 the corporation is described as follows: “The Australian Broadcasting Corporation is an independent statutory authority established by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act 1983. The basic functions and duties which Parliament has given to the ABC are set out in the Charter of the Corporation - section 6 of the ABC Act” (ABC 1994, p.1). While another section (Section 27) of the Act empowers the ABC to do so, nowhere in the Charter does it say that the ABC must provide a domestic news service. Within Australia, the ABC is to provide “innovative and comprehensive broadcasting and television services of a high standard”. It is “to countries *outside* Australia” that the ABC must transmit “programs of *news, current affairs, entertainment and cultural enrichment*” (my emphases). Yet, news and current affairs have become exemplars of the independence sanctioned by the Charter and enshrined in the Act, which is so central to the image the ABC has of itself.

The ANOP survey of Australian attitudes towards the ABC, commissioned by the Dix Committee whose review of the ABC was published in 1981, found that “People who want to know about the world and want authoritative interpretation of major events turn to the

ABC” (Dix 1981, Vol. 1, p.3). It was “the ABC’s greater news and information orientation” which was seen by the general public to be the key difference between the national broadcaster and commercial media (Dix 1981, Vol. 2, p.185). By the time of the Dix report, the ABC’s News Division (both television and radio) was “the largest single organisation devoted to the production of news in the electronic media in Australia” (Dix 1981, Vol. 2, p.204).

Over the period covered by this research, 1983-1993, news and current affairs have retained a prominent place in the ABC’s principal public document, its Annual Report. In the 1993-94 Annual Report, the ABC has as one of its eleven Corporate Objectives: “providing the best, most reliable and independent coverage and analysis of contemporary issues, ideas and international, national and regional events”(ABC Annual Report, 1994, p.1). In the same Annual Report, the section on Radio programming begins with the heading “Leadership in News and Information”. In the previous two years, the priority was the same. In 1992-93 the heading was: “Information - The Reliable Source” and in 1991-92, it was: “An Information Base for All Networks”, leaving no-one in any doubt that news and current affairs are - as they have often been described within Radio - the “cornerstones” of radio programming. Yet it was not always so. Dixon (1975), Inglis (1983) and Petersen (1993) are among those who have documented the uncertain beginnings of news on the ABC and the 20-year political struggle there had to be, “fought and won against almost overwhelming odds” (Dixon 1975, p.1) before the ABC could develop the news service of which it is now so proud.

In the first volume of his history of ABC News, Petersen (1993) explores the “prevailing political, social and cultural factors” which created for radio a role as a source of domestic entertainment and little else, in almost the first two decades of its existence in Australia. It was a role astonishingly limited by contrast with what was happening at the same time in Britain, Canada and the United States, and with

what has come after it in Australia (Petersen 1993, pp.18-38). It was a role that prejudiced the chances of an independent news service; that is, one independent both of undue government influence and of the influence of the press. There was active opposition to using radio as a medium for news in the 1920s and 30s, most of it due to newspaper proprietors “determined to protect themselves from competition” (Inglis 1983, p.34. See also Johnson 1988, p.164, 165 and Petersen 1993, Chapter 3).

Interestingly, such restrictions meant that news commentary developed in advance of a news service; E.A.Mann, “the Watchman”, began his long-lived and often controversial talks, initially called “The News Behind the News” in January 1932 (Inglis 1983, p.14).

Petersen has also documented how much slower the ABC was than the BBC, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) or CBS in the United States, to exploit the radio medium in its news presentation, despite being empowered as early 1932, by the Australian Broadcasting Commission Act, to “collect in such a manner as it thinks fit news and information relating to current events in any part of the world” (Inglis 1983, p.18; Petersen 1993, Chapters 1 and 4; Dix 1981, Vol. 2, p.65). This slowness was in part forced on the ABC by financial constraints; and such constraints have to some extent shaped the ABC’s news services throughout the organisation’s history. But it was also a reflection of ambivalence within the ABC about what its priorities should be, about its relationship with its audiences and its place in Australian cultural life; and Johnson at least has argued that this ambivalence is incapable of resolution (1988, p.82).

An independent news service

Frank Dixon was appointed Federal News Editor in 1936 to a service which consisted of one five-minute news bulletin a day at 7.50pm, of which the overseas component was limited by agreement with

newspaper owners to 200 words per day from the Australian Associated Press (AAP) cable service. From the beginning, Dixon set out to establish an independent ABC news service, foreseeing the importance of overseas correspondents. Clement Semmler documents the way Dixon “enlisted an ABC man in London” at the time of the abdication of Edward VII, to cable the official statements from Buckingham Palace until well after the newspapers had been “put to bed”; much to the fury of the newspaper proprietors (Semmler 1981, p.83). Dixon’s energetic endeavours were helped by World War 2, but it took an Act of Parliament and eleven years to bring the ABC news service into being.

From the Second World War onwards, the ABC found itself on progressively surer ground in news and current affairs. “A combination of the war and a Labor government” (Inglis 1983, p.98) produced a “growth spurt” in the development of an ABC news service, independent of the newspaper proprietors. The Federation of Commercial Broadcasting Stations in 1942, on signing an agreement to take three daily bulletins from the ABC, expressed the view that the Commission’s news service should be more than “a government handout”(Petersen 1993, p.165). Thus, as Petersen points out, it was the commercial radio sector that committed the national public broadcaster for the first time to providing news that was “factual and objective in character”(1993, p.165). The agreement gave back to the ABC “some independence in developing and asserting its own news values” during a wartime period of being openly - and for the most part willingly - used by government to patriotic ends (Inglis 1983, pp.95ff).

The independent news service was officially pronounced alive in the 7 o’clock bulletin on 1 July 1947. The ABC became the only broadcasting organisation in the world to gather all its domestic news itself (Dixon 1973, p.2; Inglis 1983, p.130). “The News Service did not have an easy birth and its formative years would be clouded with

further controversy and dissension” (Petersen 1993, p.258). Yet, by 1992 the ABC could boast of “Australia’s most extensive and authoritative independent news service, with more than 70 television and radio newsrooms throughout Australia and overseas; separate TV news and current affairs bulletins produced in each State and the Northern Territory; more than 400 local, regional, State and national news bulletins on radio every day; and Australia’s most extensive network of overseas offices with correspondents in more than 20 locations” (ABC 1992a).

“Informing Australia - the ABC’s primary role”

By 1981, the ABC was happy to adopt for itself this description of its “primary role”, taken from the report of the Committee of Review of the ABC, which chairman Alex Dix handed to Parliament in May 1981. The Dix report called for “the most important of all the Commission’s...program output to be recognised as the provision of news and information” (Dix 1981a, p.25). The ANOP poll commissioned by Alex Dix and his committee identified “the key difference perceived between ABC and commercial radio and television” as the ABC’s “greater news and information orientation” (Dix 1981b, p.185). That listeners put the highest value on ABC News was reflected in its ratings: the main breakfast bulletins attracted the largest audience of any program on all the AM band networks. Dix did not define news in any way other than in terms of form (“news bulletins” and “news feature programs”) and how the service was perceived by its audiences: as having “high repute throughout Australia for the authority and balance of its bulletins” (Dix 1981b, p.184). It was left to the ABC to develop and impart to its journalists a news culture and set of news values.

ABC News values

The 1987 *ABC Radio News Style and Training Manual*, written by the then Head of Radio News, Ian Wolfe, defines news in terms which are both ABC-specific and reflect the more general values of professional journalism: “ABC Radio News takes advantage of its independence to strive for a comprehensive coverage of news at the local, regional, state, national and international levels. It aims at the speedy coverage of news as objectively and impartially as possible. Above all else it seeks to be accurate and fair in all it does but is not afraid to tackle difficult issues” (Wolfe 1987, p.1). Wolfe makes only one reference in 76 pages to tailoring news for the different radio networks: “Our selection of news items is always based on the degree of significance for the public. But think also of the network. Perhaps there is a bulletin on the FM network and something of significance has happened in the world of fine music. Include it *if there’s room*” (Wolfe 1987, p.21. Italics added). Clearly there were higher priorities than tailoring the content of news to networks.

The 1990 version, written by John Herbert, then Head of Broadcast Journalism Training, makes no reference to tailoring news for different networks at all, but takes a broader view than Wolfe of the skills of journalism for radio. Herbert asks: “What is News?” and defines it in terms of news values and newsworthy events, such as proximity, conflict, emergencies, crime, government and human interest. He concludes: “But most important: How does it affect our listeners?” although he does not define how “our listeners” might be different from anyone else’s (Herbert 1990, p.3, original emphasis). One indication of how ABC Radio News from this period thought of “their” listeners is the definition given to news cadets by the Federal News Editor in 1988. He wrote, “We do have the most thoughtful, critical, influential and articulate listeners in Australia and they have high expectations of a good news service” (ABC 1988a). If this quotation sounds patronising, it and Herbert’s paternalism towards the

audience reflect not only his professional background with the BBC but also that tension between the egalitarian and the elitist ideals of public broadcasting, referred to in the Introduction.

A 1988 document in the author's possession titled *Draft Mission Statement for ABC Radio News*¹⁴ states: "The aim of ABC Radio News is to provide a service that is

- comprehensive
- independent
- authoritative
- responsible
- socially aware, and
- of high broadcast quality".

(ABC 1988b).

Each term is defined. "Comprehensive" refers to "a wide range of subject matter in both the geographical and topical sense" (sic) and also serves to distinguish the ABC from other news services: "In particular we seek to feature when appropriate those subjects and issues rarely aired by commercial broadcast and print outlets".

"Independent" is considered "to be the essential foundation of ABC Radio News". To be "authoritative", news must be comprehensive, independent and accurate, while being "socially aware, [which] involves thinking beyond the dominant journalistic concerns of politics, economics and 'emergencies' while, of course, always giving these dominant concerns their due".

The definitive statement of the ABC's news "philosophy" is to be found in the Corporation's *Editorial Policies*, first issued in October 1989 (and re-issued several times since then). It echoes Wolfe, characterising ABC News and Information with the words "Accuracy,

¹⁴ This document is of unknown provenance apart from its being contained in a collection of papers in the author's possession, which are notes for participants in the July 1988 New Cadets Course, Sydney.

Impartiality and Objective Journalism”. A nine-point Charter of Editorial Practice, adopted in 1984, is reproduced in full and has been in each successive edition of the editorial policies document. Five of the nine points deal with impartiality, balance and accuracy. Two other key words, because they appear in the ABC Act, are “comprehensive” and “independent”. Related to the latter is point 5 of the Charter of Editorial Practice, which states: “Impartiality does not require editorial staff to be unquestioning, or the Corporation to give all sides of an issue the same amount of time. *News values and news judgments will prevail in reaching decisions*, consistent with these standards” (ABC 1998b, par. 4.3.3, p.10. Italics added). The ABC rarely defines for its journalists the concepts of “news values and news judgements”; in Section 4 of the *Editorial Policies* at least, they are implicit rather than spelled out.

Dix, news and networks.

At the time Alex Dix and his committee undertook their review, the News Division of the ABC covered both radio and television and was the largest single production group in the organisation. The Controller of News worked directly to the General Manager of the Corporation. By contrast, current affairs - or Public Affairs as it was then called - was a department in Radio, not a Division, and was quite separate from Television Public Affairs. The Director of Radio Public Affairs worked through the Controller of Radio 1 to the Assistant General Manager, Radio. This is significant because Radio 1 became the Metropolitan network, which came to be seen as the ‘home’ of current affairs, despite its being in many ways more logical to make Radio National the news and current affairs network, as will become clear.

Among the 273 recommendations of the Dix Report was that the ABC should eventually integrate its News Division with the Public Affairs

departments, in a Division the head of which would have parity of status with the Heads of the Television and Radio divisions and report directly to the ABC's chief executive. The recommendation was not initially implemented in that form. News and Public Affairs (later called Current Affairs) were brought together but in separate, "media split" Radio and Television departments. In the 1996 organisational restructure of the ABC they became "bi-media" again; but still in a structure which kept them in a separate-but-equal relationship to all other program output.

News is news

The separate News Division was not only independent in its editorial stance but was also frequently perceived to be independent of the rest of the ABC; what one senior manager called "a god unto itself". The Division's radio output consisted almost entirely of news bulletins, plus the news feature programs *Report from Asia*, *This Week in State Parliament*, *The Week in Business* and *Newsvoice* (Dix, 1981b, p.194). To the occasional irritation of radio network managers, the prevailing philosophy within the News Division was that "News is News", and the same bulletins were carried across the networks, impervious to changes in the non-news programming around them.

Dix had recommended that News remain integrated between Radio and Television. An earlier report into ABC resources had proposed the media be split into separate groups, and that news and public affairs also be divided into radio and television departments (McKinsey 1973, p.2ff.). In 1984 the ABC Board supported Managing Director Geoffrey Whitehead in undertaking a major restructure of the ABC, prompted in part by budgetary problems. However, the driving force was Whitehead's belief that the core business of the ABC was radio and television, and that "everything that goes towards making them should be loaded into those kind of holding companies" (1991, personal interview with former General

Manager of Radio National). A media split created two separate Radio and Television Divisions. Within each, Whitehead created a large news and current affairs department. In Radio this included sport and rural programs and was headed by a Controller of Information Services.

Describing its achievements in implementing Dix, the ABC reported in 1985: “Freed of television news commitments by the ‘media split’ decision, radio journalists concentrate on radio skills and develop new expertise in ‘chat journalism’” (ABC, 1985, p. 4). This sentence would make ironic reading for today’s ABC journalists, many of whom are expected to be capable of filing not only for both radio and television but also for the online news service. However, that rather self-conscious phrase “chat journalism”, which refers to the then innovative practice of ABC presenters interviewing ABC journalists and correspondents about the news of the day, also indicates the fundamental change to the work of radio news journalists made by the media split and by the move to develop clearer identities for each of the radio networks. This was a move begun in the 1970s.

Defining the networks

The early seventies saw major change to the radio industry in Australia. This change included the introduction of FM broadcasting and the start-up of community radio. New commercial radio stations also opened and this sector began to embrace the niche format and market segmentation approach to broadcasting which had been developed in the United States as a radio response to the impact of television. Finally, a generation of post war baby-boomers arrived as consumers in the radio marketplace: educated, adventurous and demanding, they had different tastes and media consumption habits from those of their parents.

As these changes took hold, ABC Radio audience numbers remained stagnant or were falling. In response, the division developed a network strategy, under which a particular range of programs would be assigned to specific networks or groups of stations. The Dix Report endorsed this strategy. By 1981, the year Dix reported, the ABC's radio services were:

- two medium wave radio networks to serve metropolitan areas, Radio 1 and Radio 2;
- the regional medium wave network, Radio 3, which was a hybrid of programs from Radios 1 and 2 plus a little local programming;
- a stereo FM service broadcasting classical music, jazz, some 'ethnic' music and drama to the capital cities and major country centres;
- the fledgling "youth" FM station, 2JJJ, heard only in Sydney with a midnight-to-dawn relay to Canberra, Newcastle and Wollongong;
- the international shortwave service Radio Australia; and
- a tiny inland shortwave service serving some remote areas of northern Australia.

The most obvious feature of this combination of services, to which Dix drew attention, was its "bias... towards metropolitan audiences at the expense of people in the regional and outback areas" (Dix 1981, Vol.2, p.135).

Radio 1 was a local service offering "popular music, entertainment, news and public affairs, and community information", and it carried the live broadcast of federal parliament. It was a largely state-based network. *Radio 2* was distinguished by the ABC in its submission to

Dix as “serving the interests of those who have the highest expectations of radio”(Dix 1981b, p.126). Its output was almost equally divided between music and specialist spoken word programs. It was, like Radio 1, a State-based operation. This is how Roger Grant, former General Manager of Radio National and ABC-FM, described the Radio 2 of the early to mid-eighties:

It was a combination of what we would now call the specialist spoken word programs, the Rural programs and the music component, which came from the Music department. And that [split between spoken word and music] was about 50-50. ... So you had programs like Lateline and ... the Science Show and you also had classical music, you had live concerts [which were] State-based. ... You had State-based breakfast programs [which were] classical music based and a lot of that material was re-circulated by multiple copying ... They'd run off 6 or 7 copies [of the tapes], rush them interstate and they put them on the air a couple of days later ... There was very little networking ... we didn't have the satellite then, don't forget; it was all done terrestrially (Grant, personal interview, 1991).

At the end of 1983, two years after the Dix Report, the Assistant General Manager Radio Keith Mackriell, put forward a discussion paper for possible future directions for ABC Radio, called “Program Policies and Practices - Radio” (ABC 1983a). The document quoted “Market research” as showing that “the most successful radio stations in ratings terms are those which are tightly targeted to specific audiences with clearcut formats”. Accordingly, the strategies proposed in the paper moved to focus and differentiate the networks (and hence their assumed or “target” audiences) even more clearly. Although building on the existing strategy, the paper had a strong influence on the differentiation of the radio networks as it subsequently actually occurred.

The paper called for a “Radio 1 Metropolitan” and a “Radio 1 Regional”. The former was to be developed “as Australia’s most immediate, authoritative and comprehensive news and information service at the international, national, State and local level.... to which audiences instinctively turn for immediate coverage of major

events...". It was to be "a grouping of metropolitan based stations, closely identified with and representative of the communities they serve, yet drawing on the full resources of the national broadcasting organisation" (ABC 1983a).

The intention for ABC Metropolitan stations to compete actively with commercial news-talk format stations was quite explicit in Mackriell's paper. Parliamentary broadcasts should be removed to Radio 2 since they "make it impossible for the stations to establish and maintain a consistent station image", news should be "fully integrated into the total program flow", and improved inter-station communications - including satellite links - should be given a high priority so the Metropolitan stations would not continue to be beaten to significant breaking stories by commercial radio (ABC 1983a). These stations should have enough money to attract and hold skilled personality presenters, and move to a predominantly spoken word format, with less music than at the time.

If Radio 1 was to be local, Radio 2 was to develop as "a national service, aiming to serve the total community and its many component elements, able to reflect and enhance its intellectual and cultural life, presenting and exploring ideas and imaginative works and providing background to events in ways that will contribute to the development of an enlightened and educated society" (ABC 1983a). The paper recommends moving the broadcasting of Parliament to Radio 2, an increase in "serious and interesting spoken word" and a decrease in the proportion of music. There is no reference in Mackriell's paper to news on this service at all. This is despite the fact that the 1982-83 ABC Annual Report describes it as carrying "a comprehensive news and public affairs coverage, including the 6.05pm weekdays *PM, Correspondents' Report, National Farm Report ...* and such programs of analysis and debate as *Background Briefing* (Sundays) and *Doubletake* (Tuesdays and Thursdays)" (ABC 1983b, p.14). The

recommendations Mackriell made thus assigned the public service role firmly to Radio 2.

By the close of the 1980s, three distinctly focused networks were available to most Australians, along the lines forecast by the 1983 internal paper: the two local networks – Metropolitan in the capital cities, Newcastle and Wollongong, or Regional for rural listeners – and the former Radio 2, which became Radio National in 1985 and progressively dropped all the State-based programs, becoming a genuinely national network. The Second Regional Radio Network (SRRN) had been officially launched in June 1987. SRRN would enable “an upgraded version of the present Regional Radio... specifically focused on the community it serves ... significantly increasing local programming” - which of course included local news (ABC 1987a, p.44). Dix had been particularly critical of the lack of local news services for regional listeners and the “enormous geographical areas” many regional journalists and rural officers were expected to cover (Dix 1981b, p.140). The intention of the SRRN over time was to extend both local and national services (Radio National and ABC FM) to rural listeners, beginning with the FM classical music service.

A “major review” of Radio National had been undertaken in the same year as the SRRN was launched (1986-87), “with the aim of maximising audiences for the network’s quality, specialist programs” (ABC 1987a, p.36). ABC-FM had extended further into regional areas, and Triple-J could be heard in all capital cities, with plans for regional extension. Radio 1 became a network of separate Metropolitan stations each with their own manager; for example, 2BL in Sydney (called ABC 702 Sydney from 2001 and at the time of writing), was not formally part of a Metropolitan network until 1985. 2BL was re-launched at the start of 1987 with what the ABC’s Annual Report described as “A fresh line-up of informed personalities

[presenting] intelligent and entertaining talk content against a background of adult contemporary music” (ABC 1987a, p.33).

These developments took place against a background of decline in real funding to the ABC, a consequent reduction in “education, music and sports services” (ABC 1987a, p.4) and a concern that the legal requirement on the ABC to broadcast the proceedings of Federal Parliament was to blame for the long-term decline in audiences for first Metropolitan stations and then - after 1988 - for Radio National. The Annual Report of the following year reported that there had been “major changes in radio, where the three networks [Regional, Metropolitan and Radio National] were differentiated even more clearly, *enabling a more precise definition of target audience*” (ABC 1988c, p.4, italics added). This sentence makes it explicit that the identity of each network was tied to an assumed identity for the actual or desired audience for each of them. Apart from this sentence, from the Board of Directors’ Report, Radio National is not described in the 1987-88 Annual Report as a network in its own right. Regional and Metropolitan stations are identified as radio networks, but for Radio National each of the specialist program departments (Specialist Talks, for example) is still being reported separately. It did not have a General Manager in its own right until 1991.

ABC Radio network strategy and news: the composite bulletin.

The strategy of Mackriell’s 1983 paper for Radio 1 Metropolitan had a specific implication for the radio news service. While relayed national news bulletins “should continue to be the prime source of coverage of international and national events”, the highest priority would be to extend the production within each capital city newsroom of bulletins that combined local, national and international news in what the ABC called “composite bulletins”. The composite gives a state news editor freedom to decide which stories will be of most

interest to the local audience the particular Metropolitan station is meant to serve.

The priority Mackriell wanted was adopted: the 1983-84 ABC Annual Report noted “the first full year of efforts to provide greater local input and emphasis in major Radio News bulletins through composite bulletins broadcast from State capitals and Canberra” (ABC 1984, p.28). The adoption of the composite bulletin format for Metropolitan stations was the first move towards tailoring bulletins to an audience assumed to be more interested in local news than in national or international stories.

As a result of Dix and Mackriell the natural *primary* outlet for the production of the Radio News and Current Affairs departments came to be seen as the Radio 1, or Metropolitan stations. By 1985, in its summary of achievements in implementing the Dix recommendations, the ABC refers to its “radio network strategy, designed to delineate the characters of the ABC’s three radio networks”. News felt the effects of the strategy: in July 1988 the Federal News Editor wrote: “Tailoring for the different networks seems to be the way things are moving. The networks need different styles of presentation.”(ABC 1988a).

By 1990 there were some clear differences between the news service on each network. Triple J (2JJJ) had from its beginning had its own news service, written and presented from within the station itself. It consciously (some would say self-consciously) tailored news to a youthful audience. ABC-FM had, deliberately, fewer news bulletins than the other networks; there was audience research to show that listeners to classical music did not like having it interrupted too frequently by news. In 1994, when the network changed its name from ABC Fine Music to ABC Classic FM and introduced a new schedule of bulletins in the breakfast program, it was soon forced by furious listeners to drop the innovation of headlines on the half hour.

Nonetheless, an increase in the amount of news on the network in 1989 had come, but at the cost of station identification for Radio National.

For a few months, Radio National had had its own news bulletins at peak times of the broadcast day and newsreaders were instructed to give the local call sign at the end of the State component; for example: “On 2FC 576 in Sydney, this is ABC News”. But this came to an end when the executive management of ABC Radio decided there should be more news on ABC FM. News management chose to meet the demand by simulcasting certain Radio National bulletins to the FM network, so of course Radio National station identification could no longer be made at the end of the bulletins¹⁵. This is an early but telling example of the way in which the intention of a radio management policy - in this case to differentiate the networks - could be undermined by the production practices and policies about resource allocation, of the News department.

In contrast to this sharing of bulletins across national networks, Metropolitan Radio, formerly Radio 1, featured mainly locally produced “composite” news bulletins (combining state, national and international news) which, as has been pointed out, could be tailored for the city in which the bulletins were being heard. The flagship 7.45am bulletin was the exception. It began with ten minutes of National news (national and international stories), produced in Sydney, and this was followed by a five-minute bulletin of State news (produced in each of the capital city newsrooms). This was the pattern throughout the years of the research; in 1995 the 7.45am news also became a composite bulletin, but remained the longest bulletin on ABC Radio, at fifteen minutes.

¹⁵ The events described took place soon after the author moved into Radio National management as Presentation Co-ordinator for the network.

Throughout the 1980s and into the early 1990s, Radio National, the former Radio 2, had less news per day than Metropolitan radio and used very few composite bulletins. In April 1990, the state News Editor in Queensland wrote to the Radio National Station Manager, arguing that the network was “broadcasting insufficient news” and “failing to cater for listeners’ demands for bulletins”. He pointed out that, on the average weekday, Radio National in Brisbane was broadcasting a total of 97 minutes of news compared to 145 minutes on the local Brisbane Metropolitan station. Of these totals, 116 minutes on the Metropolitan station were of the composite format, while only 31 minutes of Radio National’s 97 were composite news.

The Queensland News Editor asserted that Radio National “appears not to comprehend the importance and make-up” of the composite news bulletin. He rejected any “mistaken belief that composite news bulletins are parochial and therefore have little place on Radio National”. Composite bulletins contain a “skilful mix” of international, national and local news, used “to best appeal to our intelligent audience”; but their “real benefit ... is that they allow major or interesting local items to be placed in a more prominent position within a news bulletin so that a local listener does not have to wait five or ten minutes before hearing the important local news item” (the preceding quotes are all from ABC 1990a). The state News Editor’s arguments were only partially successful. When a new bulletin schedule was introduced on Radio National in 1992 it greatly increased the number of bulletins, but actually decreased the number in composite format, emphasising the national brief of the network by providing bulletins of national and international, rather than local, news.

The impact of network strategy on Radio National

The new network strategy appeared to halt and turn around the historic decline in audiences. By 1991, almost one million more people were listening to ABC Radio than were listening in 1989 (ABC 1991, p.2). The senior executive of ABC Radio felt that the strategy of more clearly defining the radio networks was working. However, in Australia's capital cities, audience numbers for Radio National were still in the long, slow decline that had begun in the early 1970s.

In May 1991 a paper went to the ABC Board outlining "Problems, Costs and Strategies for Radio National" (ABC 1991). The paper had been prepared by the then General Manager of Radio National and ABC-FM, Roger Grant. Norman Swan, then Director of Spoken Word Programs but soon to become the first General Manager of Radio National, had considerable input to the paper, together with Ann Tonks, the recently-appointed Station Manager for Radio National, Chris Westwood, Director of Arts Programs, and a number of specialist editorial staff (ABC, 1991, p.10)¹⁶.

The paper details the growth in audience for ABC Radio produced by the radio network strategy and contrasts it with the continuing loss of audience for Radio National. The reasons for the decline in Radio National audience are identified as:

- the removal of classical music from Radio National to ABC-FM, taking listeners with it;
- the refocusing of Metropolitan stations "to provide news, information and entertainment to the broad listenership in the marketplace";
- the reduction of local content on Radio National, brought about both by a reduction in budget and following a recommendation of Dix, which affected audience loyalty outside Sydney and Melbourne particularly; and

¹⁶ At this time the author was Presentation Co-ordinator for the network, having spent many years as a newsreader and producer in the national newsroom in Sydney.

- the removal in February 1988 of Parliamentary broadcasts from Metropolitan to Radio National stations, which greatly disrupted programs when Parliament was sitting (ABC 1991, p.2-3)¹⁷.

Talking about the impact of parliamentary broadcasts on the national network, Roger Grant, the then General Manager of Radio National and ABC-FM described what he found himself dealing with, just two months after his appointment:

What of course I didn't realise at the time was there was a fundamental problem about Parliament. Parliament could have worked on Radio National except for one thing: by the time I arrived, RN had expanded from the old original eight Radio 2 transmitters to about sixty-two transmitters at that stage ... But it was only required we broadcast parliament in the original eight locations, that is, the six capital cities, Canberra and Newcastle ... Also, to make things interesting, [the ABC Act] specifies that you broadcast it live. So I found myself to my horror dealing with a kind of hybrid network that broadcast parliament live across time zones ... and only to eight of the 62 stations. So some people heard some programs and because of the time delay, you had up to a three-hour variation between the east and the west coast as to when parliament started and finished. So it was starting as early as six o'clock in the morning in Perth and ending as late as eleven o'clock at night; and this was just a programming nightmare. And that I think really was what got up people's noses. (Grant 1991, personal interview).

In fact, Radio National listeners - and managers - had to endure this "programming nightmare" for less than a year. An ABC engineer based in Adelaide brought to the attention of the network's General Manager the existence not only of a set of standby transmitters but also of "some transmitters at the back of sheds that hadn't actually been installed" (Grant 1991, personal interview). As it was technically feasible to switch parliamentary broadcasts to these

¹⁷ These were not the only reasons that had been suggested. Audience research conducted for Radio National in 1987 described the network as failing to reflect "changes in consumer demands", instead "suffering the consequences of the ABC's origins", because it persisted in pursuing the "worthy, democratic intent" to offer high quality programs to "broad and varied groups of Australians" (Banks 1987, pp. 2-4).

additional transmitters and off Radio National, the ABC began a six-month long process of lobbying the Parliament. It was a stressful process for the network's general manager:

because they kept changing their minds and dragging the chain. But finally it did happen ... It sort of came off in stages ... It would be on one day and off the other. They tested the interim arrangement for ... two months (Grant 1991, personal interview.)

The reduction in local content brought about by Radio National losing its State-based programs extended to News, with most bulletins being of the national format and therefore unlikely to include much of local importance to listeners outside Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne.

The network strategy and the Radio National audience

A research survey by ANOP in August 1990 listed several specific characteristics of listeners who nominated Radio National as their primary station. Among these was the finding that "RN listeners identified their principal interests *in news and current affairs coverage* as well as informative and educational programs" (cited in ABC 1991, p.3. Italics added). Earlier research, conducted by the Banks Group in 1987, suggested that Radio National might successfully "concentrate on *a current affairs/political format, utilising a cutting edge journalistic style* and an in-depth focus on national and international events which affect us all" (Banks 1987, p.19. Italics added).

The audience identified by the Banks study as potential Radio National listeners was "predominantly over 35, *interested in national and world events, ideas and current affairs ...* [I]t is this new audience which must be drawn to Radio National" (cited in ABC 1991, p.10. Italics added). This was not altogether surprising, given that historically, the specialist spoken word programs were only available on the network's predecessor, Radio 2. The early evening current

affairs program *PM* was also only available on Radio National until 1987 (when it was simulcast on both networks, mainly to overcome the problem of it being unavailable during Parliamentary sittings). Despite these characteristics of the Radio National audience, identified by successive audience research reports, the Radio network strategy of the early 1980s chose to identify the *Metropolitan* network, not Radio National, as the place for listeners to go to find news and current affairs.

It was soon clear that this strategy was harming Radio National. The Director of Spoken Word programs, Norman Swan, had already begun a national weekday breakfast current affairs program, *Daybreak*, as part of a plan to halt the loss of audience numbers. Responding to audience research commissioned by the ABC that showed audiences were often unsure where to find Radio National, or confused the different ABC networks, the call signs were changed¹⁸. Call signs that originally reflected the commercial origins of the stations, such as 2FC in Sydney, were changed so they all began with the letters RN, followed by the broadcast frequency and preceded by a number identifying the State (2 = New South Wales, 3 = Victoria, 4 = Queensland, and so on). Thus, 2FC in Sydney became 2RN 576, the number 2 signifying the station is in New South Wales, the letters RN for Radio National, and 576 being the AM band frequency on which the station is broadcast.

The introduction of *Daybreak* was achieved despite the objections of News and Current Affairs (known within the ABC by the abbreviated name “NewsCaff”). Swan wanted to employ journalists to produce a program similar to the flow programs on National Public Radio in the USA, such as *All Things Considered*. News and current affairs managers saw the proposal as encroaching on its programming

¹⁸ A 1991 survey found lack of awareness of the Radio National call sign and frequency in their area, even among regular ABC listeners, and/or confusion of ABC stations, especially between the local Metro or Regional and the Radio National station (Yann et al. 1991, p.10).

territory and considered there was a risk it would “poach” NewsCaff personnel¹⁹. Nonetheless, *Daybreak* went ahead, and with it an increase in live programs on the network, and the introduction of a more personality-based style of presentation. A key element of this plan was to increase the amount of news on the network and schedule it more regularly. Bulletins that had been broadcast at rather eccentric times, such as 6.45am and 7.15am were moved to “the top of the clock”, in line with the normal practice of most talk-radio stations²⁰. The 1991 Board paper said: “The used of strategically placed news bulletins is considered an important way to increase share and reach for RN as it further develops its spoken word program brief” (ABC 1991, p.12).

The General Manager of a network had the right to ask for news when and where and for however long he wanted on his networks - in theory.

In practice, the ability of the General Manager of News to comply with such requests was dependent on available resources. Customising the news was tricky if bulletins had to be shared with other networks, either to maximise resources or to provide an up-to-date service in different time zones. So for example, in order to ensure Radio National listeners in Adelaide, which is half an hour behind Sydney time, had the most recent available national news bulletin at 7.15am local time, the national newsroom in Sydney would send it live the national component of the 7.45am (Sydney time) Metropolitan bulletin. However, the management of the Radio National network recognised that this was a less than satisfactory solution in terms of *tailoring the news to the audience* for the network.

¹⁹ The author witnessed these concerns both as a newsreader and in her role as Presentation Co-ordinator at Radio National.

²⁰ Contrary to this and as the exception rather than the rule in its line-up, the Metropolitan network maintains the 7.45 News-8 o'clock *AM* program nexus to this day, despite recurrent consideration of whether or not to change it.

Of course it's half an hour later, *but it's a very different news. It's a Metro news with a different, longer [music] theme, a different reader, different production values and all that. ...* I think what we've got to do is have a much clearer idea about the kind of focus and brief about news bulletins on metropolitan stations, on RN, on FM and all the other programs that flow from news bulletins, because *it is the news bulletins that really do set the character of each of the stations ...* The problem is that at the moment it's the same news, often literally the same news, being heard ... on all networks. So what we've got to do is try to customise the news all to the needs of each network (General Manager Radio National and ABC-FM, 1991, personal interview).

Clearly, the policy preferred by this network manager was to tailor news bulletins to networks with separate and different assumed audiences. Where he saw the news bulletins as setting “the character of each of the stations”, the news producers saw the sound of the stations as setting the character of the news. This difference in definition of cause and effect (or independent and dependent variables, in experimental terms) is one illustration of the complexity of the relationship between media production, policy and audiences. It is also one explanation for how difficult it proved to agree on the nature of the audience to be called up by the bulletins.

At least, however, the network managers could start to incorporate news into Radio National's station identity, thanks to changing technology. Within twelve months of that May 1991 Board Paper, Radio National had its own, “tailor-made” news bulletins and a “dedicated” Breakfast newsreader. Both had been true of the Metropolitan network for the previous three years, since the appointment on contract of a former staff announcer, Geoff Howard, as “chief news presenter”, in 1988. This change, taken with the other elements already described, did start to have an effect on audience numbers and awareness. An audience research report dated November 1992 noted: “There appears to be greater awareness of Radio National in the last 12 months. The major comment is that

Radio National is not as dry as it used to be, and that it is making a definite effort to be more relaxed and less formal.” (Tan 1992).

Radio National bulletins

The first “program brief” for Radio National news bulletins - a description of the format and style required for breakfast news on the network - was written in February 1992. At the same time the amount of news on the network was increased, to provide new bulletins on the hour and half hour in the breakfast period and hourly throughout the day²¹.

The brief was that the RN bulletins should:

- Reflect the diversity of the country.
- Have a national flavour.
- Represent a distinctive alternative to Metros [i.e. news on Metropolitan stations].
- Blend smoothly with surrounding program and reflect a liaison with program producers.
- Have a consistency of sound and feel, across the week.

The format and style was to include headlines and “backheads” (a repetition of the main headlines at the end of the bulletin) in all ten-minute bulletins, and a national weather round-up. The outcue (final words of the newsreader) was to be ABC News except in the main breakfast bulletins when the outcue would refer to the Radio National breakfast program, Daybreak and would be “ABC News for Daybreak” (this proved impossible to maintain when FM took the same bulletin, or when the same bulletin was heard in a different time-zone, placing it outside the broadcast hours of the Daybreak program).

²¹Enough listeners complained about or commented on the increase in the amount of news for the author as Station Co-ordinator to have to draft a form letter, explaining the changes to the schedule. This illustrates The Banks Group’s findings that the network’s audience, although small, is “very committed” (Banks 1987, p.17. Underlining in original).

The memo refers to “research”, meaning audience research, several times without identifying any specific source. It claims “Research shows a large number of women listen” to Radio National and that “research shows the audience wants a serious, authoritative read covering as wide a range of issues as possible” (ABC News 1992, p.2). Finally, the memo requires producers to “Maintain a clear differentiation in content, writing style and format from Metro bulletins”, without specifying how or giving examples of desirable “differentiation” (ABC News 1992, p.3).

It is important to point out that this brief for the Radio National breakfast bulletins is included in a February 1992 memo from the then Head of Radio News to the Assistant Federal Secretary of the journalists’ union, the Australian Journalists’ Association (AJA). The memo is about new staff rostering arrangements for a trial period, for Radio National news bulletins. New rostering arrangements had to be negotiated because the determination of Radio National’s manager to have tailored news for the network disrupted existing Sydney newsroom work practices.

The Chief Producer, producing the daily 7.45am Metro national bulletin, was on contract and therefore worked a five-day week (five eight-hour days). All ABC staff journalists worked a four-day week (four ten-hour days), a hard won condition the union was determined to protect. But, to have the same producer assigned to editorial responsibility for the Radio National main breakfast bulletins each weekday morning would require an ABC staff journalist to be rostered across five days. It took considerable negotiation even to reach agreement on a trial period of such rostering arrangements. The industrial relations challenge of a change that might appear very simple is indicative of how difficult it proved to have tailor-made bulletins for this network.

Significant differences in work practices remained between the production of the ten minutes of national news that opened the 7.45am bulletin and the ten minutes of national news that led the 7.15am bulletin on Radio National, and these will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four. Principal among these was the fact that the national component of the 7.45am bulletin was produced by the Chief Producer, to whom all other news producers worked, while the 7.15am national news was produced by less senior journalists on a roster. From the stability provided by the combination of the same producer and the same reader each morning, a consistent and distinctive style developed for the 7.45am bulletin; something much more difficult to achieve on the 7.15am, with its rotation of producers and newsreaders – until the changed arrangements introduced in 1992.

News producers were very aware of how much larger the audience is for the Metropolitan bulletin than for the Radio National one. They also had quite different perceptions of the two audiences. The Metropolitan audience was perceived as “harder to hold” for news, the Radio National audience as more serious and better able to follow a dense bulletin, without the signposts of headlines or narrative links in the writing of stories. Thus, the extent of “tailoring” differed between networks, and this is something that will be taken up and analysed in detail in the chapters that follow.

Technological change and its impact on news production.

In 1993 the ABC undertook an internal review of the structure of its News and Information Programs (NIP) in both radio and television. This review led to the appointment of a Managing Editor across both media, and foreshadowed the 1996 ABC restructure which re-

integrated radio and television output (since split and then re-integrated again).

The report of the review, dated September 1993, says of radio news:

Significantly, all networks now have their own tailored News output, designed to cater for specific audience needs. ... Tailored national bulletins for Radio National, specially prepared and read, are compiled in Sydney with local interstate input. ... At the same time, the role of Radio journalists has been significantly broadened to encompass regular contributions to a wide range of Radio programs, rather than solely to News bulletins, resulting in a much closer integration with network programming. (ABC 1993a, p.4).

Internally, acknowledged the review:

News gathering has been revolutionised by the electronic linking of national and international bureaux by the Basys system. The next significant step will be the linking of audio through D-Cart, to be followed by the development of V-Cart. This will deliver an integrated information and communication package that allows equal access to multiple users of the same raw text, audio, vision and data. (ABC 1993a, p.6).

While V-Cart has yet to materialise, in radio at least this vision was substantially realised by the end of 1993. Multiple users had access to the same “raw text” via Basys and audio via D-Cart, an ABC-developed system of digital audio recording, storage and editing, which enabled multiple users to access and manipulate the same piece of audio simultaneously. At least, this was the case in the Sydney, Brisbane and Newcastle newsrooms, with Perth not far behind (Dunn 1993, p.77).

One can sense from these optimistic quotations the excitement felt by many senior managers in the ABC about the possibilities that appeared to be presented by these new News production technologies. The sense of new possibilities began with the computerisation of the Sydney and Melbourne newsrooms, with the introduction of Basys, in 1989. Basys is a US-developed computer system widely used in

broadcast newsrooms to receive and distribute agency and other news copy, and to write and edit stories.

The new possibilities sensed by ABC news workers, including journalists, were initially unwelcome ones. One entire classification of news workers - the News Operations Assistants, known as NOAs (pronounced “noahs”), who entered copy, and distributed telexes and faxes, was threatened with redundancy. Journalists feared their numbers would also be reduced by the introduction of Basys. Those journalists who remained, it was believed, would have to take on new duties of copy-taking and copy-typing into the computer. Two unions, the ABC Staff Union and the Australian Journalists’ Association (AJA), were involved in extensive negotiations with ABC management, at one point going to the Industrial Relations Commission (IRC)²².

At the time, those working in the radio newsroom were told that Basys, the company, was supplying the ABC with a custom-built system to enable rapid communication between all State radio and television newsrooms and, eventually, between regional ABC journalists as well. It was, they were told, one of the biggest computerised news systems in the world, and journalists were assured that the news system would make their jobs easier, allowing more time to work on the editorial quality of the news output. The ABC Annual Report of 1988-89 reported that “the new systems replace typewriters and telex-based system (sic), with electronic-mail copy distribution, on-screen sub-editing, teleprompting and real time

²² The author was working on the 5pm weekday news program *Newsvoice* at the time. Commissioner Pauline Griffin paid two visits to the Sydney newsroom, carefully arranged by the AJA to coincide with peak periods of activity. Newsroom staff organised with interstate colleagues and overseas correspondents to ensure the national newsroom would be swamped with faxes and other incoming copy, to demonstrate the need for clerical assistance. It may be coincidence, but the IRC ruled in the AJA’s favour and the ABC was forced to retain a small number of people as NOAs. The transformation of the newsroom by technological change is described in more detail in the next chapter.

updating of news item scheduling ... The system is already showing clear benefits: Journalists and news producers are gathering the news faster, are working to later deadlines and are drawing upon a larger base of information.” (ABC 1989b, p.53).

In the same year as Basys was introduced, an internal ABC development team successfully tendered for a digital system to record, edit and replay news and current affairs audio. By early 1992, D-Cart was being marketed commercially by the ABC as “a powerful multi-user digital audio recording, editing and playback system designed to replace reel to reel and cartridge tape machines” (ABC 1992b). It was installed in the Sydney, Brisbane and Newcastle newsrooms in 1992, in remaining capital city newsrooms and Sydney Radio Current Affairs the following year.

The work of producing a news story from the copy and audio supplied by a reporter was once done by a minimum of two people and required a certain amount of “double handling”: a technical operator would record the reporter’s audio, then take it to the sub-editor. The sub-editor would listen to it and decide how it should be edited to fit with the written copy, which had been separately filed by the reporter. The sub-editor would then return the audio tape to the technical operator to be edited. Basys and D-Cart enabled the process of editing both text and sound to be done at a workstation by a single producer, effectively eliminating the need for a technical operator, except actually to record the audio, and not even that in all instances.

Despite the threat to the work of technical operators (Radio Operations Production Officers or ROPOs, pronounced “roh-pohs” in ABC-speak), D-Cart was introduced with relatively little industrial disruption. This was mainly because its introduction overlapped with the move of ABC Radio in Sydney to the new centre at Ultimo, and the introduction of the far more cutting-edge and alarmingly unreliable touch screen technology. This move greatly distracted the

attention of the relevant unions, especially the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU - formed by the amalgamation of the ABC Staff Union with other public sector unions), which represented the ROPOs. Nonetheless, there was the usual long, slow process of industrial negotiation even as D-Cart was installed in newsrooms.

As with Basys, D-Cart is relatively easy to learn to use, and is a multi-user system. ABC Radio newsrooms soon installed computer terminals with a “hot key” on the keyboard which toggled between news copy on Basys and an audio insert on D-Cart, enabling every sub-editor (news producer) in the newsroom to work on the same piece of copy and the same “grab” simultaneously, if they wanted to. How this technological capability was applied in practice was to produce “tailor made” news bulletins: the same raw material was produced in different ways for different news outlets. However, as has been described, this did not really happen for Radio National until 1992, when a “program brief” was written for the main breakfast bulletin, and the same newsreader was rostered across the five weekday mornings, to provide continuity of presence - as was already the case on the 7.45am flagship bulletin on Metropolitan stations.

“The big bucket”

Within 12 months of the introduction of D-Cart the number of technical operators in the Sydney radio newsroom dropped by about one quarter, while the number of news stories produced to air trebled. But supply could not increase fast enough; by 1993, the demand within the ABC for news was voracious.

The News and Information Programs (NIP) Review of that year reported:

The demand for news material within the ABC has increased sharply in recent years and will increase further to meet the needs of new services. The introduction of AusTV, Subscription Television and Radio, and 24-hour Radio News will ensure an ongoing requirement for program material... (ABC, 1993a, p.5).

Of those service listed, only NewsRadio has survived²³; but in the meantime the ABC has developed ABC News Online. As well, “the future of broadcasting has clearly emerged as digital ... Digital Audio Broadcasting is likely to replace existing AM and FM radio broadcasting within a decade and greatly increase the number of services available” (ABC 1993a, p.5)²⁴.

Digital text, audio and video systems, if they could be networked, offered the opportunity to pool ABC news and current affairs material from the capital cities and the regional stations in a metaphorical “big bucket”, which all ABC services could dip into to meet their own specific needs. In their submissions to the NIP Review, both ABC-FM and Radio National expressed the desire for “network specific” bulletins, so that ABC-FM for example could include more arts stories in their news service. The fact that it was prohibitively expensive to network D-Cart was not seen as a serious obstacle by the Review committee, merely a matter of time before technological advances solved the problem (six years later, this still had not been achieved).

ABC News and Information Programs was in an expansionary mood at this time, when David Hill was early in his second five-year term of

²³ The satellite service Australia Television (AusTV) was always under-funded. The licence was taken over by the commercial Seven Network for two years from 1997, in an unsuccessful attempt to make it commercially viable. It lapsed completely until 2001, when the ABC was awarded the contract to run an equivalent service, Asia-Pacific Television, with the financial support of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), in much the same way the BBC World Service is funded by the Foreign Office.

²⁴ While the ABC and commercial radio were engaged in trial DAB broadcasts using the Eureka 147 standard, at the time of writing Australia had not even finalised whether this European digital audio standard or the American In Band On Channel (IBOC) standard should be adopted (Cassidy 2003).

appointment as Managing Director. A December 1993 edition of *Fanfare*, “The ABC Radio Information Program staff magazine”, published by the Head of News and edited by the Queensland News Editor, has as its front page banner headline: “Your ABC: The Force of Change” (ABC 1993b). The magazine features several articles on the embryonic commercial news service of the ABC, due to begin operation in January 1994, called Broadcast News Australia (BNA). The service had begun in Queensland only, in September 1993, supplying specialised read-to-air news bulletins to 15 commercial radio stations, via a satellite service owned by the Australian Radio Network, called Arnsat. This service used ABC Wire copy and News audio but not ABC reporters’ voice reports. It was considered unacceptable both by the ABC and by the AJA (the journalists’ union), for the voices of ABC reporters, presumed to be identified with the independent publicly funded broadcaster, to be heard also on commercial radio.

As far back as 1990 the Federation of Australian Radio Broadcasters (FARB)²⁵ had invited the ABC to tender for a wire service supply to commercial stations. On that occasion Australian Associated Press (AAP) was successful. However, in 1993, as AAP’s industry contract drew to a close, FARB approached ABC Radio again, this time permitting them to approach individual radio stations. By December 1993, the acting manager of BNA was talking confidently of having “between 40 and 50 percent of Australia’s commercial stations as clients” in 1994. BNA was to operate out of the former training centre of the ABC in Brisbane, refurbished to provide digital workstations for nine journalists and a News Editor, as well as satellite reception and distribution capacity.

As events turned out, BNA was almost as short-lived as the ABC’s attempt to enter Pay TV with a continuous news channel a couple of

²⁵ Since 2002, FARB has been called Commercial Television Australia.

years later. Commercial radio, it appeared, was not ready to abandon AAP for an ABC-supplied news service and BNA was quietly closed down. But by the time BNA closed, NewsRadio was up and running. Parliamentary broadcasts had been moved from Radio National at the end of 1988, onto the 8-city network of standby transmitters. The idea of a 24-hour radio news service on the parliamentary network not only put an end to the technically fraught practice of turning the transmitters on and off depending on when parliament was in session, but also provided a national outlet for the many locally produced stories that were only heard on the local metropolitan or regional station.

The ABC's submission to the Minister for Communications in September 1993 for a Parliamentary and News Network (PNN) spoke of enhancing the ABC's "ability to serve the Australian community by providing a valuable news free-to-air radio service", of increasing "audience awareness of the Parliamentary Broadcast network", and of utilising the ABC's "unique news resources to greater effect" (ABC 1993c, front page). The proposal referred to the ABC "news pool" ... "created by the news gathering resources of ABC Radio, Radio Australia and the overseas bureaux". The proposal explained that the new service would "quarry" these news resources. "In this way, ABC can obtain an extra 'life' from the raw material of each story ... from which all the networks select, *edit and tailor new stories for their specific network's audience.*" (ABC 1993c, par. 2.3, p.3. Italics added).

In a clear statement of the relationship between technological change and the proliferation of services, the document's next paragraph is headed "Greater Use of the ABC's Technology", and explains that the proposed 24-hour radio service is made possible "by such things as the ABC's new audio technology including D-CART, the extension of computerised copy-handling systems [Basy] and upgrading of its audio distribution networks" (ABC 1993c, par.2.4). Ian Wolfe

moved from being General Manager of Information Programs to develop the new service. Talking to the News staff magazine *Fanfare* in September 1993, Wolfe argued that new technology meant the proposed 24-hour service could be run with a relatively small increase in staff: “Nowadays with the flick of a switch because of the technology - what we couldn’t do before when you had to fax and telex material between newsrooms - now it’s centralised on a computer, and by the end of this year we should have all ABC newsrooms and correspondents in a position where they can centrally file material” (ABC 1993b, p.7). The proposal for the 24-hour service refers to “the introduction of greater multi-skilling in news presentation and production” as “Another important element” in the resourcing of the service. One aspect of that multiskilling was the decision, earlier in 1993, to equip all overseas bureaux with the capability to file for both radio and television, and to train journalists accordingly.

In the same edition of *Fanfare* as Ian Wolfe talks about the NewsRadio proposal, ABC Managing Director David Hill was interviewed on the subject of the “extraordinary speed” at which changes were occurring within the ABC, “with new radio and television services and startling technological advances” (ABC 1993b, p.14). This does not seem like an exaggeration when one considers that not only BNA and the 24-hour Parliamentary and News Network were in train. Not long before, Australia Television (AusTV), the Asian satellite service, had been launched, and plans for the ABC to go into Pay Television were well advanced. In another example of multiskilling, Radio Australia journalists and news readers were providing news in Asian languages to Australia Television, from a television studio specially fitted out in the new Melbourne ABC Radio and Orchestral building, at Southbank.

The newsroom in Melbourne was also trialling a new form of workstation for journalists and producers. A “major workstation”

accommodated two producers (sub-editors), two operational broadcasters (formerly ROPOs), the newsreader and the administrative assistant (former News Operations Assistant). A number of operations could be performed simultaneously: the operators could receive and record material from reporters in the field, the producers could be listening to and sub-editing different stories; the news reader could be pre-reading or auditioning material or writing headlines; and the operations assistant could be entering yet another story into the computer. At their desks, all news staff could access 15 different sources, including the rounds reporters, various ABC and outside networks, D-Cart, police landline, the scanner, and various wire services. Perhaps not surprisingly, news staff did complain that the workstations could get very noisy. Overall, however, as Henningham's 1992 study of journalists' reactions to new technology confirmed, ABC journalists took a supportive view of the new ways of producing and tailoring news (Henningham 1995, p.236).

A reasonable balance.

Less than eighteen months after the writing of the Radio National news brief, the then Director Radio, Peter Loxton, commented that reporters were too office-bound. The Head of News, Colin Tyrus, replied that there were too many separate bulletins to file for. (Both comments are taken from personal notes of a News and Information Programs (NIP) Review meeting held on July 23, 1993). This can be seen as the first intimation that tailoring bulletins for the separate networks was stretching the resources of the News department too far.

The NIP review produced a restructure of radio newsrooms that abolished the old Chief of Staff and Chief Sub-editor positions, reducing the size of the workforce in the Sydney newsroom particularly. Executive Producers were made responsible for all aspects of news, including bulletin line-up and the sound on-air. The

introduction of the Executive Producer (EP) role was not only to move to titles which were more pertinent to radio than those derived from the print medium, but also to standardise news operations and editorial supervision in all ABC newsrooms around the country. It was reported in the News staff magazine *Fanfare* that at the first meeting of News Editors and Executive Producers following the restructure, the Director Radio spoke of the “evolution of services tailored to meet the needs of specific clients and composite bulletins which included a mix of local, national and international news” as “Key developments” in News and Current Affairs. Loxton also pointed to a future that “offered increasing opportunities to explore the limits” (ABC 1993b, p.11).

That was December 1993. A year later the General Manager Information Programs, Susan Kadar, was informing radio network managers there had to be “a reasonable balance between the need to service an audience in a differentiated way according to geographical and demographic markets, and the need to provide the unique national resources of the ABC to a quality news service” (Kadar 1994, personal interview²⁶). Kadar cited the example of some bulletins being produced three times in different time zones as a poor use of resources. No doubt there was wasted effort in re-doing bulletins for the same network in different places. However, the implication of not re-doing the bulletin is that the network instead runs a bulletin that has been prepared for simultaneous broadcast on a different network; and the same bulletin cannot be “tailored” for two networks at once.

The return to generic concepts of radio news stories and bulletins was inevitable - at least within the network news service. There was no doubt that staff numbers in the newsroom had fallen. 1994 marked the final year of the ABC’s second triennial funding agreement with the Federal Government. The 1993-94 Annual Report refers to “an

²⁶ All quotations in this section are taken from the 1994 interview with General Manager Information Programs, Susan Kadar.

overall decline in the ABC's appropriation and declining staff numbers". If there are not enough staff it is not possible both to collect the news and tailor the bulletins. The General Manager Information Programs argued that more energy and time directed to tailoring bulletins meant less on news gathering.

By the end of 1994, ABC Radio at least was looking for ways to make the most effective use of resources within network news and was looking beyond the networks, to ways of "extending" the news. Susan Kadar emphasised the importance of local news. She argued that if regional newsrooms, each with only one or two journalists, find themselves tied to the telephone and computer by the demands for tailored bulletins, unable to go out into the community, this "crucial service" to regional listeners would inevitably suffer. At the same time, the ABC's "unmatched regional resources" represent "a wealth of information from the regions which isn't always used as well as it could be", Australia-wide. That is, good regional stories from one State often do not make it into five or ten-minute bulletins in another State.

Kadar expressed frustration with the limitations of the five- or ten-minute duration and format of network news bulletins. The format allows producers to fit the "first rank" stories, in importance and interest, into the bulletin, but not the "second rank" - which are often the regional stories - which would provide the substance and the range to "go beyond the headlines". The definition of news which fits the format is often confined to national and international politics and economics, with sport, arts, social, moral and environmental issues fitted in when they can be. The network news format cannot carry all this, said Kadar, and NewsRadio is one response to this challenge. ABC News Online is another. Kadar saw different technological means of delivery and the differentiation of the radio networks as ways that together would enable the provision of more comprehensive views of the world, as "windows for the additional wealth of

information News possesses”. Radio National specialist programs already “extend the news”; but “24 hours wouldn’t be enough to put out all the stories we now gather”. Speaking to this writer in December 1994, Kadar looked forward to the development of “interactive online services”; she was not sure how it would work, but believed that it would happen. What such a service would provide, she believed, was instant access across the nation to the ABC’s every news story; and she was substantially correct in her prediction.

Conclusion.

This chapter has traced the history of the differentiation of the ABC’s radio networks and the impact of network strategy both on the News service and on the creation of audiences. We have seen that a network strategy that made the local networks, Metropolitan and Regional, the primary outlet for news and current affairs deprived Radio National of an emphasis that audience research had suggested might attract more listeners to the network. At the same time, developments in digital technology were making it possible for the newsroom to tailor bulletin output to network requirements. These same developments also made it possible for ABC Radio News to be more productive with fewer people, with the result that when the management of Radio National sought to exploit the opportunity to tailor bulletins, it was thwarted by a combination of resource limitations and a radio network policy that directed news production effort to the Metropolitan stations. It encountered further obstacles in the form of work practices in the national newsroom. These work practices had enabled a more coherent news service to develop on the Metropolitan network; which did have the effect of differentiating it from news on Radio National, although not necessarily in ways desired by the managers, the policy makers, for the Radio National network.

How work practices affected audience-making in the news will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. This chapter has also introduced another important effect of developments in digital audio technology on the policy desires of senior managers: to find new outlets for the content generated by Radio News and Current Affairs.

Chapter Four gives detailed consideration to news production and its relationship with network policy at the ABC, developing the thesis that different audiences were constructed by each of the Radio National and Metropolitan “flagship” breakfast bulletins.

Chapter Four

Practice: ABC Radio news production

Introduction

The two previous chapters described, respectively, the research findings in the literature pertaining to news workers' professional culture, including their perceptions of audiences; and the historical background to ABC Radio's news service and network policies through to the end of the case study period. This chapter builds on both the preceding ones to examine the specific routines of news workers on the two bulletins under study in the thesis. It does so not only in the context of the literature of news production and audiences discussed in Chapter Two, but also in the context of the policy and technological changes described in Chapter Three.

The aim of this chapter is to bring together the information and analysis of the preceding three chapters. That is, to bring them home to the site of the research: the ABC's Sydney radio newsroom, in the late 1980s and early 1990s. By so doing, the chapter introduces the findings of the case study proper, in the sense of identifying the differences between the production practices of the two bulletins as they emerged in the fieldwork. This forms a preliminary chapter to the detailed comparison of the bulletins in the next chapter.

This chapter begins by recognising that descriptions in the sociological literature surveyed in Chapter Two identify the process of news production as occurring in stages. While the names assigned to each stage may vary from one study to another, those of Golding (1981) are used here: planning, gathering, selection and presentation. Unlike the majority of studies of news production, however, this one

concentrates on editorial shaping (selection, rather than news gathering) and the institution's sense of its audiences, manifested not only in the news constructed but also in network management policies. The chapter then examines in detail the impact of technological changes, described in Chapter Three, on the routine methods of news production at ABC Radio. Again, this is a relatively neglected area of research in this field.

The stages of planning and gathering, then of selection and presentation as they occurred in practice in the ABC national radio newsroom are described and analysed. The final part of the chapter looks at differences in work practices in the production of the two bulletins that are the focus of this study: the ten-minute national components of the 7.45am Metropolitan and the 7.15am Radio National news bulletins. The chapter concludes that the overall result of differences in work practices in the selection and presentation of news for these two bulletins was that a more specific and more coherent audience was able to be constructed for Metropolitan than for Radio National bulletins.

News production processes (1): stages of production

The literature describing news production processes is characterised by the use of *stages* of news making. Some accounts of news production make the point that news workers themselves seldom describe what they do in such organised terms. They may find it hard to describe the process (Tuchman 1978) or resist the idea that it can be described as following a predictable pattern at all (Schlesinger 1978). There was evidence of a similar phenomenon among the ABC news staff observed and interviewed in this study. This is an ABC radio news Chief Producer's rather flummoxed initial response to a question about how he works on a day to day basis:

It's er, there's no actual day to day - I mean we wouldn't sit down each day and consult but it's - erm, I suppose it's a - it's hard to describe.
(Chief Producer, personal interview, 1991).

So to some extent the observations in the sociological literature of the news production process are imposed on it, in the sense that the process does not present itself in the same way to the participants in the process. Nonetheless, there have to be some means of transforming “the idiosyncratic occurrences of the everyday world” into news; and this is accomplished by routines of “processing and dissemination” (Tuchman 1978, p.58). Since these routines almost invariably take place within organisations, they tend to be bureaucratic processes, leading to Tuchman's much-quoted observation that “[a]mong reporters, professionalism is knowing how to get a story that meets organizational needs and standards” (Tuchman 1978, p.66). A further implication of “routine production procedures ... and the beliefs and conventions which support them” (Golding 1981, p.63) - indeed, a direct result of them, both Golding and Tuchman argue - is that news is fundamentally ideological.

Broadly speaking, the stages of the news making or production process have been identified by sociologists of journalism as

- planning;
- gathering;
- selection; and
- presentation. (Golding 1981, p.70)²⁷

Gans (1979) spends most time considering what is involved in story planning and selection, in the sense of both the availability of an event or person and the suitability of it as news, that is, its newsworthiness.

²⁷ Other writers may use different names for these stages, but the division of the process into stages that begin with deciding what will be identified as news and conclude with the broadcast/publication is found throughout the literature.

Ericson, Baranek & Chan (1987) define the stages as Assigning, Reporting and Editing, a division which clearly parallels Golding's. Fishman (1980, p.13) observed journalists' "routine methods for producing news" by which they "transform [the] world into news stories". He divides news production into four stages:

1. detect;
2. interpret them as meaningful events;
3. investigate their factual character; and
4. assemble them into stories (Fishman 1980, p.16).

Again, this scheme clearly parallels the stages of planning, gathering and selection.

Tuchman (1978) speaks of the "rhythm of newsmaking", Schlesinger (1978) of the "news day", an organisational term used by the BBC and therefore by the producers and journalists whom he observed. The news day gets its rhythm not only from a series of deadlines, but also from the sequence or stages of news bulletin creation, which Schlesinger describes under the headings of planning, sub-editing or writing, and transmission (Schlesinger 1978, p.56-64).

This study is less concerned with the *intake* of news, that is, its planning and gathering - what reporters and their supervisors do - and more with its selection (or editing) and presentation, that is, with what producers and newsreaders do. However, this is not a study of "gatekeeping" in the sense that White (1950) and others used it; that is, of the formation of news as a matter of which stories editors and producers select and omit, and why. Rather, it is a study of the formation of *audiences*, in part by the work of editors and producers (but not wholly, since other, policy, issues come into play).

The values that inform decisions at the planning and gathering stages include assumptions about audience behaviour and desires. These

values are also to be found in the selection and presentation stages, and it is in these latter two stages, as the product emerges (in this case the radio news bulletin) that the audience is also most visibly manufactured. That there is a gap in the literature is suggested by Schudson when he asserts that “studies rarely look at the social relations of newswork from an editor’s view ... Most research focuses on the gathering of news rather than on its writing, rewriting and ‘play’ in the press” and that the analysis of news institutions’ “sense of their audience [is] something relatively rare in the sociology of news” (Schudson 1989, pp.272, 276). As this chapter shows, news institutions’ “sense of their audience” is made up of a complex interplay of routine practices and editorial policies.

News production processes (2): The impact of technological change.

The other area of relative neglect in the research that Schudson nominates is the impact on broadcast news production of technological change (Schudson 1989, pp.273, 279). At the time of the fieldwork research, in the early nineties, the ABC was going through a period of rapid and significant technological, economic and organisational changes, some of which are discussed in Chapters Two and Three. Aspects of these changes will be briefly reconsidered now, as a necessary background to understanding how they affected the stages of ABC radio news production and specifically the contribution they made to the different work practices of Metropolitan and Radio National bulletin producers.

Computerisation and digital audio recording gave radio producers direct editorial control not only of news copy (words on the page) but also of the recorded reports or “grabs” (soundbites) and the integration of the two. This meant that producers were connected to and therefore

able to be conscious of the overall sound of their bulletins in a way that hitherto had not been possible in any consistent way, nor had it been considered an essential part of their work. In other words, and really for the first time in the history of ABC Radio news, they became *radio* producers, rather than news journalists who just happened to be working with audio. These changes also had impacts on network policy, which in turn affected news.

As was outlined in the previous chapter, the first major technological change began with the introduction of the computerised information gathering and transmission system, Basys in 1989. It was soon followed by the new digital recording, editing and replay system of D-Cart. Not long after the introduction of D-Cart, in 1992 the national radio newsroom moved, along with the whole of ABC Radio based in Sydney, to a new building, in which advanced and, as it turned out, unstable computer touch-screen technology was installed in the air studios. The impact of technological change on newsroom work practices was profound.

Basys was the first system to be introduced and required months of training for journalists and newsreaders. It completely replaced the telex machines and the overwhelmingly female staff of copy-takers or News Operations Assistants (NOAs), who were employed not only to type stories to the dictation of reporters in the field, via telephone, but also to type and re-type news scripts for the producers. Other NOAs were employed in the telex room; a long room full of inky, clattering machines, pouring out copy from news agencies (wire services) and overseas correspondents. The copy-typists originally used manual and then electric typewriters. Reporters had always typed their stories, but producers rarely typed. If all the NOAs were busy, a sub-editor might have an old manual typewriter on which he (they were mostly “he” in the 1980s, just as the NOAs were mostly “she”) would peck out with two fingers the first version of a story, for a copy-typist to turn into pristine copy for the newsreader, using three blue-ink carbons. The

reader got the original and the producer, technical operator and the news library all ended up with carbon copies of each script.

To visit the Sydney newsroom at the turn of the twentieth century, it was hard to believe the mess and the noise of the ABC's national radio newsroom before the advent of digital technology. Suddenly, from one June day in 1991 to the next, the computers came in, with their silent screens and softly clicking keyboards. The clattering telex machines, black ink, and the rattle of the typewriters, the blue carbon copies, were gone. All but half a dozen NOAs were gone - retrenched, redeployed or retraining - and those that remained were on limited time, wrested from management by the industrial action described in Chapter Three. Producers sat at screens, mute and grimly concentrating as they wrestled with unfamiliar word-processing and function keys to sub-edit a story; and the second-hand on the clock moved inexorably round to the next deadline²⁸.

About eighteen months after Basys had been introduced, ABC Radio in Sydney moved out of the scatter of buildings it occupied throughout the centre of the city, into a purpose-built new headquarters of award-winning architectural design, in the inner city area of Ultimo. The Ultimo building featured a touch-screen studio system, which, as mentioned in Chapter Three, caused considerable industrial upheaval. The touch-screen or Ouija system, as it was called, affected the News department in Sydney relatively little, although its power was never exploited there. This was partly because of some initial technical incompatibilities between Ouija and D-Cart and partly because of workplace agreements that prevented Sydney newsreaders from playing the audio cuts into the news bulletins. D-Cart, the multi-user digital recording, editing and replay system, arrived within a few months of the move to Ultimo. It was another huge change, but one

²⁸ The literature on change management does not speak much of courage, but that is certainly what this writer witnessed as experienced, skilled workers adapted to technological change on a scale greater than any of us had experienced in radio news before.

that - buoyed by their success in working with Basys and distracted by the furore over Oujia - the newswriters assimilated with less emotion, despite the loss of a number of jobs among technical operators (a job classification covered by a different trade union from that of the journalists).

Reporters could do the preliminary editing of their own work on D-Cart at a computer terminal in a small edit booth or at their desk. Because the audio was stored on the server's hard disk, several producers could access the same reporter's voice piece and "actuality" (sound recorded at the scene of the story) simultaneously; and choose to edit it differently if they wished, yet still preserve the original, unharmed. This was dramatically different from the way in which reporters' audio was handled prior to the advent of D-Cart.

Before D-Cart, audio would be recorded in the "lines room" onto a small open reel analogue tape by a technical operator, who would label it with the title given by the reporter, and then deliver it to a tray on the relevant - i.e. national, cables or state - sub-editor's desk in the newsroom. The producers then went through the double-handling of listening to the tape (assuming the reporter and technical operator got it to them in time), deciding where it should be edited, telling the technical operator how they wanted it edited, waiting until that was done and (if time was available) listening to it again to check it sounded all right with the copy to be read. It was a cumbersome system and slowed down the process of getting news to air.

Producers welcomed the control the combination of Basys and D-Cart gave them over the totality - copy and audio - of the stories they were preparing for broadcast:

It's great being able to edit your own tapes, I really like that. I really like not having to rely on someone else to do it, and being able to do it straight away and hearing whether that edit's going

to work ... And you've got full control of how it's going to sound, you've got total responsibility.
 (News producer, personal interview, 1991. Note the use of the word 'tape' to refer to the audio; it continued to be used long after physical audio tape had been replaced by digital audio storage.)

This producer also made the point that prior to the advent of D-Cart, she might have to work on the words for the newsreader - that is, the copy lead-in - without having heard the audio. The reporter might only have had time to tell the producer the proposed opening and closing words and approximate duration: "You couldn't listen to it, you didn't know if it really sat with the copy".

As the producer's comments make clear, along with the technological change came industrial change, to work practices. Each change had to be negotiated with both the journalists' union (the Australian Journalists' Association or AJA) and the ABC Staff Union. When interviewed in September 1991, not long after the move to Ultimo, the recently-appointed Head of News, Colin Tyrus, complained he'd been unable to give as much attention to editorial matters as he would have liked because his time had been taken up dealing with work practices; but he saw the two as related:

[I]f you don't get the work practices right, it's very difficult to get the editorial efficiency. You can have the best reporter in the world but if they can't get their material to air quickly through whatever stumbling blocks there might be ... That is, they've got to hand their tape to someone else to have it edited for them, when they could have probably edited it themselves a lot quicker.
 (Head of News, personal interview, 1991).

The descriptions of news production processes in Tuchman (1978) and Schlesinger (1978) in particular, reflect the limitations then placed by technology on the identification and transformation of events into "news".

The “news day” described by Schlesinger is now twenty-four hours; very different from the 10am to 4pm span of television news observed by Tuchman. Four pm was “the deadline for feeding film into the developer in order to have footage edited by the 6pm telecast” (Tuchman 1978, p.43). Of course, radio news was available round the clock much earlier than television news. Nonetheless, each transition in broadcasting technology, from film to video; from analogue to digital; from landlines to satellites and satellite mobile phones; all have contributed to the transformation of the work of news journalists and of news services. The array of electronic news services now spans the traditional “top of the hour” radio bulletins and the daily and evening broadcast television news bulletins, through 24-hour radio stations and subscription television channels, to online news services which can be refreshed and tailored to individual requirements.

News production processes (3): ABC Radio’s national newsroom.

In 1991, the national newsroom in Sydney for ABC Radio was responsible for providing national bulletins for four networks: Radio National, ABC FM Stereo, the nine Metropolitan stations and almost fifty Regional radio stations (see the Introduction for a description of each of these networks). The fifth, the youth music network, Triple J, produced its own bulletins with journalists - usually young ones - seconded to it from the Sydney newsroom. Radio National broadcast fewer news bulletins than the Metropolitan network – although the network policy changes outline in Chapter Three meant they were catching up – and fewer in the composite bulletin format, especially from 1992, again as a result of policy changes.

The ABC Annual Report 1991-92 shows Metropolitan stations as broadcasting 19 hours per week of News, or 11.3% of its program

output, in both 1990-91 and 1991-92, but Radio National as moving from 12 hours per week in 1990-91 to 17 hours in 1991-92. In other words, Radio National increased its news programming from 7.1% of its total output, to 10.1% over those years (ABC, 1992c, p.94) [see Figure 1 for the 1991 and 1992 weekday bulletin schedules].

1991 schedule	1992 schedule
* 0600 - 0605 (N)	* 0600 - 0605 (N)
* 0630 - 0635 (C)	* 0630 - 0635 (C)
* 0715 - 0730 (N/S)	* 0700 - 0710 (N)
* 0800 - 0805 (N/S)	* 0730 - 0735 (C)
* 0900 - 0903 (N)	* 0800 - 0810 (N)
1000 - 1002 (N)	* 0900 - 0905 (N)
	* 1000 - 1005 (N)
* 1200 - 1205 (N)	* 1100 - 1105 (N)
1230 - 1240 (N/S)	* 1200 - 1205 (N)
1300 - 1310 (C)	* 1230 - 1235 (S)
1330 - 1335 (N)	* 1300 - 1310 (N)
1500 - 1503 (C)	* 1400 - 1405 (N)
	* 1500 - 1505 (N)
	* 1600 - 1605 (N)
1800 - 1810 (C)	* 1700 - 1710 (N)
1900 - 1910 (C)	* 1800 - 1810 (N)
	* 1900 - 1910 (N)
2200 - 2210 (N/S)	2200 - 2210 (N/S)

Figure 1: Radio National Bulletins, Monday-Friday. The weekends included more shared composite bulletins. Key = * Special bulletins prepared only for Radio National – increased workload for the newsrooms in 1992. (N) = National bulletin. (S) = State bulletin. (C) = Composite bulletin. (N/S) = National/State bulletin. The breakfast bulletin used in this study is in bold.

The State desk of the national newsroom was also responsible for providing composite and state news bulletins to the Sydney and Newcastle metropolitan stations and state bulletins to regional New South Wales stations, for both the Regional and Radio National networks. At this stage (1991-92), Radio National had 163 transmitters in non-metropolitan centres around Australia.

The “desk” arrangement, derived from newspaper practice and common in broadcast newsrooms of the time, is one whereby the producer responsible for producing the State bulletins is designated as being “on the State desk”, and similarly the producer “on the National desk”. By 1991 this was in transition to a designation based on the destination in the Basys system, similar to a computer folder, called an Air queue, to which a producer was assigned. So instead of being “on the State desk”, a producer might be called “the METRO1 producer”, after the name of the Air queue in which he or she assembled the State news bulletins for broadcast.

Like all transitions, this one could get messy, as the following attempt by the Chief Producer to explain the new system demonstrates (omissions in this transcript are only of repetitions, hesitations or re-phrasings which might be confusing to read). He begins by referring to the decision to drop the title ‘sub’ (i.e. sub-editor) in favour of ‘producer’.

[W]e adopted some of those things mainly in an effort to get away from the ... word, the term of “subs”, you know, which is a newspaper term. ... [W]e don’t work in the same sort of way that newspaper subs would. And in radio, producers are the people who put programs to air, so I think it’s more in keeping with us, and ... following on from that, with Basys, we adopted air queues for compiling these programs, so the shifts are variously described as Metro One, Metro Two, Metro Three. But it doesn’t absolutely follow that um they’re your designations. It can, it gets a bit mixed up sometimes.

(Chief Producer, personal interview, 1991).

The main national breakfast bulletins, on Radio National at 7.15am (until 1992 when it was moved to 7.00am) and on Metropolitan stations at 7.45am, were regarded as the “flagship” productions of the News department.

While this study is only concerned with the National bulletins, it is important to understand that in the national-plus-state bulletin format, the National bulletin was followed by a single five-minute State

bulletin, separately prepared and read in each State or Territory newsroom; that is, in Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth, Darwin and Hobart. Since the national newsroom was in Sydney, listeners in Sydney heard the same newsreader throughout their main breakfast bulletin, whichever of the two networks they were tuned to (one reader for the Radio National network and another for the Sydney Metropolitan station). Listeners in other States and Territories would hear two readers: the national reader for that network, reading from the national newsroom in Sydney, followed by their local (capital city) reader, simulcasting the State bulletin on both networks. The ten minute bulletins of national news were produced separately: the Metropolitan bulletin by the Chief Producer and the bulletin for Radio National by whoever was assigned as the Radio National producer for the shift.

Planning and gathering

The previous sections have detailed some of the technological and policy changes that affected work practices in ABC Radio news in Sydney over the period of this research. This section describes how news workers not only became much more productive, they also became conscious of being part of radio output, and began to move away from practices inherited from newspaper production.

By 1992 the ABC was claiming to provide “Australia’s most extensive and authoritative independent news service, with more than 70 television and radio newsrooms throughout Australian and overseas ... more than 400 local, regional, State and national news bulletins on radio every day ... Australia’s most extensive network of overseas offices with correspondents in more than 20 locations” (ABC, 1992a). Clearly this was - and is - a substantial news gathering organisation. Planning the news gathering process is necessarily something that takes place at a number of levels. This section is

concerned only with the day-to-day planning of what news would be covered by the national radio newsroom in Sydney, during the period of the research, in the early 1990s. It was a relatively loosely controlled process, relying heavily on established practice, including the hierarchy of the newsroom and the assumption of shared understandings about what constitutes news.

The combination of Basys, a laptop computer with a modem and access to a telephone line, enabled the reporter to file his or her copy directly to the desk of the producer, whether at home or abroad. Equally, D-Cart enabled reporters to file audio directly down a telephone line onto a computer hard disk; again, to be accessed by the producers at their computer workstations. In practice most audio was – and still is – filed into a ‘lines room’, where a technical operator times it and enters it, with its duration, first and last words, into D-Cart. These technological changes did not just reduce the number of technical operational staff and copy-takers needed. The role of the producers was also changed: no longer ‘sub-editors’, confined to working on the words alone, but on each story as a piece of *radio*, and each bulletin as a form of radio programming. In other words, as the Head of News urged his news workers to recognise, they truly became ‘producers’. He saw the reputation of the ABC’s radio news service resting first in its news gathering but also, importantly, in its use of the immediacy of the radio medium:

We’ve got a vast network of regional journalists as well as our international correspondents and I think all we need to do to exploit that is to have an attitude that the news is constantly evolving, living, growing and is by no means a newspaper of the air.

(Head of News, personal interview, 1991)

The point has been made in the previous chapter that ABC Radio news began as “a newspaper of the air” and this approach persisted for many years after the time when the news actually consisted of reading

newspaper copy on air. The Chief Producer in Sydney referred to this legacy of newspaper practice in describing the role of the Chief of Staff in news planning and gathering:

That was very much the old-fashioned structure we borrowed from newspapers. The Chief of Staff decided how to allocate the reporters. It was very much a sort of throw the net out, pull it all in, and um dump the lot, so to speak, on the subs' desk, and they would work out what they were going to use.
(Chief Producer, personal interview, 1995).

According to this interview, the Chief of Staff allocated the reporters on the basis mainly of “the forward diary, and the newspapers”. This would have been for mostly local news, finding its way into the Sydney Metropolitan bulletins, although there would have been some national stories there.

As both Tuchman (1978) and Fishman (1980) documented, news workers can find it difficult to decide whether the classification of a story should be local or national and there may be argument between producers over whose story it is. During the period of field research, when the newsroom in Sydney had the status of national newsroom, the producers of national bulletins could and did make the decision. A national producer described his working relationship with his counterpart on the State desk, when asked how much consultation there was between them:

Producer: Just the necessary consultation in the event that I've taken what looked to be a State story and decided to run it on a national basis and I'd alert them to that.

Interviewer: So you'd say, “I've taken x story so you can't use it”?

Producer: That's right, yeah.
(Personal interview, 1991).

The role and function of the news diary, the forward list of events already “prefabricated” as news (Schudson 1989, p.265), has been extensively analysed in the sociological literature of news production.

The introduction of Basys in Sydney opened up the diary to all Basys users and contributed to the diffusion of editorial responsibility for news planning in the ABC's national newsroom.

Under the Chief of Staff system, unfortunately, the diary, well in Sydney, the news diary was kept almost as a state secret. I mean it was silly. I mean, you would have one line, um "Royal Commission - see paperwork" or something ... One of the first things I did when we lost the Chief of Staff and became EPs [Executive Producers] was to get people to put as much detail as possible into the diary. I don't think we missed any scoops as a result of it.

(Chief Producer, personal interview, 1995).

Basys opened up to producers not only the Diary but all copy. Unlike the very structured processes described by Schlesinger(1978) at the BBC in the 1970s, the national newsroom of ABC Radio, at least in the late eighties, was not holding a daily news planning conference. Because the Radio and Television divisions were quite separate, there was not seen to be a need for consultation with Television; but there was little *formal* consultation between Radio newsrooms. In fact, it was not until the early nineties that a daily telephone hook-up was introduced for the Chief Producers in each of the ABC capital city radio newsrooms around Australia, for the purpose of exploring the day's "prospects".

This lack of consultation might be explained partly by the secrecy with which Chiefs of Staff appear to have allocated reporters to stories, and partly by the difficulty of finding an appropriate time when producers could get together. Australia has between three and five different time zones (not all States have Daylight Saving in summer and one, Tasmania, starts and finishes Daylight Saving at different dates from the other Eastern States). The main explanation appears, however, to lie in the perceived nature of radio as a news medium:

It was tried a number of times, to get a formal conference going but um, radio is a bit - Well, I suppose it's radio's flexibility that um - And you have so many editions of the news that saying "this will be our main story" is a bit misleading. Because although it may be the main story at 7.45, by 9 o'clock, 10 o'clock, 11 o'clock, something else may be. ... There was never really I suppose, a proper time for a conference. Mostly, reporters had to be got out on the road [by] eight or nine-ish, at which time the Chief Sub [-editor] was still involved in bulletin production ... and ... when they were free, well, most of the reporters were on the road.(Chief Producer, Sydney, 1995).

Without any conference between newsroom Chief Producers "it was a matter of just waiting" to see what stories came in from interstate, which might be of interest for the national bulletins. Basys meant that producers had access to reporters' copy as soon as they filed it. Before that, they appear not to have been part of the planning stage of news production, or only minimally, as this exchange makes clear:

Interviewer: ...prior to Basys how could you have managed without some sort of editorial conference; you must have had one surely? You wouldn't have known what was coming.

Chief Producer: Ah, well, no, you just got by without knowing.

Interviewer: Phone calls...?

Chief Producer: Yes, there was the odd phone call. It wasn't a very rigidly controlled structure, ABC News in those days, and um the, I mean, the Chief Sub could maybe know one or two, you would expect, some stories coming. But a lot of stuff would just descend out of the blue.

(Personal interview with Chief Producer, 1995).

This situation was undoubtedly one reason why the Chief Producer talked to the International News Producer (known as the "Cables Sub") regularly each morning after the six o'clock bulletin; to reduce the uncertainty, at least in international news. As one Cables Sub put it:

I show him the [stories] that are in, tell him the ones that are coming in, tell him how I think they'll work, and he tells me what he wants. It saves us both. He's not then hit with stories that he wasn't expecting done up - you know, the same way that I talk to correspondents and tell them what I want, and then I'm not hit with something that I don't know what to do with - he knows what's coming, he's got an idea of how he can construct it, and I know specifically what he wants and don't waste my

time on other things. (International News Producer, personal interview, 1991).

All studies of news work find that news *sources* are central to the work of journalists. “Typically, the journalist seeks a source in the know to say it is so, and has a routine, predictable supply of such sources in established organizations” (Ericson, Baranek & Chan 1989, p.1). Further, the work of journalists is organized in such a way as to make access to and dependence on bureaucratic sources easier, mainly by means of specialist reporters assigned to specific “rounds”. At ABC Radio news these could be full-time or part-time. Which were full-time and which were part-time reflected both economic pressures (the more rounds-people, the fewer general reporters available to cover all the rest of the news) and the hierarchy of news values. The importance assigned by news values to the workings of government and issues of law and order, for example, meant that State parliament and police reporting each provided a full-time round in all the State newsrooms. In contrast, over the years the author spent working in the national newsroom, the role of health reporter, for example, went from full-time to part-time, with the designated journalist spending the rest of her week in general reporting. The number of specialist rounds was trimmed in state newsrooms in response to tightening budgets; so, for example, instead of there being an industrial reporter in each state, there was a single national specialist in industrial relations. There was a single, part-time arts reporter for the whole radio news service. Significantly, he was based not in the national newsroom in Sydney but in Adelaide, also the home of ABC-FM Stereo, the classical music and performance network, and the one considered most likely (apart from Radio National) to have listeners wanting arts news in their bulletins.

Interestingly, given the emphasis the research literature places on (press) journalists’ reliance on rounds or beats, the Chief Producer in the national newsroom had mixed feelings about them:

Rounds is a vexed question. I thought there were some rounds that we had - I mean, obviously some of them were very good and some were just a waste of time. At that time [i.e. the early 90s] we were moving towards some national rounds, such as the industrial round. I mean, to me, it was silly, each State having an industrial reporter and filing silly little stories about stoppages, when the main story had to come from the main centre. [For example] is this a push by metal workers for a wage increase? If so, it's a national story and should be filed that way. Um, but then, you know, we used to have Science reporters, Health reporters. Well, that to me always seemed a waste of time when we had program units who were much better off doing those stories, and that's where we should have got our stories from.

(Chief Producer, personal interview, 1995).

The “program units” to which the Chief Producer referred were the specialist production units in Science, Religion, the Arts and so on, which were mainly based inside Radio National by 1991, although some produced programs for other radio networks as well. There were - and are - significant problems with expecting these units to supply the equivalent of specialist reporting for news, although this was also proposed by the General Manager of Radio National in his submission to the 1993 News and Information Programs (NIP) Review, which was discussed the previous chapter.

The natural outlet of the specialist departments had been the old Radio 2 which developed into Radio National, although Religion, for example, had always made programs for Metropolitan and Regional radio as well. The great majority of this specialist material was – and is – in “long form”, that is, documentary and feature programs. Even magazine-format programs use stories that are considerably longer than the average news story. Moreover, journalists did not make the specialist programs; producers or “broadcasters” did, a quite separate job classification at the ABC. People recruited as broadcasters tended to come from non-journalistic professions and were unlikely to have received either training or experience in daily news journalism. When, as happened from time to time, one of the specialist Radio National

stories was news-breaking, the news producers found it took too much time and trouble to turn it into a news story.

After a period when other network managers complained that expensive people and their expertise were too “locked up” inside Radio National, the specialist program units came under pressure increasingly to create original material, or to allow the re-editing of material originally broadcast on RN, for other networks. This was explicitly the case for NewsRadio, or the Parliamentary and News Network, which came into being in 1993, with a brief to obtain content from other networks.

There was some editorial concern by the specialist spoken word program producers that journalists would edit their programs in a non-sympathetic way, in order to fit them into the rolling news format of NewsRadio. Equally, it took a long time before journalists - producers - in the newsroom would use material generated by the specialist Radio National producers, because they were not producing “news stories”; that is, they were not perceived as creating material that met the requirements of news in either form or content. It was really only some time after Radio National began the breakfast current affairs program *Daybreak*, that specialist material was produced in a way clearly recognisable to newsroom producers as news stories, including on occasions, breaking news. This was made possible because *Daybreak* employed journalists as its producers and had the explicit brief of using the expertise of the broadcaster-producers from the specialist units. However, stories from *Daybreak* remained a very small contribution to daily news bulletins and not equivalent to what might be expected from a “rounds” person or specialist reporter.

Planning and gathering of international news took place within the ABC’s own overseas bureaux, where the senior journalist or head of the bureau, depending on its size, would allocate correspondents to stories. The International Editor was more concerned with deciding

where in the world the organisation should allocate its resources than with which stories the correspondents should cover. This was only sensible; based in Sydney, the International Editor was in no position to know what news was breaking in Tokyo, London or Washington before the correspondents themselves. So direct contact with the international producer (or “cables sub”) grew in importance in deciding what news would be gathered, as well as selected.

Over time, international news producers did not just wait to see what the correspondents would file, but also requested or commissioned specific stories from them:

It became not so much what are you going to give me but, well, no, I don't think we really want that but gee, I would like... And it works pretty well.
(Chief Producer, personal interview, 1995).

As the producer's role became more explicitly that of a producer of stories, so the International News Producer took more initiative in how the story should sound:

[I]n the main, it's commissioning correspondents to do pieces. And tell them how you want them to do it, and when you want them filing. ... If it's a big story...then you start to dictate how you want it in more precise terms. Ordinarily you'd say, okay, do the British riots, do one version just on the riots, do the second version on government reaction, police reaction. If it's a story like the Russian revolution you say, okay, cover the main points and end your piece throwing to someone else.
(International News Producer, personal interview, 1991).

The technique of asking one reporter to “throw” to another enables the producer to “package” several stories, or reports about the same story, together. This substantially affects the sound of a radio news bulletin. Even though the voice of the reporter mediates events, the reporter is still “at the scene” (or sounds as though they are). This reduces the appearance of the mediation of events by the newsreader, and increases the sense to the listener of “actuality”; that is, of hearing

what actually happened or even, in the case of a “live link-up”, what is actually happening.

As becomes evident in Chapter Five, which considers the bulletins in detail, this approach was far more common on the 7.45am Metropolitan bulletin than on the 7.15am Radio National bulletin. One of the reasons for this relatively time-consuming production technique being more commonly used in the 7.45am bulletin was that the Chief Producer, who was responsible for the 7.45am bulletin, took precedence over all other newsroom producers in assigning production duties. The impact on work in the newsroom of these practices is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Selection and Presentation

Selection of news is based in editorial decision-making, which, as has been discussed in detail in Chapter Three, reflects a “news culture” or set of values and assumptions about what people and events constitute news. The news culture of a publishing or broadcasting organisation is in turn a part of the wider organisational culture. In the case of national public broadcasters such as the BBC or the ABC, this organisational culture is very congruent with many traditional journalistic values, of independence and “balance” and freedom from bias, for example.

Presentation of news, in the sense used here, is in effect an aspect of selection, since it is about choosing a range of presentational elements. These include what kind of language is used for news scripts, what other sound is used and in what way, as well as the overall sound of the radio news service. The sound of the news service includes such things as the scheduling and duration of bulletins, the format

(national, state, composite), what kind of newsreading style is used, and how a bulletin is “announced” to listeners, whether with music, headlines, one of these, both or neither. These issues of placement and sound are the connection between news as radio program and the not-news radio programming that surrounds the bulletins. The relationship is important for the status of news, which is “privileged discourse” within the larger discourse of ABC radio.

The following section introduces and explores some specific ways in which the selection and presentation stages of news production occur in ABC Radio news.

The implications for news selection of “upward referral” and the chain of command

Broadcasters both public and commercial are constrained by legal and regulatory requirements that affect their program policies. The existence of such editorial policies is said in sociological studies of news production “to imply that each news organization constructs news in identifiable ways, in terms not only of the selection of stories but also their angling and mode of presentation” (Schlesinger 1978, p.135); in other words, in their framing. The ABC has for some years made its program policies as transparent as possible, publishing regularly revised editions of its Editorial Policies. Since the passing of the Broadcasting Services Act of 1992, this document has included the Code of Practice, which the Act requires all broadcasting organisations to develop.

Under Section 78 of the ABC Act (1983), the power of the Minister responsible for the ABC to tell the corporation what to broadcast is subject to a number of safeguards, which effectively guarantee the ABC’s editorial independence. Indeed Section 78(6) states explicitly that: “Except as provided by this section or as expressly provided by a provision of another Act, the Corporation is not subject to direction by

or on behalf of the Government of the Commonwealth” (quoted from ABC Annual Report, 1997-98, p.113). This freedom from government control is at the heart of the ABC’s editorial policies.

The 1989 edition of the editorial policies states: “Broadcasting is a powerful medium; and the ABC Act is framed to ensure that the national broadcaster does not become merely an instrument of government” (ABC, 1989a, 1.4.3, p.7). In the 1998 edition (*Editorial Policies*, April 1998) paragraph 2.2 is headed “Independence and Accountability”, and a sub-paragraph directly links both of these to the corporation’s news services and the principal editorial standards expected of it:

The fact that the ABC is independent of any private interest or control gives it the responsibility to ensure the quality, comprehensiveness and impartiality of its news, information and other services. An independent news and information service is a guarantee of the public’s right to unrestricted access to information (ABC, 1998b, 2.2.5, p.3).

These policy expectations have not changed in substance over the years of the research. Section 7 of the 1989 editorial policies sets out program standards and the principle of “upward referral”. Paragraph 7.1 and its sub-paragraphs set out “the balance of responsibilities in program matters” between the ABC Board, the Managing Director, other management and staff. Responsibility for observing “the provisions of the ABC Act ... the general law as it relates to broadcasting and the philosophy, standards and policies of the ABC” rests with “staff and producers themselves”. However, the section makes it clear that this responsibility is delegated by the Managing Director, who is the “editor in chief” of the organisation, so that staff are operating “in the context of a system of ‘upward referral’”. This policy means that “it is the responsibility of the individual to judge when to seek higher executive and/or management guidance.” (ABC 1989a, 7.1.2, p.23).

The 1993, 1995 and 1998 editions of the ABC's Editorial Policies all include substantially similar sections on "Editorial responsibility and 'upward referral'". The 1998 edition (published since the restructure of the corporation that replaced the Radio and Television Divisions, ending the media split) includes for the first time an appendix containing "three charts that show the editorial lines of responsibility for National Networks, Regional Services and News and Current Affairs." (ABC 1998b, 3.1.4, p.6). The line of editorial upward referral for radio news producers and reporters travels up through their Executive Producers, through the State Heads of News, to the National and/or International Editor, to the Head of News, then the Head of News and Current Affairs, finally arriving at the "editor in chief", the Managing Director (ABC, 1998b, p.70)[see Appendices].

By contrast, the 1989 Program Standards, which would have been applicable at the time of this study, are much less explicit about the editorial line of referral, providing no diagram and stating only that:

In practice, when a producer or executive producer who has editorial responsibility for a program has doubt about an editorial question or issue of program content, then the matter must be referred to the next most senior person in the editorial chain of command.
(ABC, 1989a, 7.1.3, p.23).

The editorial policies of the ABC do not need to be taken at face value as the only or even the most significant influence, when interpreting the practice of the Corporation's radio news. There are other factors that might be taken into account in analysing the formation of the news. Nonetheless, the effect in the national radio newsroom of the ABC approach to editorial policy was to make the role of Chief Producer (later called Executive Producer) extremely powerful in directing the *selection* and *presentation* of the news. The form this power takes can best be exemplified by describing the assignment of

work by the Chief Producer to the other producers in the national newsroom.

Assignment: editorial work practices in the national newsroom.

Every producer in the national newsroom worked to the Chief Producer. He described his role:

My role is to assess the copy that we have and, in conjunction with the [other producers], work out what we're going to make our main story, what stories we're going to feature, what - in consultation with the Chief-of-Staff - what stories we want to get more information on; also with the emergency roundsmen. And we'll, er, with the other producers, [decide] what stories may need developing or that we can discard.
(Chief Producer. Personal interview, 1991).

In addition, the Chief Producer was specifically responsible for producing the breakfast and early morning national and composite bulletins for the Metropolitan network, including the "flagship" 7.45am bulletin.

A crucial difference between the working week of the Chief Producer and that of all the other producers was that he had negotiated a contract with the ABC. It included working an eight hour day, five day week, Monday to Friday, while other producers, under the ABC staff journalists' agreement, worked a ten hour day, four day week. This focus on the major bulletins of the day (breakfast and morning) over the five days of the working week enabled the Chief Producer to bring a consistency of style to the production of the bulletins for which he was responsible that was not possible when two or more producers rotated across the production schedule.

The five-day week was brought about by a combination of things. But it was in my mind that the four-day week was an unnecessary interruption, and you had to have an overall - I suppose an overview, for the five days of the week. And ... I think it's beneficial not only for the ABC, but it's beneficial for the staff, because they get a consistent line of what's expected of them each day that they're on. Whereas before you would have

three days of one line and then someone else. Not a great change but enough of a shift: ‘Oh no, I don’t like it done that way’ - you know. ... And then I’d come in and say ... ‘No, I don’t like it done that way’. ‘Oh well, the other bloke likes it.’ ‘Well, I don’t like it done like that, do it this way’! And that was a great benefit you know, people know where they are. People like to know where they are.

(Chief Producer. Personal interview, 1991).

As this quotation suggests, the Chief Producer assigned work to other producers, especially the International News Producer, but also to the producer responsible for the 7.15am bulletin on Radio National, who is described hereafter as “the RN/FM producer”, after the Basys air queue he or she worked in.

An RN/FM producer described his relationship to the Chief Producer this way:

I suppose you could think of my role as assistant chief producer in the sense that I work to the chief producer and work on stories specifically for his bulletins. But in addition obviously the role of producing the Radio National seven-fifteen bulletin is a separate one.

(RN/FM producer. Personal interview, 1991).

Specifically, the Chief Producer assigned stories for the 7.45am Metro bulletin to the RN/FM producer, often as early as six o’clock in the morning. The Chief Producer would prepare the 6.00am bulletin for the Metropolitan and Regional networks, and the RN/FM producer would also use this bulletin, with minor adjustments, thus having time to work on stories for the 7.45am:

I rely on [the Chief Producer] to get the ... six o’clock together, I dupe [duplicate] that into my air queue so, unless there’s something glaringly wrong for Radio National, I’ll leave that. ... So I haven’t got a lot of work to do for the six o’clock. I’ve already been assigned stories for the seven forty-five. Now that can sometimes change as the morning goes on, there might be a new story or an update. But I basically know what I’ve got to produce for his seven forty-five, so the six o’clock doesn’t take too much work, and that’s why we do it like that.

(RN/FM producer. Personal interview, 1991).

Sometimes the RN/FM producer would use the stories assigned to him or her by the Chief Producer in the 7.15am Radio National bulletin, if they were ready in time and suitable. Other stories could be finished off once the 7.15am had gone to air.

This makes clear that the RN/FM producer, in addition to having sole responsibility for the “flagship” breakfast bulletin on Radio National at 7.15am, also had to work as assigned by the Chief Producer on any or all of the other morning bulletins, at 6.00am, 7.00am and 7.45am. One RN/FM producer said he preferred to start work on the 7.15am bulletin “by around six-thirty” but that his other duties sometimes made this impossible:

If, for example, I’m sub-editing stories for the seven o’clock Metro bulletin for the Chief Producer, that will hold things up. And also I’m channeling out copy to the rest of the State and around the nation.
(RN/FM Producer. Personal interview, 1991).

This requirement to prepare stories for other bulletins definitely affected this producer’s concentration:

Obviously there’s a requirement for [a story] to be done by seven, that is imposed not by myself. You know, if I’m working towards the seven-fifteen, I put my own sort of mental deadlines on and ... I’m just managing my own time. Whereas had there been the requirement to do a story up by seven, there’s a sort of outside management imposed on my time so ... that kind of constitutes an interference if you like.
(RN/FM Producer. Personal interview, 1991).

Working on other bulletins was not only a source of distraction from producing the 7.15am bulletin, however; it could “have its uses”. The producer became thoroughly familiar with the available news stories and could “do up” a story for the seven o’clock Metro bulletin that would also serve, with a re-written lead-in, for the seven-fifteen bulletin on Radio National.

The other key person to whom the Chief Producer assigned work was the “Cables Sub”, or international news producer. There were several of these, two of whom shared the early morning shift across the week at the time of the field research. While each worked a little differently, there was always some consultation between the Chief Producer and the international news producer, usually immediately after the six o’clock bulletin and sometimes again after the seven o’clock.

The international news stories that the producer set up for the 7.45am Metropolitan bulletin were described by the Chief Producer as “basically” also being those that would be used on the 7.15am on Radio National, “unless there’s a dramatic change”. This was acceptable, since the policy was to avoid a repetition of the same version of a story for bulletins on the same network, but there was no objection to using the same version of a story on different networks. The RN/FM producers also consulted the International News Producer, about what stories they wanted in the 7.15am bulletin. One producer described herself as usually getting her own version of a story for seven-fifteen if it was “a big story”:

[The International News Producer] will do a version for seven o’clock, for the radio Metro composite bulletin, and then ... if it’s a big story, I always get a seven-fifteen version.
(RN/FM Producer. Personal interview, 1991).

This producer went on to describe how, if it was “not such an important overseas day”, she would “take seven o’clock versions and if I don’t think they’re appropriate for seven fifteen, I’ll re-jig the lead”. She could do this on the assumption that the Radio National audience would not have heard any audio that had been fresh for the seven o’clock Metropolitan bulletin.

If the day was a busy one and a lot of material was coming in, the requirements of the Chief Producer and therefore of the 7.45am bulletin, took precedence:

I mean, you can feel it if it's too busy or if they're really flat out and lots of stuff's coming in. Most of the time you can feel it or sense it. So often I'll yell out, oh, shall I take the seven o'clock? Yep, nothing's changed. And you know the Cables Sub'll say, if anything's changed I'll let you know. So I'll put [the seven o'clock version of the story] into my air queue, dink around with it and that'll be okay. But often I find that I'm offered a version for seven-fifteen on very big stories.

(RN/FM Producer. Personal interview, 1991).

It was generally acknowledged by everyone interviewed or questioned in the newsroom that international stories would “get a better run on Radio National”, and that this was a reflection of the assumed *audience* for that network:

I know that both [the International News Producers] respect [the 7.15am bulletin] and realise that they're probably going to get a much better audience for their general overseas news than they will on radio Metro. ... I'm not talking about when there's a big, full-on overseas story, but just the general, ordinary, day-to-day overseas stuff. I think that they agree that they get a better run and, probably, get a *better listenership* on Radio National.

(RN/FM Producer, 1991).

The International News Producer interviewed by the author described herself as working “on a principle of three” in preparing versions of a story: one version for 6.00am, one for 7.00am and the third for the 7.45am - all bulletins on the Metropolitan network, apart from the 6.00am, the national component of which was heard on both the Metropolitan and Radio National networks. She was following the newsroom policy mentioned earlier, that the same version of the same story should not be played on subsequent bulletins on the same network, which meant that no story *had* to be written especially for the 7.15am Radio National bulletin:

When you've got the seven-fifteen, you can use material that you're using at seven am. Because it hasn't been heard on Radio National. That's okay. It's unfortunate that, in most cases, particularly [during the overthrow of the Communist regime in the Soviet Union], everyone was filing too late to get those major pieces into the seven-fifteen. ... [T]hey may file at half-past six, but it's still too late for me to write the seven

o'clock bulletin and then turn around what will be the seven forty-five version in time for seven-fifteen.
(International News Producer, personal interview, 1991).

Only a breaking story would cause this International News Producer to try and update between the seven o'clock (Metro) and seven-fifteen (Radio National) bulletins.

Conclusion

This chapter has applied to ABC Radio news a description of work practices in each of the planning, gathering, selection and presentation stages of production. News producers were strongly affected by the impact of technological change on the selection and presentation stages in particular. From a "newspaper" culture, ABC news moved to a "radio" culture of news production, reflected not merely in changes of title (from "sub-editor" to "producer" and the like) but in producers' control over the editing of both spoken words and other sound. This control is central to the argument that producers were able to manipulate the sound of the bulletin in ways intended to call up particular audiences. However, the hierarchy and work practices of the national newsroom meant the Chief Producer could do this more consistently and therefore more successfully than other producers.

It became apparent through watching and talking to the RN/FM producers (who produced the 7.15am Radio National bulletin) that their work practices meant they simply could not focus on one network and a series of bulletins for that network, in the same way as the Chief Producer could. Not only did they work a four day week - itself an interruption, as the Chief Producer put it, to concentration - but they also had to prepare stories for more than one radio network.

While it is true that the Chief Producer bore the overall editorial responsibility for all the output of the national newsroom during his shift, he did not in practice have to produce bulletins for any but the Metropolitan network (with those bulletins sometimes being simultaneously broadcast to Regional stations). In addition, he had two people (the RN/FM producer and a second journalist designated the 'writer') to assist him. This meant he could produce much more consciously crafted or tailored stories, whether in the form of a "round up" or "briefs" in copy, or in the form of a "package" of stories, including audio pieces. Similarly, the International News Producer worked first with the major Metropolitan bulletins in mind, relying on stories done for the 7.00am bulletin on the Metropolitan network to serve also for the Radio National bulletin at seven- fifteen. So the Radio National flagship bulletin had perforce to run stories written primarily for another network, while each story at 7.45am, as well as the whole bulletin as a "program", was always specifically constructed for the Metropolitan network.

Moreover, the Chief Producer worked with one newsreader - the Chief News Presenter - every day. In contrast, until 1992, when this writer became the Radio National breakfast news presenter for a short period, the RN/FM producer worked with a series of two or three different newsreaders on a roster across the week. This continuity of working with the same newsreader might seem unimportant, but the Chief Producer spoke of the "good working relationship" he developed with the Chief News Presenter. Part of this relationship was the way the Chief Producer wrote the introduction to the main 7.45am bulletin and to individual stories. All newsreaders have different voices, different presentational strengths and weaknesses. One might be able to read dramatic announcements with authority and credibility, while the same text would sound silly in the mouth of another. One will be able to read very fast and still be heard and understood easily by listeners, while another needs to read more slowly and deliberately.

In ABC Radio at this time it was a rare luxury to be writing for and producing, day in and day out, a newsreader whose presentational strengths one could get to know well. Equally, such a newsreader, even if not a trained journalist (and most were not then), could develop a feeling for how this producer liked to write and produce the news bulletins. The next chapter argues that the overall result of the work practices described in this chapter was a more specifically and coherently tailored bulletin for listeners to ABC Metropolitan radio network stations, than its counterpart on Radio National. Another way of putting this is to say that a more coherent *audience* was constructed for Metropolitan than for Radio National bulletins.

While changes to technology and work practices have been shown to be important factors in the manufacture of audiences, as has also been mentioned, producers took their cue as to the kind of audience they were looking for from the sound of the networks on which their bulletins were played. The next chapter looks at the bulletins themselves and the audiences manufactured therein.

Chapter Five

Manufacturing audiences: the news bulletins

[A]udience images vanish like ghosts only if we insist that they must be some sort of descriptive information (e.g. demographic information) stored in the heads of individual mass communicators to be used in the daily activity of message production. ... “[A]udience images” reappear, if we look for them, not in individual daily work routines but in organizational strategies and interactions within the overall arrangements of the institution.
(Ettema & Whitney 1994, p.8).

Introduction

The focus in this chapter is on the texts of the ABC Radio National and Metropolitan breakfast news bulletins, collected over two three-month periods. The news bulletins are taken as examples of what Ettema and Whitney, in the quotation above, call “interactions within the overall arrangements of the institution”; that is, as sites for the construction of audiences. Just how this manufacture takes place is described using framing analysis.

Unlike Ettema and Whitney, the thesis does not dismiss the assumptions of news producers about their audiences as “harmless ghosts in the production machine” (1994, p.8) - that is, as having no effect on what is produced. Rather, the interlinked importance of production practice (including producers’ assumptions) and institutional policy is claimed to be centrally important in constituting the audience. This chapter identifies representations of audiences through the framework of the news bulletins. Framing analysis of the news bulletins collected, supported by evidence from participant observation, interviews and organisational documents (memoranda, policy statements and audience research) are used to locate the

audiences constituted by news practice and institutional policy respectively. This chapter analyses the bulletins and the stories themselves. It must be remembered that news bulletins sit within the other, non-news, programming on each of the networks under study. The audience constructed by the bulletins is thus one that reflects news producers' perceptions of the intended audience for both the news and the non-news programming on each of the networks.

Framing in news practice and news discourse

Several factors guide news producers in their construction of news bulletins. These are the values and working practices of journalism, the producers' ideas about and the requirements of the organisation for which they work, and their beliefs about the audience and its responses. These factors all have the potential to influence how they will frame (or, in the language of the newsroom, "angle") the news. Gitlin (1980, p.7) described framing as a process which "organise[s] the world" for both journalists and audiences, and frames as "persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation". In other words, there are features of news texts that produce "a certain frame of reference" and therefore influence how the audience will read them (Scheufele 1999, p.111). Audiences (news consumers) have culturally shared expectations about 'the news', which they bring to bear along with individually held beliefs, when they listen, watch or read. News texts can thus be viewed "as a system of organized signifying elements that both indicate the advocacy of certain ideas and provide devices to encourage certain kinds of audience processing of the texts" (Pan & Kosicki 1993, p.56).

Another way of analysing this "system of organised signifying elements" is in terms of the audience that the author of the text is trying to bring into being (or manufacture) by the "ideas and devices" in the text. This chapter examines those signifying elements or

symbolic devices as the means by which the audience is represented, using framing. Tulloch (1999) describes a similar undertaking in relation to television soap opera, in which the focus is on “the *discursive frames* that operate in popular television *in attempting to position implied audiences*”(Tulloch 1999, p.152, emphases added).

Framing is conceptualised here as the “master metaphor” for the way in which news stories are treated by news producers and how they assume audiences will read them. Framing is conceived of theoretically in this analysis both as the processes of producing and receiving the news discourse and as inherent to the organisation of the discourse itself (Pan & Kosicki 1993, p.57). As such, it is a concept that bears a close relationship with the journalistic notion of the news ‘angle’, as well as such features of the broadcast news form as themes, or linkages between stories. For journalists/news producers there are nearly always competing frames available; it is often possible to pitch a story one way or choose one angle, rather than another. The bulletin analysis in this chapter demonstrates that there were significant differences between the frames of the Metropolitan and Radio National bulletins, as well as core similarities. Examining the differences reveals differences in the audiences being constructed by each. First, however, is a brief review of the literature on framing and news.

News and framing: a brief review of the literature

As with other media communication, radio news writing and production can be analysed as containing “frames”, which construct issues, structure discourse and develop meanings, for both producers and listeners (Reese 2001, p.7). Reese defines frames as “organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world” (Reese 2001,

p.11). The concept of “framing” has been adapted from Goffman (1974). While Goffman’s subject matter was “the social psychology of face to face interaction”, his use of framing was as “a particularly tangible metaphor ... for the implicit rules that, by ‘defining the situation’, shaped the meanings generated within it” (Berger in Goffman 1986/1974, p.xiii). What is *not* in the frame may be as important in generating meaning as what is included.

The framing metaphor has been put to rich use in the study of news by Iyengar & Kinder (1987), Gamson (1989), Iyengar (1991), Gitlin (1980), McLeod and Detenber (1990), and Reese (2001) among others. Many other studies of news have informed media frame theory, without necessarily using the term framing or defining it explicitly, such as Tuchman (1978), Fishman (1980), and Ericson, Baranek & Chan (1987). Even this short list of researchers – one could add many more – gives some indication of the different methodological paradigms within which the idea of “framing” has been used, from the positivistic and quantitative to the interpretive and qualitative²⁹. The section that follows considers some of the ways in which framing has been conceptualised, and identifies how it is used in this thesis.

Framing and agenda setting, production and reception.

Entman (1993) calls framing “a fractured paradigm”, on the grounds that it is used in disparate ways, without theoretical coherence.

Nonetheless, the concept of framing “consistently offers a way to describe the power of a communicating text” and does so through “*selection and salience*” (Entman1993, pp.51, 52, italics in original), terms that link his use of the concept explicitly to agenda-setting.

Scheufele (1999) argues that framing research lacks an underlying

²⁹ For a discussion of the ways in which framing “bridges the competing tendencies” of quantitative and qualitative approaches to social analysis (and its uses in the media effects paradigm), see Reese 2001, pp.8-9.

“commonly shared theoretical model” then proposes a conceptualisation that, like Entman’s, is “embedded in the larger context of media effects research” (Scheufele 1999, pp. 114, 115). Iyengar (1991) and others (for example, McCombs, Lopez-Escobar and Llamas 2000) have also connected framing to media effects theory, specifically agenda setting. McLeod and Detenber argue that news frames “influence public opinion by making certain aspects of a story more salient, thereby activating specific thoughts and ideas for audience members” (McLeod and Detenber 1999, pp.6, 7). McCombs, Lopez-Escobar and Llamas equate framing and second-level agenda setting, that is, setting the agenda of attributes of objects (people, events, places etc) in the news: “in the language of the second level of agenda setting, to frame is to ascribe defining attributes to an object” (McCombs, Lopez-Escobar and Llamas 2000, p.79).

As McLeod and Detenber point out, “[f]raming effects theory takes framing beyond the construction of news stories to examine what happens when audience members encounter those messages”. Another way of saying this is that framing as construction of news stories is analysis at the site of *production*, while framing effects analysis is more concerned with *reception*. Entman (1993) endeavours to bring together the production analysis and the reception analysis of framing, identifying four *locations* of frames: in the text, the communicator, the receiver and the culture (Entman 1993, p.52). The locations with which this thesis is concerned are the text (the news bulletin) and the communicator (the news producer), and to an extent the culture (at least of ABC news). The analysis goes beyond consideration of how an agenda is set there, however, to identifying the ways in which an audience is made. In other words, it makes an argument that the audience (that is, who is listening and what they are interested in) also is “framed” in the text.

A structural linguistic approach: dimensions and levels.

Pan & Kosicki (1993) consider the sociological and psychological conceptions of framing analysis, presenting it as a tool for the analysis of news discourse. This linguistic approach operationalises the analysis of news texts along *four structural dimensions*: syntactical, script, thematic and rhetorical. Their paper concludes by advocating the pursuit of a longer-term goal: “the potential of integrating research on news production, news discourse and news comprehension and effects” (Pan and Kosicki 1993, pp.70,71). That is, they propose to bring together production and reception analysis through analysis of the roles performed by frames, which Scheufele describes as “schemes for both presenting and comprehending news” (Scheufele 1999, p.106).

Scheufele (1999) proposes two *levels* of framing: “media frames” and “individual frames”, which are very similar to the production and reception sites of analysis respectively. Individual frames are defined using a quotation from Entman (1993, p. 53) as “mentally stored clusters of ideas that guide individuals’ processing of information”. In defining media frames, Scheufele quotes Tuchman: “The news frame organizes everyday reality and the news frame is part and parcel of everyday reality” (Scheufele 1999, p.106). He goes on to say that media frames “also serve as working routines” for journalists, so the motives for choosing one angle or sound grab or word over another can be either intentional or unconscious ones.

Journalists are also audiences, for their own and other journalists’ work, and Scheufele cites previous research, such as that by Fishman (1977, 1980), that suggests “journalists are susceptible to frames set by news media” (Scheufele 1999, p.117). Using Scheufele’s concepts of framing, this study may be said to be more concerned with media frames than with individual ones, insofar as each can be considered in isolation from one another, since it could be argued that media frames

produce the “common sense understanding” (Hall et al. 1981) that informs individual frames.

Thematic analysis.

Fishman (1980) uses not the term “frame” but instead “news theme” and describes it as a “symbolic context” which forms the basis of newsworthiness: “[N]ewswriters make incidents meaningful only as *instances of themes*” (p.536. Italics in original). Tuchman (1978, p.25) uses the metaphor of a news “net” as imposing a “frame upon occurrences”. She identifies different levels of framing, from the organisational or bureaucratic - having to do with the selection and gathering of news - to the linguistic or semiotic, having to do with the language of the news texts. Both these are under consideration here. The latter includes the typifications and forms - such as the “known narrative forms” - upon which journalists rely in order to “reduce the idiosyncrasy of occurrences as news” (Tuchman 1978, pp.99ff.). She concludes with an observation on the dual role of framing, in both news production and reception: “like any other language [news] both frames and accomplishes discourse. It is perception and it guides perception; it reconstitutes the everyday world” (Tuchman 1978, p.107).

Ericson, Baranek and Chan (1987, p.44) locate the news frame around the “angle” on which journalists hope to “hook” both story and audience, and relate framing to the standard categories or genres of news story, or “recognizable frames for understanding” the item being reported (Ericson, Baranek and Chan 1987, p.198). Recent work by Blood et al (2000) exemplifies the continuing validity of this approach, using framing theory in a major study of Australian media coverage of suicide and mental illness. The “frame” (angle or pitch of a story) is assumed to be recognisable and meaningful both to news producers and to their audiences. The framing metaphor denotes it as setting limits, which contain (or constrain) the news. If an event is

outside the frame, it is unlikely to be recognised and constructed as news. Reporters ignore information or “alternative frames” that do not seem readily to fit the frame they have established. The consequence is “partial knowledge: information about some phenomena and not others, and information only about some aspects of phenomena reported” (Ericson, Baranek and Chan 1987, pp.293-295). As a result: “The newsworthy is not that which is new, but that which fits into a familiar frame or into the existing knowledge of news discourse” (Ericson, Baranek and Chan 1987, p.144).

The use of familiar frames thus has an ideological dimension and the proposition that news media thereby act to support the status quo has been proposed in theory and documented in practice (eg. Herman & Chomsky 1988; Gitlin 1980; Shoemaker & Reese 1996; Couldry 1999).

McCombs, Lopez-Escobar & Llamas (2000) distinguish between an *aspects* definition of framing and what they call a *central theme* approach: “In the case of the central theme, our concern is with the central focus of the picture. In the case of aspects, the frame distinguishes between what the picture includes and what is outside” (McCombs, Lopez-Escobar & Llamas 2000, p.79). The difference between the two is a useful one, of where the emphasis is placed in the analysis of framing and its effects.

A conceptual model of framing.

All these ideas about what framing is and how it works share some core propositions in relation to news, which together create the conceptual model of framing the thesis uses:

- framing occurs both as a production process and as a reception process;

- framing is a means of organising events and people (excluding or refusing to recognise some things) into a form called “news”, recognisable as such to both producers and audiences;
- framing provides symbolic devices, or linguistic and structural cues as to the form and meaning of “news” (and therefore how to “read” it);
- framing as a production process arises from the values and practices of news production, from organisational policies and from assumptions about audiences;
- it is possible to analyse or identify news frames by examining news texts and news policy documents, through participant observation and interviews with news producers; and
- thereby to identify representations of the audiences manufactured or called into being by framing – to see the “audience in the frame”.

These core assumptions explain the decision to examine the text of news bulletins and to interview news producers. The interest of this research is in the assumptions held by news producers about audience reception of the news and the creation of (implied) audiences through news frames, rather than in audience reception itself, but the author acknowledges this as also a neglected area for research to address.

Framing devices in news discourse

Pan and Kosicki (1993) draw on the work of Van Dijk in discourse analysis (Van Dijk 1988, 1991) to identify four categories of framing devices or structural dimensions of news discourses: syntactical, script, thematic and rhetorical. These can be applied to either print or broadcast news and thus provide a valuable starting point for the analysis of the ABC radio news bulletins.

The *syntactical* dimension or framing device includes each element of the bulletin structure: headlines, lead stories, episodes, background

material, and closure. In radio news both the headline, if there is one, and the lead sentence (the intro) of a news story may signal its frame. At the level of the whole bulletin, the selection of stories to be headlined and the choice of lead (top) story can signal the frame.

Script structure refers to the storytelling conventions of news scripts, such as that the reporter should cover the ‘who, what, when, where, why and how’ of a story. These storytelling conventions of news also include that each story should appear “to contain complete information of an event with a beginning, a climax and an end” as well as “drama, actions, characters and human emotions”. No wonder that on analysis, news stories often appear “excessively fragmented, personalised, and dramatised” (Pan and Kosicki 1993, p.60). Radio news stories are so short (less than a minute at most) that they are particularly susceptible to this charge. One of the arguments of this chapter is that the news bulletins produced for the 7.45am Metropolitan network of the ABC are more likely to contain stories that are “personalised and dramatised” than those on the 7.15am (or in 1993, 7am) Radio National network, and that this is because the audience for the Metropolitan network is constructed as wanting to be entertained more than that for Radio National³⁰.

Thematic structures is the name Pan and Kosicki use to identify *issue stories* in the news and the way in which such stories explore or report several aspects of single issues, using the usual news sources. Pan and Kosicki describe these structures as having “hypothesis-testing features” in that “evidence” in the form of events, actions and sources is cited in support of whatever it is the story is asserting to be the case (Pan and Kosicki 1993, p.60).

Related to this epistemological aspect of news-making is that thematic framing may imply or state explicitly causal links between events.

³⁰ See also the section on packages or “wraps” in the news bulletins, and Table 6.3.

“[M]any factual reports often make causal representations of a news story implicitly by simply presenting actions in a context in which one may be seen as an antecedent and another as a consequence” (Pan and Kosicki 1993, p.61). Entman (1993) also explains framing as used “in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, *causal interpretation*, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (Entman 1993, p.52. Italics added). Used in this way, thematic framing is a narrative device, one that is used to ‘explain’ things, to signpost for listeners ways of assessing events as well as the connections between them. There are more examples of thematic framing in this sense in the Metropolitan news bulletins than in the Radio National ones and this is because the audience for the former is represented as wanting such structural guidance more.

Rhetorical devices are, as the name suggests, the writing and production techniques that journalists choose in order to have particular emotive or persuasive impact on the audience. Rhetorical devices are defined to include “metaphors, exemplars, catchphrases, depictions and visual images” (Pan and Kosicki 1993, p.61). The bulletin analysis later in this chapter reveals not only more regular use of such devices in the Metropolitan bulletins but also to some degree more imaginative and colourful use of language and of the audio medium. The “facticity” or claim to truth that characterises news (Tuchman 1978) is an aspect of the rhetorical structures of news discourse. The distinction between News and Current Affairs maintained in the organisational structure of the ABC has its rhetorical counterpart in the identification of each kind of program, particularly those features which distinguish News from ‘non-news’ programming (such as the introductory theme and the “top of the clock” placement of bulletins). These are ways of reinforcing rhetorically the “legitimacy and authority” of news stories as factual. These structures in turn enhance the likelihood that all the “frames of news discourse” will be accepted (Pan and Kosicki 1993, p.62).

Taken together, these framing devices are the “rules, conventions, rituals and structures of news discourse” and “tools for newsmakers to use in composing or constructing news discourse” (Pan and Kosicki 1993, pp.56-60). As such, they are the basis from which analysis begins, of the news stories and bulletins collected.

What was collected

Three months of bulletins were collected in 1991 and in 1993. These were for April, May and June of 1991 and May, June and July of 1993. There was no reason for choosing these particular months. Only the weekday (Monday to Friday) bulletins were collected, but in some months a number of the days are missing. The number of bulletins collected in each of the two years came to one hundred and ten, making a total of two hundred and twenty bulletins studied in all. The bulletins collected were the 7.15am (Radio National) and the 7.45am (Metropolitan) ten-minute national bulletins, in 1991; and in 1993 their equivalents, that is the 7.00am ten-minute national bulletin on Radio National, and the ten-minute national bulletin at 7.45am on Metropolitan Radio. See Table 6.1 below for the number of bulletins collected in each month. The number represents the sum of the equal number of Radio National and Metropolitan bulletins so, for example, in April 1991, twenty-six bulletins were collected, meaning there are thirteen 7.15am Radio National bulletins and thirteen 7.45am Metropolitan bulletins.

	1991		1993
April	26	May	30
May	46	June	40
June	38	July	40
Totals	110	Totals	110

Table 6.1: Number of bulletins

The reason for collecting two sets of bulletins two years apart was to permit a comparison between the situation as it pertained while the

author was the morning newsreader for Radio National (prior to and throughout 1991) and the situation after certain policy changes had taken place. The most significant of these for this study was the development of a ‘brief’ for the breakfast bulletin on Radio National and the assignment to it of a particular producer working five days a week. As has already been argued, these policy changes were intended to attract a larger and more age-diverse audience to the Radio National network.

Soon after this happened, the Chief Producer who had produced the 7.45am bulletin on Metropolitan Radio, had moved on, to assist in the development of the new twenty-four hour Parliamentary and News Service (PNN), known as NewsRadio. As has been detailed earlier, there had also been a considerable increase in the output of the newsroom with the implementation not only of the Basys system but also of D-Cart, the digital audio system replacing analogue tapes.

News discourse and frames: Syntactical and thematic devices.

Based on observations of the differences between the two breakfast bulletins during the researcher’s time in the national newsroom, they were compared first on the following attributes:

- whether or not there were headlines;
- the use or not of “teasers” or actuality sound, in the headlines;
- reference to sports or “colour” stories in the headlines;
- whether the lead (first) story of each bulletin was the same or not;
- the number of lead stories that were overseas or foreign news; and
- the use of “packaged” stories or “wraps”

These measures were selected because these are the *syntactical* and *thematic* devices that accomplish framing in radio news. The sections that follow examine first these syntactical and thematic categories, then rhetorical devices, using examples from the news bulletins collected, incorporating field notes and interview material, in order to compare the news bulletins on the Metropolitan network with those on Radio National. The picture that emerges is consistent: the audience for the Metro bulletin is constructed as one that needs to be entertained if it is to stay listening and as one that needs – or would prefer – to have connections and implications, even value judgements, signposted within and across news stories. This audience is entertained with the selection and placement of actuality sound, as well as with the brevity and sequencing of the news items, and the choice of familiar even colloquial language.

The audience for the Radio National bulletin is represented as needing far less contextual information, particularly about current stories, and as less likely to want or need to be led through the meaning or implications of a story. The language of the bulletins is more restrained and actuality is not used in headlines. There is less effort made to sequence stories in a way that will create a ‘flow’ from one to another. These differences are not always manifest; the bulletin analysis, field notes and interviews reflect differences between the two networks’ bulletins that cannot always be picked up just by counting occurrences.

Headlines, teasers and colour stories.

Headlines are an extension of the “call to attention” that is the fanfare-like theme music signifying the start of ABC and most other radio news, the signifying effect of which was discussed in the previous chapter. The role of headlines in radio news production practice is to summarise the key stories, appeal to the listener’s curiosity, and -

ideally - give the audience an incentive to keep listening. The headline is the top of the classic pyramidal structure of news stories: headline, lead, episodes, background and closure – and what Pan and Kosicki call “*the most powerful framing device* of the syntactical structure” (Pan and Kosicki 1993, p.59 – italics added). It is worth recalling here that all the Metropolitan bulletins collected featured headlines, while Radio National omitted them on twelve occasions in 1991 and once in 1993.

The use of actuality (audio from the scene or key players) in headlines is known as a “*teaser*”: a short “grab” of sound, its intended effect is to alert the listener to something unusually important or significant. The teaser relies on being rarely heard in headlines to be most effective. Teasers were used only twice in the fifty-five Metro bulletins collected in 1991 and eight times in the fifty-five collected in 1993, again in the Metropolitan bulletin. No Radio National bulletin headlines featured a teaser, either in the 1991 or in the 1993 bulletins collected.

Reference to a “colour” or lighter story in the headlines can amuse and/or intrigue. Since such stories usually occur quite late in or even at the end of the actual bulletin, a “colour” headline is intended to keep the listener tuned in long enough to hear the full story to which it refers. For example, the headlines for the 7.45am Metro bulletin for Tuesday July 20, 1993 pointed to five stories: three related to federal government policy, a fourth which glossed or linked two international stories, and a fifth which was clearly a “colour” story (in italics):

Renewed speculation this morning on a cut in interest rates...
 Federal Cabinet set to put CSIRO reorganisation plans on hold...
 Feuding continues between the Victorian Premier and the
 Federal Aboriginal Affairs minister over Mabo...
 US President Bill Clinton makes two tough decisions...
And the case of a birth in custody...
 Good Morning, John Logan with ABC News...
Metropolitan bulletin, 7.45am, Tuesday July 20, 1993

Instead of the five headlines on the Metropolitan bulletin, there were just three on Radio National:

The Victorian Government legislating today on the High Court's Mabo ruling...

The first national wage case in two years gets underway...

And the head of the FBI sacked...

RN bulletin, 7.00am, Tuesday July 20, 1993

There is no equivalent to the "colour" headline. However, like those of the Metro bulletin, they show linguistic features characteristic of the headline form: verbs and articles not needed for comprehension are dropped and a kind of verbal shorthand is employed, as in "And the head of the FBI sacked" or "Renewed speculation this morning...". Both use recognisable phrases of Australian journalistic language, such as "set to" (meaning "intending to") or "gets underway" ("begins").

Metro bulletins featured "colour" stories (including sports stories) in the headlines on eight occasions in 1991 and twelve in 1993. Radio National featured no colour stories in headlines except for one sports story in 1991 (Thursday May 2) and again in a story about sport, once in 1993 (Tuesday July 27). On both occasions the story was that Australia had won the deciding game in a series of international Test cricket matches. It is also worth noting that in the May 2 1991 bulletins, Radio National ran the test cricket story last, while Metropolitan radio ran it in the first half of the bulletin at sixth position. This suggests that the Radio National listener is assumed to be generally less interested in sport of any kind than the listener to the Metro stations. The second interview with the Chief Producer provides support for this image of the audience:

I mean, to me, the Radio National listener was um interested in normal you know, economy and those sorts of things; a bit heavier sorts of stories. *And was interested in cricket and tennis. They were about the only sports stories that you would [put in the bulletin].*

(Chief Producer. Personal interview, August 1995).

A look at the rundown (or list of stories) for the bulletins of June 25 1991 provides additional evidence of this. Both bulletins run “hard” news stories at the top of the bulletin, concerning the Australian Labor Party conference, the economy, violence in South Africa, and a price war between domestic airlines. These occupy the first four minutes or so of each bulletin. After that, the Radio National bulletin runs a series of overseas news stories and a social issue story on the so-called “new poor” (or working poor). The Metropolitan bulletin, however, runs a set of three stories about sport, reporting that both Wimbledon and test cricket are disrupted by rain, and that the Melbourne Cup horse race will be run fifty minutes later than usual. The “new poor” story and three of the five overseas stories that appear in the Radio National bulletin are not used at all in the Metropolitan one.

On July 27 1993 the Radio National bulletin ran the cricket test match result relatively high – about four minutes – into the bulletin, but the Metro bulletin of the same day opened dramatically with actuality. Listeners heard a fifteen second grab of the cricket test match commentary, calling the final ball and the resulting win for Australia, played off the back of the news theme, before the newsreader’s voice was heard with the back-announcement:

The ABC’s Neville Oliver calls the final ball of the fourth cricket Test... wrapping up the Ashes for Australia and heralding the resignation of English captain, Graham Gooch...
Metropolitan News, 7.45am, Tuesday July 27, 1993

The Chief Producer’s description of a typical Radio National news listener included: “... interested in tennis and cricket”. This example not only suggests the audience for the Metro bulletin is held to be more interested in test match cricket than the audience for Radio National news, however. It also demonstrates the tendency of the Metro bulletin to use the radio medium in a way designed to appeal directly to the listeners’ imagination and emotions.

A combination of sound recorded live at a scene (actuality) with the voice of a reporter, recorded either in a studio or on location (voicer) as well as the voice of the newsreader, coming from the “acoustic limbo” of the studio (MacFarland 1997: 112) is found in both Radio National and Metro bulletins, as might be expected. However, in this example of the Test match victory, the Metro bulletin employs the techniques of the radio feature: a flashback, taking the listener to the closing moments of the game, bringing to the opening of the news a sense of excitement and triumph, which the audience is clearly assumed to share. There is no equivalent use of audio in any of the Radio National bulletins collected, marking it as a much more traditional public service radio news bulletin, in its avoidance of the techniques of radio entertainment.

The function and importance of headlines is agreed by radio news producers:

I think you've got to tease listeners on a bit in radio, you've got to get them interested ... And it gives people, well, it gives them an idea of what's coming or whether they want to listen or not (Chief Producer, 1991).

I think they sort of send a signal that here is a substantial bulletin of news, and it's of such a length because of its importance, and with that length you just want to signal what's coming up... [Headlines are] a list of contents, a teaser, a bit of an advertisement. You basically want them as an inducement to keep listening... (Radio National news producer, 1991).

Despite this consensus on the significance of headlines, as both information and as an incentive to the audience to stay listening, the Radio National bulletin omitted headlines on twelve occasions in 1991, but once only in 1993 (out of the fifty-five bulletins collected in each year). The reason for the omission in 1993 is unknown. In 1991 observation showed it to be mainly a result of the work practices in the newsroom, which gave the Radio National bulletin producers

many additional responsibilities, the effect of which was sometimes to leave them without the time to prepare the headlines for the 7.15am bulletin (see Chapter Four).

The field notes for June 1991 detail several examples. On Wednesday June 19, the Radio National producer told the researcher: “I ran out of time”; on the following day, “I got distracted and didn’t get around to headlines again today”. When asked, “Distracted by what?”, he replied “Oh, just conversation”, which suggests this particular producer did not see headlines as vital for Radio National bulletins. Again on Wednesday June 26 the same producer said he “didn’t get around to” writing headlines. However, the other justification - or defence - for omitting the headlines apart from lack of time, was given by the bulletin producers as coming from the *audience*. The Radio National bulletin producers argued that listeners to this network did not need headlines to entice them into listening; they already wanted to hear the news. Or to quote one Radio National bulletin producer’s words: “It’s generally accepted that the Metro audience is harder to hold for news” (personal interview, 1991).

Headlines are interesting as much for what they delete or omit of the news story from which they derive, as for what they include (van Dijk 1988, p.39). Framing occurs in both what is omitted and what is selected. A comparison of the headlines for the two bulletins under analysis demonstrates the values that determine what is newsworthy in journalistic practice, but repeatedly bears out the producers’ construction of the Metro news audience as needing to be entertained more than the Radio National audience. It also introduces another difference between the audience constructions, one that is followed up in the section dealing with ‘packages’ or ‘wraps’: the Metropolitan audience tends to be provided with more story-telling links within and between news items.

The following analysis of a single bulletin exemplifies differences that appear over and over again in the bulletins collected for this study.

On Friday April 26 1991, the first headline in both bulletins refers to an industrial relations story, the second to the leadership of the political party in government, another to events in the Soviet Union and the final headline to an incident in test cricket. The Metro bulletin has an additional headline about events in Iraq, a story which the Radio National bulletin chooses as the lead but does not headline, instead using the “But first...” rhetorical device to take listeners to the top story, after headlining other stories to come in the bulletin. In each case, there is agreement as to what ‘the story’ is about, but some telling differences in the frame and framing devices.

7.15am RN

A crisis meeting in Sydney today in an attempt to salvage the nation’s waterfront reform....

The P.M. at the centre of renewed leadership speculation...

An offer of resignation by the the Soviet President overwhelmingly rejected.

And in cricket Viv Richards lashes out at Australia’s coach Bob Simpson...

But first to the middle east....

ABC News headline comparison Friday April 26, 1991

7.45am Metro

Urgent talks on waterfront reform...

Labor leadership wrangling...

A US ultimatum to Iraq...

‘Mihail Gorbachev applies pressure to his critics....

And harsh words after the cricket....

The first thing to notice is how much longer the RN headlines are than the Metro ones. The Metro headlines are “teasers”; they give listeners a sense that *something* – usually presented as urgent or conflictive – is

going on, but not much idea *what* is going on. The Radio National headlines, on the other hand, provide in a few words a clear idea of what ‘the story’ is.

In the Radio National bulletin both the first headline and the lead paragraph of the story to which it refers use the phrases “crisis meeting” and “attempt to salvage”. The Metropolitan *headline* does not include the specific implication that “waterfront reform” is in jeopardy, only that there are “urgent” talks. The *story* that relates to that headline does, however. It refers to the future of reform hingeing on “crucial talks”.

The second headline has “renewed leadership speculation” in the 7.15am bulletin and “leadership wrangling” in the 7.45am news. “Speculation” may occur outside the party, while “wrangling”, as well as being a less formal choice of word, suggests internal conflict, which proves to be a more accurate representation of the stories that follow. In the Radio National bulletin the report leads with a former government minister’s response to the Prime Minister’s accusation that he had been “fuelling leadership speculation”. The Metropolitan bulletin presents the story as a “wrap”; that is, it tells the story so far, opening with the summary introduction: “The Labor leadership issue is doing the rounds again...”. It puts the Prime Minister’s accusation at the top of the story, despite it being the older news, then introduces the riposte by the former government minister. In other words, it uses a chronological narrative, rather than the more traditional inverted pyramid, which would begin, as does the Radio National story, with the freshest information in the story.

The Radio National bulletin does not headline the Iraq story at all, instead using the “But first” device to introduce a series of five stories on the closing stages of the Gulf War, which together make up the first two minutes of the bulletin. The Metro bulletin headlines one of the two stories it runs on the same issue. The first and longer of the

two Metro stories is titled “US ultimatum 3” and has been sub-edited from a story sent by the Washington correspondent, Matt Peacock. An earlier version of Peacock’s story was subbed for the 7.15am Radio National bulletin. The version used at 7.15am is briefer than the Metro version, in part because it contains less information. After twenty-five seconds of copy read, it uses only seven seconds of “actuality” of the US Defence Secretary, whereas the Metro version runs the full audio package submitted by the correspondent, including voicer and actuality, which runs forty-seven seconds.

The Radio National version’s lead paragraph is:

The Gulf allies have set a weekend deadline for Iraq to withdraw its forces from the northern town of Zahko.

7.15am Radio National Friday April 26, 1991

The Metro version, going to air half an hour later, “refreshes” the frame, updating the story with a new angle:

Iraq claims it’s already complied with an American ultimatum to withdraw its security forces from the northern town of Zahko by tomorrow.

7.45am Metropolitan Friday April 26, 1991

The story that follows contains substantively the same information in both versions. The difference is that the earlier version includes only actuality of the US Defence Secretary saying his country is prepared to use force, while the later version has ABC correspondent Matt Peacock reporting that an Iraqi official has claimed that America’s terms have been met. Peacock then throws to the actuality of the US Defence Secretary, with the words:

Earlier, US Defence Secretary Dick Cheney made it clear that the United States is prepared to use force to see the ultimatum met.

7.45am Metropolitan Friday April 26, 1991

The Metropolitan bulletin runs this story at fourth position, three minutes in from the top; it is the lead story in the Radio National bulletin, and is followed by four short copy-only stories from the same

conflict. Listeners do not arrive at the first domestic story, the waterfront reform talks, until the third minute of the bulletin – a precise reversal of the priority assigned by the Metro bulletin.

The Metropolitan bulletin only assigns a high priority to overseas stories if the story has compelling news value or if the available domestic news is comparatively insignificant. Equally, Radio National bulletins are less likely to pull events together into a single narrative, in the form of a “wrap” or “package”. Thus, the five stories run at the top of the 7.15am bulletin on this day, as on others, are linked by being about aspects of the Gulf War, not by any explicit rhetorical or thematic devices of sub-editing.

The very different treatment of this story by the two networks extends to the headlines. Radio National chooses not to headline its lead story at all, while the Metropolitan headline (‘A US ultimatum to Iraq...’) does not refer to what is new in the story (Iraq’s claim it has complied), but to the more dramatic and conflictive aspect (as well as, it could be argued, that which is easier for a newsreader to say succinctly).

The headlines referring to Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev are very different in each bulletin, yet they turn out to refer to the same story. Radio National’s headline is a short statement of the information in the first paragraph of the story, which runs:

Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev has offered his resignation as Communist Party leader.....only to have it overwhelmingly rejected.

7.15am RN Friday April 26, 1991 (Spacing in original)

The Metropolitan headline not only frames the story quite differently but also displays the technique of “teasing” the listener, by offering only a little bit of the story in a way intended to intrigue or pique the listener’s interest:

Mikhail Gorbachev applies pressure to his critics....

7.45am Metropolitan Friday April 26, 1991

The Radio National headline says what has happened. The Metropolitan headline conveys an *interpretation* of what has happened, contained in these words from the correspondent's voice report:

The resignation offer appeared to have been a tactical manoeuvre to force those who have been criticising him to either dump him or back his reforms.

7.45am Metropolitan Friday April 26, 1991

The news frame in the Metropolitan headline and story is thus a more specific direction to the audience as to what meaning to make of the events; and this is a characteristic difference from the Radio National bulletins.

The final headlines, referring to an incident during a test cricket match, also display a typical contrast between Radio National's summary of events and the tease headline in the Metro bulletin. The Metropolitan headlines are characteristically brief and 'punchy' ("And harsh words after the cricket...") compared to the longer Radio National ones. The effect of the Metro approach is a pacier, less distancing and more urgent bulletin, designed to attract and retain an audience created as reluctant to give its attention to news.

Influence of network sound on news discourse

The approach to headlines of the Metropolitan bulletin can be described as more akin to the "tabloid" headline than the more traditional approach of the Radio National bulletin. Not only are the Metro headlines important audience attention-getting devices, they are also shorter, couched in language more likely to use metaphors of conflict and contest. This reflects the programming and the sound surrounding each of the bulletins, and the response of news producer to that sound and the audience it implies.

As has been described earlier, the ABC's Metropolitan network of stations actively competes in each State capital city with any other talk and news-based commercial radio stations. In order to do so, each of them has adopted the flow formats and devices of commercial radio. These include such features as: open line (talkback), short format stories (from two or three minutes through to ten or fifteen, but seldom longer), variety of sounds (jingles, station identification and advertisements for ABC produced books and CDs) and on-air presenters who are expected to be 'personalities' rather than journalists or experts in any field (even if they are also either or both of these).

Radio National, on the other hand, is the home of "serious" specialist talk programs. When the breakfast program called *Daybreak* began in 1990, concessions to flow formatting were introduced, not for the first time but certainly more consistently and some, such as the placement of promotions and station identification, were mandatory for the first time. Aspects of flow formatting were found not only for the duration of the breakfast timeslot (6am to 8.30am) but also in the use of devices such as the presenter 'pointing forward' to what was coming next on the program, or what listeners could expect to hear on the next program.

When a new head of Talk Radio, Mark Collier, was appointed in 2001, from a commercial radio background, he took this process further. He introduced an overlap between the live breakfast and morning programs by having the presenter of the next appear in the final minute or so of the program preceding theirs, to promote what is "coming up after the news". This effectively increased audience share (although not reach) by carrying some of the audience across one time period in which ratings are measured, to the next.

However, at the time of this study, and certainly in the minds of the news personnel who had worked at the ABC in some cases for many years, Radio National was a serious talk-based station, running long-format “block” programs of one hour or half an hour’s duration. Here is how one news producer who worked predominantly on the 7.15am (later 7am) Radio National news bulletin saw the difference between Radio National’s sound at breakfast time and the sound of the Sydney Metropolitan station, 2BL (later 702 ABC Sydney):

I mean, 2BL in the mornings now is very lightweight, I reckon, very Mickey Mouse a lot of the time. You know ... some of the material they use, er, the music, you know, that theme that’s played over and over again ... Whereas you look at Daybreak and it’s much meatier, it’s much more heavyweight, without being too turgid.

(Radio National News Producer, personal interview, September 1991)

A bulletin comparison from May 21, 1991 illustrates clearly how different are the headlines that result from this perception of difference between the networks:

Radio National 0715

Curfews and the army brought in as violence marks Day One of India’s general elections ...

Hopes for a curb on township violence in South Africa ... an agreement on traditional weapons ...

Caution urged on prospects for Australia’s housing industry ...

And ... compensation for West Australian sufferers of medically-acquired AIDS ...

Metropolitan 0745

Death, terrorism and fraud mark the start of polling in India ...

New measures in South Africa against communal violence ...

A cautionary word on recovery in the housing industry ...

And an historic settlement for AIDS sufferers in Western Australia ...

ABC News Tuesday May 21, 1991

The differences between the two bulletins are characteristic: shorter, less descriptive headlines on the Metro bulletin, tending to omit a verb form. A comparison of the first two headlines, about India's general election, particularly illustrates the tendency of the Metro bulletin to employ highly emotive language ("Death, terrorism and fraud ...") in the interests of an attention-grabbing start to the bulletin. One news producer identified this approach as not appropriate for the audience for the Radio National bulletin:

I don't necessarily shy away from colloquialisms or sort of racier type of constructions for Radio National. But I think I just try and avoid an expression or phrase that will divert the listeners' attention, so they will remark upon a phrase or a certain piece of grammar and be distracted from the story because of the way language was used.
(Radio National news producer. Personal interview, September 1991)

Another producer also described the way in which the sound of the networks influenced the way the news bulletins were written, in terms that directly conjure up different audiences.

I just write a little bit differently for Radio National than I would for Metro. I just don't think it's as fizz, pop and whizz bang as er radio Metros should be. ... I don't like the use of, on Radio National, I don't like the use of sentences without verbs. ... There's a lot of that on radio Metro and I don't mind that at all, I think that fits on radio Metro, the *type of audience we have and the type of audience we're trying to attract* so on Radio National I try and write a bit more formally ...
(Radio National News Producer. Personal interview, September 1991)

The audience constructed by the sound of the *network* was taken by ABC Radio news producers as a vital clue in imagining the audience for the news bulletins on that network:

I just base my sort of perceptions and feelings on the basic tone of the overall network. The fact that there are lots of specialist programs [on Radio National], that people would be listening to get information, to be stimulated intellectually whereas with [2]BL I think there is an element of [its being background radio]; you know, popular music is played, announcers have

chatty type talkback, competitions and that sort of thing. So I think that sets the tone for the news on the networks (Radio National News Producer. Personal interview, September 1991).

Lead stories

Choosing which story will come first in the bulletin is an act of selection; and selecting ‘the most important’ is to frame. It appeared to this researcher, as a participant observer that the Radio National bulletin was more likely to give lead story status to foreign news or to social issues (as distinct from federal politics or economics) than the Metropolitan bulletin. That proved to be true, although it was more often the case in 1991 than in 1993. The example cited earlier, of the bulletins of April 26, 1991, illustrates the greater likelihood that the Radio National bulletin would lead with overseas stories. On that occasion, the 7.15am bulletin opened with five short stories on aspects of conflict in the Middle East, while two stories on the same theme did not come until three minutes into the 7.45am Metropolitan bulletin.

In 1991 Radio National led with a foreign news story in twenty-seven of the fifty-five bulletins collected, which represents 49%, while Metro led with foreign news 36% of the time, that is, in twenty out of fifty-five bulletins. In 1993 the percentages were again 49% for Radio National (twenty-seven foreign leads) while they had slightly increased for Metro bulletins, to twenty-two foreign lead stories, or 40%. This may reflect what was happening internationally in the selected months of that year.

Year	Radio National	Metropolitan Radio
1991	49	36
1993	49	40

Table 6.2 Percentage of bulletins with overseas lead story

The Radio National news producers themselves described foreign news stories as more likely to be used on that network, while acknowledging that listeners use radio as essentially a local medium:

Overseas stories do tend to get a better airing [on Radio National], although I do try to resist that. I feel that we're an Australian network broadcasting to an Australian audience and therefore, you know, radio is a very parochial medium and so we should be telling the listener what is of immediate concern. (Radio National news producer. Personal interview, September 1991).

Perhaps more surprisingly, there was never anything like a one hundred percent match between the lead stories of the two bulletins. This was despite the fact that in 1991 they went to air only half an hour apart, meaning that the news value of “freshness” was less likely to be highly significant. This is particularly so, given that ABC News policy only required the “freshening” of bulletins if they were on the same network, so there was no policy reason why the same version of a story could not be run in both bulletins.

In 1991 thirty-seven of the fifty-five bulletins collected from each network had the same lead story (67%). In 1993, by which time the bulletins were forty-five minutes apart, the figure was thirty out of fifty-five, or 54.5%.

Year (Time between the bulletins)	Percentage(number) of same lead stories on RN & Metro breakfast bulletins
1991 (30 minutes)	67 (37/55)
1993 (45 minutes)	54.5 (30/55)

Table 6.3 Percentage (number) of same lead stories on both networks

The smaller number of times the same lead story was chosen when the bulletins were further apart suggests that the news value of “newness” or “freshness” is particularly important in choice of lead story, but also that other factors are at work. These might include the ideological preferences of the individual producer, a phenomenon which Ericson, Baranek and Chan certainly observed (1987, p.329). It is the argument of this thesis that assumptions about the audiences for

news on the two networks have an important effect on producers' choices of what led the bulletins.

A closer look at the bulletins, again supplemented by selected examples from field notes and responses from the interviews, would appear to support this. For example, lead stories generally follow the hierarchy of news values and are "hard" news, that is, reporting events in federal politics, the national economy or industrial relations. Social issues such as poverty or the environment are considered relatively "soft" news stories and are most unlikely to lead flagship news bulletins. They appeared as lead stories only twice in all the 110 Metro bulletins collected, both times in 1991, whereas social issue stories led the Radio National bulletins three times in 1991 and again in 1993; six times in all and three times as often as on Metropolitan radio.

The number of social issue stories may be small but the relatively larger number leading Radio National bulletins indicates another difference between the audiences created. The audience for the Radio National bulletin is constructed as more likely to be interested in, for example, the treatment of Aboriginal people, migrants or the environment. This appears in both 1991 and 1993 bulletins, involving different producers, making it less likely to be a question of the prejudices of the individual producer.

All the producers interviewed were unequivocally of the view that the audience for the two bulletins was different. One producer of the 7.15am Radio National bulletin described being told that a bulletin lead she had written for that network should be re-written as it was more suitable for the Metro network:

And that's when I started really to discern the difference between the two networks and that, no, it wasn't okay to write the same for both of them. ... the lead that I'd used on Radio National was much more Metro, was much more city-oriented, a

more sort of, um, sensational lead and a fleeting lead, rather than something that was more, you know, more weighty and more international and, er, perhaps with much more, er, far-reaching impact. ... I think with Radio National they [executive producers] want weightier leads, weightier stories, things that have much more far-reaching and long-term effects and consequences ... in terms of, um, an audience that actually thinks about what they're hearing, rather than just wanting to get updated on what's happening in the city and what everyone's talking about, you know, just for the day.

(Radio National bulletin producer, September 1991)

This picture of listeners to the Radio National bulletin as wanting “weightier” or “meatier” stories fits with the higher priority given to stories that concern difficult and complex issues for the Australian public, such as the nation’s historic and contemporary relationship with its Aboriginal people.

The bulletins of April 18, 1991 assign very different priority to the report of a national inquiry into violence against Aboriginal people and people of non-English speaking background. The report, which was due to be tabled in the Federal Parliament later that morning, expressed considerable concern at the level and nature of racially motivated violence in Australia, and at the involvement of the police in such violence, either as perpetrators, or by neglect of complaints about such violence. The 7.15am Radio National bulletin uses this as the lead story. The 7.45am Metropolitan bulletin places it fourth, after a lead story about a speech by the Prime Minister to his party’s State branch in Victoria and two stories about economic problems in that State and in South Australia. Traditional high priority hard news stories about Federal politics and economics, lead the Metropolitan bulletin, in other words. The Radio National audience, however, is constructed as willing to accord a higher value to the “racial violence” story.

Another example of the framing of Radio National’s audience as more interested in issues affecting Aboriginal people – and more willing to

listen to their voices – occurs on June 3, 1993. The Radio National 7am bulletin leads with the anticipated Federal Government response to a momentous Federal High Court ruling known as the Mabo decision, recognising the existence of indigenous land rights or native title. This is a weak story with which to lead a bulletin, in news value and news practice terms, because it is a preview, rather than a report. The Metropolitan 7.45am bulletin leads with the latest development in a running story – a more conventional choice of lead – and runs its Mabo response story in 6th position, nearly 4 minutes into the 10-minute bulletin.

The Radio National story uses a grab of an Aboriginal man, Mick Dodson, from the government-funded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), criticising the Government's approach. The Metro bulletin has a story called "ATSIC speaks", but it uses a voice piece from a reporter, paraphrasing another Aboriginal leader, rather than using her actual voice. The same thing happens the following day, June 4 1993, when both Radio National and Metropolitan radio lead with stories arising from the Mabo High Court ruling and the Federal Government's proposed response to it. Both networks run four stories with a total duration of approximately three minutes. However, Radio National's coverage includes two voice grabs from Aboriginal people, while Metro radio uses the voices of two reporters, a government minister and a white medical researcher, but no Aboriginal speakers.

In the June 1993 bulletins, Aboriginal issue stories featured on seven occasions within the first three stories of the Radio National bulletin, as opposed to four such stories in the Metro bulletins. The Radio National stories used Aboriginal speakers on three occasions, the Metro stories only once. Moreover, on June 10 1993, when both bulletins headlined the continuing story of government responses to the Mabo High Court decision, the framing was very different.

7.00am Radio National

The Commonwealth and the States planning their next move over the Mabo ruling ...

Thursday June 10 1993

Radio National's headline frames the Commonwealth government as in a game with the High Court and the "next move" in the game is theirs; a metaphor of competition found quite commonly in news writing. The Metro headline, uncharacteristically long, creates a picture of imminent crisis. Such a picture is consistent with the audience constituted by Metro bulletins as requiring such emotionally heightened appeals if their interest in news is to be retained. It also provides a degree of interpretation of the story that is seldom found in the Radio National bulletins, by telling the audience how "the nation" is feeling (fearful and confused).

The point, that the Radio National audience is constructed as more interested in social issues than the Metro audience, can be made using examples of story order as well as of headlines. On May 3 1991, the 7.15am Radio National bulletin has a lead story following up reaction to an Australian Broadcasting Tribunal decision clearing a commercial radio announcer, well known for his conservative views, of charges of having made racist comments on air. The story includes six seconds of actuality from the chairman of the Ethnic Affairs Commission, Stepan Kerkyasharian. This story does not appear in the 7.45am Metropolitan bulletin until nearly halfway through the bulletin, at four and a half minutes in. It includes a 37-second voicer from the Ethnic Affairs reporter, Evan Williams, but cuts out the actuality of Kerkyasharian. The Metro bulletin uses as its top story a report from the ABC correspondent in South Africa on changes to security laws, announced by the country's president. The Metro bulletin places last a story about the establishment of a paper recycling plant in Victoria,

7.45am Metropolitan

Failure to reach agreement on the handling of the Mabo High Court ruling sparks fear and confusion across the nation ...

whereas Radio National runs the same story relatively high up, at just over three minutes into the bulletin.

On the other hand, both bulletins run an identical story in third place, about one and a half minutes into the bulletin, a story in which a prominent Aboriginal leader is heard criticising the Northern Territory government for deliberately delaying the return of land to Aboriginal people. This concurrence is the exception rather than the rule when it comes to social issue stories, especially those concerning Aboriginal people and issues. A few days later, on May 9 1991, the final report of a Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody was due to be tabled in the Federal Parliament. This was the lead story in the Radio National bulletin at 7.15am. It runs a total of 51 seconds – a long story in radio news terms. There are five paragraphs of copy for the newsreader followed by a 20-second grab of the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, describing the Commission as “the most fundamental inquiry into the position of Aboriginal people in Australia”. In the Metropolitan bulletin at 7.45am, the story runs at third place. The Metro version is subbed down to three paragraphs and includes the same grab of actuality. The story runs 42 seconds in total, nine seconds shorter – which is quite a lot in radio news time – than the Radio National version.

It is worth considering what explanations there might be in news terms for this difference in priority; such as that the story could be considered “tired” by the later bulletin or that there was a more compelling story on offer as lead at 7.45 am. The Radio National top story was slugged “black deaths 0745”, so it had in fact been subbed specifically for the later bulletin, by the Radio National producer, who then chose to use it for his own bulletin. This would not stop it being used at 7.45, since the bulletins are on different networks.

The second explanation, that there was a story with more compelling news value available as a lead, appears more likely. The Metro bulletin's top story is headed "Turkish protests 0745" and begins:

Police in Canberra say protesters have thrown paint bombs in a demonstration against the visiting Turkish President, Turgot Ozal.

7.45am Metropolitan Radio News, Thursday May 9 1991.

This offers the key news values of conflict, consequence, prominence and proximity; and the Radio National bulletin acknowledges this by placing it second. Compare "black deaths 0745", the lead story in this bulletin, which begins:

Aboriginal Affairs Minister Robert Tickner says he's confident all states and territories will work together to implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody

7.15am Radio National News, Thursday May 9 1991

A positive statement of national co-operation from the Minister is dull stuff by comparison with paint bombs and ethnic conflict in Canberra..

The bulletins of Tuesday April 30 1991 provide a final example of how differently constructed on the two networks is audience interest in social issues; in this case, the environment. Interestingly, this is also an example of the Metropolitan bulletin placing an overseas story higher than Radio National, which was unusual.

The 7.15am Radio National bulletin opens with three stories running almost two minutes in total, about a proposed ban on mining in the Antarctic. The 7.45am Metropolitan bulletin leads with two stories on Kurdish refugees, and runs a single story on the Antarctic Treaty, in fourth position, at about three minutes into the bulletin. The very different positioning of the same story cannot simply be explained with reference to the news value of "freshness", since two of the three stories about the Kurdish refugees were also available for the earlier

bulletin, but were run much lower down. Rather, the Kurdish refugee story was the more current; it was a story that had been leading the news on and off for weeks, in the aftermath of the Gulf war.

Throughout April 1991, the Radio National and Metropolitan breakfast bulletins were in agreement about the placement of the refugee Kurds story more often than they differed, so this example should be viewed in that light and in relation to examples cited from other months as well.

The pattern that emerges, however, is one of Metropolitan bulletins placing a higher priority on those news values, such as conflict, impact, prominence and proximity, which act to entertain as well as inform. Radio National, in contrast, consistently prioritises issues for their social impact, rather than their appeal to entertaining news values or to the ear. Taken with the other “devices” explored here, such as packages or “wraps” in the section that follows, the effect is to construct different audiences for the two bulletins.

Packages or wraps

These terms - package or wrap - are applied wherever different stories are “packaged” together as related to one another, or whenever different aspects of the same news story are presented as a “wrap”, indicating the definitive version of the story to date. Both are the products of sub-editing and done by or at the request of the bulletin producer, although the foreign editor (the “cables sub”) may make a direct request to an overseas correspondent for a “wrap” or package.

There are two effects of these editing techniques for listeners. In the first instance, the story is often more attention-getting or interesting to listen to, since it will often contain several different short sound pieces (grabs or, if it is the journalist voicing his or her own report, voicers) of different people speaking or sound from the scene of an event (actuality). It may also offer some narrative devices, such as setting

up an enigma (the ‘tease’ lead) and a resolution or, of more significance in the context of news, relationships of cause and effect. The *meaning* of the story is to some extent packaged, by virtue of presenting two stories as related in some way (including causally). This is that aspect of the *thematic* dimension of framing referred to earlier, of making links between stories.

Ericson, Baranek and Chan (1987), studying television news, found the package or wrap was central to bulletin construction. Editors looked for connections between stories, and this of course affected which stories were selected and which ignored, since “potential items were often judged in terms of how they would fit into a ‘pack’ or ‘wrap’”. A theme was found so that items could be linked in a “flow”. “The term for linked stories was a ‘wrap’; for example, doing a ‘murder wrap’ was to *package* the present murder item reported to connected items and murders with similar *modus operandi* in the past” (Ericson, Baranek and Chan 1987, p.198. Italics in the original).

The definition of a package or wrap is very similar in the context of ABC Radio news. If a distinction is to be made between the “package” and the “wrap” it is this: a “wrap” is the more commonly-used technique and may be defined as the latest definitive version of the story, with a summarising and updating function. The “package” on the other hand, is a more self-conscious technique, used deliberately for effect. It is, therefore, more explicitly a framing device.

It is editors, that is, bulletin producers, who look for linkages between items and ways of making the bulletin flow:

The ideal bulletin would start at the top of a story that would flow into the next and the next and the next and the next and the next. And instead of ten minutes from here, there and everywhere, you get a bulletin that flows beautifully through. (Chief Producer. Personal interview, 1991).

The preparation of a package in radio can be simple or quite elaborate. A simple example is the headline from the 7.45am Metro bulletin of June 20 1993, quoted earlier: “US President Bill Clinton makes two tough decisions...”. In the bulletin itself the story combines in one report two presidential decisions: Clinton’s so-called “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy on homosexuals in the US Military, and the sacking of the head of the FBI. The correspondent himself describes the two incidents as “unrelated”, in his “voicer” (recorded report), but the copy lead, written by a producer, connects them by means of the “two tough decisions” phrase:

US President Bill Clinton has made two tough decisions today -- ordering the American armed services to allow homosexuals to serve in the military, and sacking the head of the FBI.
7.45am Metropolitan bulletin, Tuesday July 20, 1993.

The same story was also included in the 7.00am Radio National bulletin for that day. However, it not only dealt with the two incidents in more conventional news order – starting with the most recent decision, the sacking of the FBI head, then the earlier decision regarding homosexuals in the military – but it also did not make any explicit connection between the two. The copy began:

US President Bill Clinton has fired the head of the FBI -- America’s federal police chief.
7.00am Radio National bulletin, Tuesday July 20, 1993.

The final paragraph then read:

It came in a separate development soon after Mr Clinton ordered the U.S. military to allow homosexuals to serve in the armed forces ...

7.00am Radio National bulletin, Tuesday July 20, 1993.

In other words, the two incidents were not written as a “wrap” for the Radio National bulletin, but they were for the Metropolitan bulletin, and this was a pattern of difference between the two bulletins.

At its most elaborate, a package may involve writing the introductions or lead-ins to two or more audio reports in such a way that the stories can be run “back to back”. This may even involve arranging with the correspondent for him or her to “throw” (verbally hand over) to the next story in their “voicer” or voice piece. In such cases, up to three minutes of pre-packaged material may go to air without the newsreader saying a word. Apart from the effect this has on the sound of the news, the risk taken by a news producer in using this technique is if anything goes technically wrong. In that event, the producer of the bulletin is faced with a three-minute “hole” in the bulletin and, potentially, no story that can be run without also running the others, because of the way the lead-ins have been written and each reporter has “thrown” to the next. However, as a device for ensuring the desirable “flow”, it is extremely effective.

Of the fifty-five flagship breakfast bulletins collected in 1991 from each of the Metropolitan and Radio National networks, stories were slugged (titled) as “wrap” fifteen times on Radio National. Of these, four were the lead story in the bulletin. Stories had “wrap” in the slug-line twenty-four times in the Metropolitan bulletins, of which nine were the lead story. This demonstrates that the Metropolitan bulletins were significantly more likely to contain packaged stories than were the Radio National bulletins. Packages were used in almost 44% of the Metropolitan bulletins compared to 27% on Radio National. In addition to those stories actually labelled “wrap”, the Metropolitan bulletins were more likely than the Radio National ones to be characterised by linguistic features that served to make connections between stories for the listener.

Year	Radio National	Metropolitan Radio
1991	27	44
1993	25	36

Table 6.3 Percentage of bulletins using “packages” or “wraps”.

The breakfast bulletins of Monday May 13 1991 provide a case study of the use of packaging. Both the Radio National and the Metropolitan breakfast bulletins ran lead stories with the word “wrap” in the title. The 7.15am bulletin lead story is called “job summit wrap” and fits the summing-up or ‘story so far’ model, in that it reports “initial support from Queensland for a South Australian proposal to hold a national job summit” in the lead paragraph. It then backgrounds the proposal, and concludes with the actuality of the Queensland Premier expressing support for it. This story is followed by one called “anz predicts”, which was marked by the producer as “to follow JOB SUMMIT WRAP” (capitals and lower case as in original). The D-Carts (audio inserts) used were an eighteen-second grab of actuality from the Queensland Premier in the first story, and a voicer of thirty-four seconds from the Finance Reporter for the second. No explicit connection is made between the first and second stories although there is a thematic link. The last words of the Queensland Premier refer to trying “to turn around this employment situation” and the second story’s lead sentence also refers to (un)employment: “Fears of further job losses are backed up by the latest forecasts from the ANZ bank”. So there are two stories, one after the other at the top of the bulletin, linked only by being on the same broad theme, of (un)employment.

The treatment of essentially the same two stories, plus one more, on the Metropolitan network at 7.45am, served to guide listeners from one story to the next, creating connections between each. In order to make this clearer the table below sets out the story order and titles for each of the bulletins.

RadioNational 7.15am

No headlines

1. ‘job summit wrap’:
First words (newsreader): ‘There’s

Metropolitan 7.45am

Headline: ‘More economic pointers
...’

1. ‘eco [economy] wrap lead
0745’: First words (newsreader –

been initial support from Queensland for a South Australian proposal to hold a national job summit' ...

Last words (actuality Queensland Premier): 'We certainly need some changes in terms of policy at the national level I think to try and turn around this employment situation'.

Duration: 43 seconds

2. 'anz predicts to follow JOB SUMMIT WRAP':

First words (newsreader): 'Fears of further job losses are backed up by the latest forecasts from the ANZ bank.'

Last words (reporter): 'But it says the up-side of all this is falling interest rates. The bank believes they'd fall by another one per cent or so as the year proceeds'

Duration: 46 seconds

Monday May 13, 1991

The first story in the Metropolitan bulletin is slugged (titled) "eco wrap lead 0745": "eco" short for economy, and the rest of the title specifying the bulletin for which it was prepared and its place in that bulletin. The story takes the form of a five line copy read and the same thirty-four second voice report from the Finance Reporter as was used in the Radio National bulletin's second story (the one called "anz predicts"). This is then followed in the Metro bulletin by two further stories, "job summit 2", which is marked by the bulletin producer "to follow ECO WRAP", and "eco misery", which is marked "to follow JOB SUMMIT 2" (capital letters in original).

headline style): 'Another pointer to economic recovery before the year's end ... as momentum gathers for a national job summit ... and the Coalition releases its Misery Index'

Last words (reporter): 'But it says the up-side of all this is falling interest rates.. The bank believes they'd fall by another one per cent or so as the year proceeds'.

Duration: 50 seconds

2. 'job summit 2 0745':

First words (newsreader): 'The prospect of growing jobless numbers is fuelling moves for a national employment summit'

Last words (actuality Queensland Premier): 'We certainly need some changes in terms of policy at the national level I think to try and turn around this employment situation'

Duration: 38 seconds.

3. 'eco misery':

First words (newsreader): 'But the Federal Opposition says any turnaround will be long and painful' ...

Last words (actuality shadow treasurer): '...turn this country around'. Duration: 35 seconds.

The first key difference between the Metro treatment of the stories and that of Radio National is that the Metropolitan bulletin's lead story begins with an introduction that is like a second set of headlines:

Another pointer to economic recovery before the year's end ...

... as momentum gathers for a national job summit ... and the Coalition releases its Misery Index.

Finance Reporter, KATRINA BYERS, says ANZ Bank forecasts back up Government predictions of an economic turnaround before the year's out.

7.45am Metropolitan bulletin, Monday May 13, 1991

The voicer follows.

Each of the three stories on the economy, in the Metropolitan bulletin, is thus referred to in the lead to the first, serving to package them together. The second story is on the "momentum ... for a national job summit" and uses the same grab of actuality from the Queensland Premier as the Radio National bulletin used to open with. The final story in the sequence picks up off the final words spoken by the Queensland Premier. The actuality ends: "We certainly need some changes in terms of policy at the national level I think to try and turn around this employment situation". The next story ("eco misery") echoes the words "turn around" in its introduction: "But the Federal Opposition says any turnaround will be long and painful ... even under a Coalition government".

This linking or packaging of stories to create connections and hence a flow from one to the next is characteristic of the Metropolitan bulletin, and less commonly used in the Radio National bulletin. Packaging stories on the Metro bulletin may employ either or both of the techniques used in this example: "headlines" as an introduction to the first story, of a form that groups it with the stories that are to follow, or an aural link, echoing a word at the end of one story in the introduction to the next.

This linking of one story to the next is a function of sub-editing, of the producer's role, and this can be demonstrated by looking at the final story in the Metro sequence, titled "eco misery". As originally filed overnight by the reporter, it was called "A.M. ECO MISERY" (upper case in original) - to indicate that it was to be used for the morning bulletins - and was introduced as a discrete story:

The Federal Opposition says Australia is now in the grip of the recession and things will be tough for years to come regardless of what Government is in power.

Overnight copy for "A.M. ECO MISERY" story for May 13 1991.

The 7.15am Radio National bulletin does not use this story at all, despite the fact that the original version was available from 5am. However, the original version was very long (1:05 minutes). The version run at 7.45am ("eco misery") has not only been re-written to provide a package with the other stories about the state of the economy and unemployment, but has also been cut from over a minute to 35 seconds, by editing down both tape and copy. Work practices in the newsroom would have given the Radio National producer no time to re-work the story in the way the Metropolitan producer, the Chief Producer, was able to do. This factor is undoubtedly one reason packages feature more regularly on the 7.45am Metro bulletin than in the 7.15am Radio National one. The effect is still to construct an audience for Metro Radio that is being led through news issues, by means of narrative devices.

To cite another example, on Wednesday April 24 1991, both the 7.15am and the 7.45am bulletins ran a group of stories about conflict in the Middle East. The way in which each network deals with these stories illustrates not only the fragmented nature of news, its absence of context, but also the different constructions of audience. The following deals first with the later bulletin, the 7.45am Metropolitan bulletin, then contrasts it with the 7.15am Radio National bulletin.

The introduction to the first story in the Metropolitan sequence, called “0745 foreign iraq”, uses something close to the “headline” format to set up a narrative by contrasting events in the north of Iraq with those in the south of the country:

Protection for refugees in northern Iraq is being stepped up - - but those in the south may soon be without any buffer between them and Saddam Hussein’s agents.

1st story, 7.45am Metropolitan news, Wednesday April 24 1991.

The second story, “battlegroup 745”, begins:

John Shovelan reports the U-S is also strengthening its naval presence in the Mediterranean fearing possible attacks on Kurdish refugee camps being constructed in Iraqi Kurdistan.

2nd story, 7.45am Metropolitan news, Wednesday April 24 1991.

The third story, “shi-ites left”, begins:

But as security is stepped up in the Iraq-Turkey border area ... the United States and allied forces are about to hand over to the United Nations in the south.

UN troops today began taking over in the demilitarised zone on the Kuwaiti border .. and they’ve admitted they won’t be able to protect refugees remaining in the south.

3rd story, 7.45am Metropolitan news, Wednesday April 24 1991.

The story pertaining to the south of Iraq is thus not heard until over a minute after it has first been referred to in the introduction to the first story, after two others concerning events in the north. However, it continues the narrative about refugees: that some (in the north) are gaining greater protection while others (in the south) can not be protected. Despite the title (“shi-ites left”) there is no reference to Iraqi Shi-ite Muslims in the story itself, which contributes to the reduction of this complex story of religious and national conflicts to one about ‘refugees’, a familiar narrative for Western news audiences. This simplification is characteristic of news frames and of broadcast news in particular.

After these three stories about the plight of Iraqi refugees, the scene has been set for the final story, called “austcare-iran 4”, in which a worker for the Australian aid agency Austcare says Iran is not receiving its fair share of international aid to the refugees. Iran is the country to which a majority of the Kurdish refugees has fled, from neighbouring Iraq.

An Australian aid agency worker says Iran is not receiving a fair share of the international aid for Iraqi refugees.

Ross Munroe - of Austcare - has been looking at the conditions of the Kurdish refugees along Iran’s northwestern border.

4th story, 7.45am Metropolitan news, Wednesday April 24 1991.

It is impossible from these stories alone to understand the reasons why Kurds are fleeing Iraq. Nonetheless, from four separate reports a connected thematic story about refugees in the Middle East has been created, not only by the sequential placement but also through the use of compass directions: north, south, northwest.

Now a comparison with the 7.15am Radio National bulletin. It runs three stories about the Middle East, rather than the four used on the Metro bulletin. The 7.15am headlines set up a connection, but using quite a different news frame.

CANBERRA urged to do more for refugees in IRAN ... as more Allied troops move in to boost the relief effort in IRAQ ...
(Capitals as in original)

Headlines, 7.15am Radio National news, Wednesday April 24 1991

The first story run in the Radio National bulletin is called “austcare-iran 2” (the ‘2’ indicating that it is an earlier version of the same story run as “austcare-iran 4” in the Metro bulletin half an hour later). The Radio National version frames this first story as a criticism of the Australian government.

An Australian aid worker in Teheran says Canberra should urgently give aid to Iran to deal with the Iraqi refugee crisis.

Greg Wilesmith reports Ross Munroe of Austcare has visited towns on the Iran-Iraq border.

1st story, 7.15am Radio National news, Wednesday April 24 1991

This is quite different from the version run at 7.45am, which did not ascribe responsibility to any nation in particular. The actuality of the aid worker has been edited in the Radio National version to mention Australia, while in the Metropolitan version it does not:

austcare-iran 2 (Radio National)

Actuality Monroe:

‘This is the biggest refugee crisis that has occurred for at least twenty years. I really do think that the Australian government should be doing a lot more’

austcare-iran 4 (Metropolitan)

Actuality Monroe:

‘Iran is actually receiving about two thirds of the total number of Kurds that are becoming refugees. And the amount of aid that is coming in is nowhere near commensurate with the demands that are placed upon them. The Iranians at this stage are getting a pretty bad deal.’

Wednesday April 24, 1991

Presumably Monroe said both things but each bulletin has chosen a different angle. The reasons are not known, although the earlier, Radio National version uses the news values of proximity and conflict, in that it brings this distant story of human misery closer to home through reporting a criticism of Australia’s level of assistance. This angle, because of these primary news values, justifies running it first of the three.

The Metropolitan bulletin chose to use a fresher story to lead its coverage of the narrative about refugees, so there was little point in introducing the angle critical of Australia in its version of the aid story, which it ran last in the package.

The second story in the Radio National bulletin is called “0700 foreign Iraq” and is a report from the ABC’s Washington correspondent. It begins:

Western troops are again being dispatched to Iraq ... but Washington is playing down any tensions in the north. American, British and French forces are already at work setting up and protecting camps for Kurdish refugees near the Turkish border.

2nd story, 7.15am Radio National news, Wednesday April 24 1991

Unlike the Metro version, this makes no mention of the south of Iraq. Instead, it is followed by a copy only story, called “iraq – un”, taken from the BBC and Agence France Presse. This is the same story as the Metro bulletin ran third; but the frame is different. The Metro version not only connects the story to the ones that preceded this, but also frames it in the lead paragraph as a story about the United Nations troops being *unable* to protect refugees in the south:

But as security is stepped up in the Iraq-Turkey border area .. the United States and allied forces are about to hand over to the United Nations in the south.

U-N troops today begin taking over in the demilitarised zone on the Kuwaiti border .. and they’ve admitted they *won’t be able* to protect refugees remaining in the south.

One U-N officer - Captain Gavin Spink - has confirmed the force *has no right* to intervene if Saddam Hussein’s agents arrest Iraqis.

‘Shi-ites left’, 3rd story, 7.45am Metropolitan news, Wednesday April 24, 1991. Italics added.

In the second paragraph, the words “has no right” reveal that UN troops are constrained by lack of authorisation, but a listener could easily miss this. The lead paragraph conveys the vulnerability of the refugees, but not the reason for it. Compare this with the Radio National version, which does not make any reference to the earlier stories and makes it clear in the first paragraph of the lead that the

United Nation is *not authorised* to protect refugees, rather than *unable* to:

An officer with the United Nations force about to move into southern Iraq, has confirmed that it isn't authorised to protect local Iraqis from Saddam Hussein's security agents.

The U-N peacekeeping force will replace American and allied troops in the demilitarised zone between Iraq and Kuwait.

'iraq-un', 3rd story, 7.15am Radio National news, Wednesday April 24, 1991

Any connection between the three Middle East stories on Radio National would have to be made by the listener, without the prompts supplied by the Metropolitan bulletin, which makes explicit connections between the four stories it runs, packaging them as an overarching narrative about refugees. This kind of packaging of stories is yet another example of the creation by the Metropolitan bulletin of an audience that requires guidance. It illustrates the way in which such a construction constrains the interpretations available to the audience.

Freshening and framing.

Compared to a newspaper story, the frame of a radio news story is not fixed but transient, quite possibly changing from bulletin to bulletin.

Radio news is instant and constantly moving. There can be no "edition" approach of waiting for deadlines to draw near before filing. Updating and freshening are essential. ... At the end of a shift it should be possible to look back at a cumulative effort on a story. You may have started your shift giving the first break of the story with just a few lines for the next Hourly [short bulletin]. Then you'll develop it with a grab (if not already) for the next Hourly. Certainly you'll update anything that's moved. For the first longer bulletin you'll be presenting an intro/voicer/grab package. The voicer might hold but with further update pars to freshen up the intro or to be used after the voicer.

ABC Radio News Presentation Guide, n.d. but 1989 or 1990, pp.1,4.

Freshening and updating the story may mean changing the frame, selecting a new or different angle on the story. Comparison of the 7am/7.15am Radio National and 7.45am Metropolitan breakfast bulletins reveals that the Metro bulletin may take a headline or lead sentence from the earlier one on the other network, as a way of freshening up a story that has been run in the 7am Metro bulletin. This borrowing may have the effect of changing the frame of the Metro story between the headline and the story itself, producing an apparent inconsistency in the argument that has been made in this chapter for distinct “audiencing frames” (Tulloch 1999, p152) between Radio National and Metropolitan bulletins. In fact, as has been discussed already, this example also demonstrates that the work practices of the national radio newsroom in Sydney could undermine the construction of different audiences for each bulletin.

For example, on April 17 1991, both bulletins ran a story about a decision made the previous day by the Industrial Relations Commission, to award metal workers a two-and-a-half percent wage increase, linked to productivity agreements. The story headline in the earlier bulletin, on Radio National at 7.15am read:

Union leaders to face their members after an unpopular national wage decision ...

Headline, 7.15am Radio National news, April 17 1991

The story is clearly signposted in terms of a problem, of confrontation and conflict. The headline used for the same story at 7.45am on the Metropolitan stations was:

Union leaders going back to the workshop floor after the wage decision ...

Headline, 7.45am Metropolitan news, April 17 1991

This is much more neutral in tone. However, the relation between the frame of the headline and the framing of the story itself is different in each of the two bulletins.

On Radio National, the story, written as copy for the newsreader plus an 11-second grab of actuality, continues to be framed as conflictive.

Metal Workers national secretary, George Campbell, says yesterday's national wage case decision has left him with an impossible mission in going back to members.

The decision has effectively annulled a wages agreement struck last year after a nationwide industrial campaign.

The metal unions were spearheading a campaign for a 4-point-5 productivity increase, a 12-dollar across-the-board rise and a 3-percent increase in superannuation contributions.

But the Industrial Relations Commission yesterday awarded a 2-point-5 percent pay rise ... linked to productivity gains.

Mr Campbell says the wages question will now have to be referred back to the union's rank and file.

CART: There's no way in the world am I going to convince metal workers that they should break down all the old demarcation barriers, do what the boss wants them to do, for an extra ten dollars a week. It is just not on. DUR: 0:11

ACTU President, MARTIN FERGUSON, has already said the ACTU will be forced to re-think its commitment to the wages system.

7.15am Radio National news, April 17 1991 (*Bold and capitals as in original*)

On Metro stations the *story* begins using the same words as were used in the Radio National *headline*:

Union leaders are preparing to face their membership ... after yesterday's unpopular National Wage Case decision.

7.45am Metropolitan news, April 17 1991

Thus the frame is set here, in the Metro story, as one of confrontation and conflict, which it was not overtly in the headline: "Union leaders going back to the workshop floor after the wage decision ...". Like the Radio National version, the Metro story is also written in the format of a copy read plus the same grab of actuality, but with the information given in a different order from the Radio National bulletin's version.

Both versions were sub-edited by one person, the Radio National bulletin producer. As explained in earlier chapters, the RN producer was expected to prepare material for the 7.45am Metropolitan bulletin as well as be responsible for the 7.15am on RN. The version used for the 7.45am bulletin is slugged as “metalwage 2” and the copy indicates it is a rewrite of the 7.00am version (“rw 0700” appears at the top of the page in bold in the block of information that gives the story’s source, title or slug, and history). This means that the Radio National producer had been asked to “freshen” the version of the story run at 7am on the Metropolitan network, for use at 7.45am, as well as prepare a version to run in the 7.15am bulletin on Radio National.

Here is the Metropolitan rewrite, in which the paragraphs are numbered, for purposes of comparison with the Radio National version, the paragraph numbers of which are italicised and in square brackets:

1. Union leaders are preparing to face their membership ... after yesterday’s unpopular National Wage Case decision. [*RN headline*]
2. President of the ACTU, MARTIN FERGUSON, has already warned the union movement will be forced to re-think its commitment to the wages system. [*final par – 6. Note that this version avoids the repetition of ‘ACTU’ contained in the earlier, Radio National, version of the par*]
3. The decision has effectively annulled a wages agreement struck last year after a nationwide industrial campaign.[2]
4. The metal unions were spearheading a push for a 4-point-5 percent productivity increase; a 12-dollar across-the-board rise; and a 3-percent increase in superannuation contributions.[3. *Note “spearheading a campaign” in the RN version becomes “spearheading a push” in the Metro version - a more colloquial rendition*].
5. However, the Industrial Relations Commission yesterday handed down a 2-point-5 percent pay rise ... linked to productivity gains.[4]

6. Metal Workers national secretary, George Campbell, says the decision has left him with an impossible mission when he goes back to members.[1]

7. **CART: There's no way in the world am I going to convince metal workers that they should break down all the old demarcation barriers, do what the boss wants them to do, for an extra ten dollars a week. It is just not on. DUR: 0:11 [6]**

745am Metropolitan news Wed Apr 17 1991. (Bold and capitals as in the original)

Both stories lead with the freshest information – the reaction of the union national secretary – but the Metropolitan version does so in the form of a headline or tease line, then supplies the same information in detail as the throw to the grab, right at the end of the story. In both cases the story could be cut from the bottom, if there were a problem with time, but only to a certain point if the story is still to contain enough information.

The 7.45am version shows some other features that characterise the Metropolitan bulletin in comparison to the Radio National bulletin. It uses a shorter, less formal word, 'push', instead of the RN bulletin's 'campaign'. It puts the confrontational response of the ACTU President Martin Ferguson much higher up the story than does the RN version, which places it last, where it is at risk of being dropped for time reasons. These are similarities and differences that are typical in any comparison of the bulletins that are the focus of this research.

The important thing to note about this example is that it illustrates the way in which a Metropolitan news construction of audience may appear in Radio National bulletins. This happens when the work practices demanded of the Radio National producer – to "freshen" material from the 7am Metropolitan bulletin for use at 7.45am on that network – mean there is no time to prepare a distinct version for Radio National.

Another example of changing frames between headlines and story occurs in the Metropolitan bulletin on June 19 1991. This is also about an ongoing industrial relations dispute, in this case involving stevedoring unions. In this case, however, the Metropolitan version of the story favours a conflictive frame and implies blame, while the Radio National version chooses to emphasise negotiation and takes a more neutral stance.

The story is placed third in both bulletins. The Radio National bulletin does not have headlines, the Metropolitan headline is: “The Prime Minister trying to promote more talks on the stalled waterfront pay deal...”. Thus, the *headline* presents the Prime Minister as negotiating rather than confronting, but the *story* emphasises conflict. The Radio National story’s lead places negotiation ahead of conflict, as a comparison of the opening paragraphs of each story demonstrates.

Radio National

Prime Minister, Bob Hawke, says today’s waterfront strike won’t achieve much ... but he’s keen to keep open the lines of communication.

The Industrial Relations Commission yesterday modified Mr Hawke’s compromise deal for the waterfront ... and most of the nation’s ports are this morning expected to fall idle ... as stevedoring unions stage a 24-hour strike.

However, the Prime Minister says he wants a return to a more effective relationship between all parties involved in industrial relations.

And Mr Hawke has refrained from criticism of the

Metropolitan

Dockside unions are digging in ... as the Prime Minister tries to smooth over the latest hitch to reform on the waterfront.

The Industrial Relations Commission yesterday rejected key elements of Bob Hawke’s compromise pay package for waterside workers ... and the major ports around mainland Australia are now subject to a 24-hour strike by stevedoring unions.

Mr Hawke says the stoppage is unlikely to achieve much ... and he’s urging a return to a more effective working relationship between all parties involved in industrial relations.

He’s also refrained from criticism of the Commission’s decision.

Commission's decision.

"waterfront 0700"

7.15am Radio National news, June 19 1991.

CART: (25 seconds of Hawke)

"waterfront 0745"

7.45am Metropolitan news, June 19 1991.

The similarities between the two versions are obvious, but the differences are telling. The Metropolitan story emphasises that there is a problem ("digging in", "the latest hitch"), while the Radio National bulletin balances each negative statement ("won't achieve much") with a positive one ("but he's keen to keep open the lines of communication"). The Metropolitan version also frames the Industrial Relations Commission and the unions as responsible for the conflict, with the Prime Minister positioned as conciliatory, as he is throughout in the Radio National version. Where the Radio National story uses the word "modified" in relation to the IRC action, the Metro story has "rejected", a word much more connotative of conflict, as is the positioning of "Australia" as "subject" to a 24-hour strike. The Radio National version of the story is much more neutral in its language.

Radio National ran a second story about the waterfront dispute, titled "waterfront reax", immediately after the one quoted above. It is written in such a way that the effect for a listener would be of hearing one seamless story. The final sentence of the first story ("waterfront 0700") is "And Mr Hawke has refrained from criticism of the Commission's decision". The first sentence of the next story ("waterfront reax") is: "But unions and employers are not so conciliatory ...". There follow two paragraphs and a grab from the federal secretary of the Waterside workers union and two paragraphs of the response from the Australian Chamber of Shipping (the employers). In this "on the one hand, on the other hand" structure, the story displays the typical public sector news definition of 'balance'. The Metropolitan bulletin, with its single story, did not demonstrate

‘balance’ in this sense. Both bulletins also illustrate that conflict is a core news value, making a story newsworthy regardless of the audience constructed for the bulletin.

A final example from the bulletins collected in June 1991 of a change in the frame between headline and story in the Metropolitan bulletin, illustrates how very differently the two bulletins could frame the same story. On Friday June 28, both the 7.15am Radio National bulletin and the Metropolitan bulletin at 7.45am ran “wraps” on the ALP national conference, which had finished the previous night, from Federal parliamentary reporter Graham World. The Radio National headline for the story was: “The ALP’s national conference ends with the rejection of expansion of uranium mining ...”. The headline for the same story in the Metropolitan bulletin was characteristically snappier but used the same story angle: “And the ALP wraps up its annual conference with a rejection of any more uranium mines ...”. However, the stories themselves were quite different.

The earlier Radio National bulletin story retained the same frame as the headline: it was about a vote by the Party to reject the expansion of uranium mining. The Metropolitan bulletin changed the frame, running a story that only referred to the uranium mining vote in passing; its main focus was on factional party politics. Here are the lead paragraphs of the two stories.

Radio National

Any expansion of uranium mining has been rejected by the Labor Party’s National Conference ... and it was a relatively brief debate at the end of the four day conference that saw the issue put to rest.

“alp wrap am”, 7.15am RN bulletin, June 28 1991

Metropolitan

The ALP national conference’s wrapped up for another year ... but not without accusations of factional rorts over the numbers on the party’s national executive.

“alp wrap ams 2”, 7.45am Metro bulletin, June 28 1991

Both stories are framed as conflicts, with the Radio National story going on to use actuality of a Labor Minister criticising his party conference's decision as illogical. The language of the Metropolitan story is, typically, more colloquial ("rorts") than that of the Radio National story. And the Radio National story reflects the greater importance, discussed earlier, assigned by this network's bulletins to social and environmental issues. The Metropolitan bulletin story is framed around the more conventional "hard news", party factionalism.

The differences analysed in the foregoing, using examples from the bulletins collected in 1991, are still to be found in the 1993 bulletins, despite the changes to the time of the Radio National bulletin by then, and to work practices in the newsroom. (The principal change was to assign a producer to the Radio National bulletin who was not also required to prepare stories for the 7.45am Metro bulletin).

On May 24 1993, both bulletins headlined elections in Cambodia.

The Radio National headlines are:

Minimal disruptions to the first day of voting in Cambodia....
7.15am Radio National news Monday May 24 1993.

The Metropolitan headline has quite a different frame:

Some outbreaks of sporadic violence on day one of the
 Cambodian elections...
7.45am Metropolitan news Monday May 24 1993.

The lead stories for each bulletin, to which the headlines refer, were both filed by the same reporter and subbed by the same producer but, as with the headlines, each is framed very differently for the two networks:

Radio National

United Nations officials say at least a third of Cambodia's

Metropolitan

There was an artillery attack on one town... a mortar attack on

eligible voters cast their ballots yesterday – day one of the country’s crucial UN-supervised elections.

another, and a ballot box shot up in a third.

Trevor Watson says the day passed with only minor disruption by the Khmer Rouge guerrilla faction which is boycotting the poll.’

Other than that, day one of the Cambodian elections passed relatively peacefully, despite threats by the Khmer Rouge to disrupt polling.

United Nations officials say at least a third of the country’s eligible voters cast their ballots yesterday.

But with five days still to go, the U.N.’s military commander, Lieutenant John Sanderson, is still cautious.’

7am Radio National

7.45am Metropolitan news, May 24 1993.

The Metropolitan version of the story shows a characteristic “tease” lead, which also calls immediate attention to the violent disruptions to polling, while the Radio National version places these second to information about the number of people managing to cast their vote on the first day of the ballot. There is no doubt which is the more entertainingly constructed story, but which more accurately reflects the events as they were experienced by those “on the ground” is open to question.

The foregrounding of conflict and the use of more everyday or even colloquial language (“digging in”, “shot up”) are further evidence that the audience constructed by the Metropolitan bulletins is one that requires more of the linguistic devices of entertainment and populism than does the Radio National audience.

The attributes on which this section of the chapter has compared the Metropolitan and Radio National breakfast bulletins fall into what Pan & Kosicki (1993) call the syntactical and thematic structures of news discourse. The last example introduced the use by Metropolitan news of *rhetorical* structural devices. These are just as important to understanding the differences between the bulletins, and how those differences create different audiences. As the consideration of headlines, teasers, choice of lead stories and use of packages and wraps has indicated, radio news has its own “grammar”. The grammar and routines of news writing are a departure point for identifying frames. The sections that follow illustrate a central assertion of this thesis – that the audience for the Metropolitan bulletin is constructed as needing to be entertained as much as informed – through the exploration of such rhetorical devices as metaphor.

News discourse and frames: Rhetorical devices

Metaphors

Metaphors are ways of seeing things *as if* they were something else. They are primary devices of the rhetorical structures of news discourse; they are pervasive in news writing. As such, they are also primary framing devices, especially those that appear in headlines, and the introductory paragraph of lead stories. The metaphors of news writing, as with those of most organisational discourse, are ways of “constituting the facts” (Manning 1983, p.226). That is, metaphor is used to make what is said meaningful to the audience, by providing a point of recognition for them. The choice of metaphors creates a reality for the audience, by providing them with “a basis for imaginatively constructing the event” (Ericson, Baranek & Chan 1987, p.337). Imagination is stimulated by metaphor, making it an especially powerful rhetorical device for radio, which must enable its audiences, lacking the visual cues provided by newspapers or television, to create pictures in the mind’s eye. Choice of metaphors in news writing reflects not only journalistic practice but also

journalists' beliefs about what will be meaningful and significant (authoritative) to the audience.

Metaphors drawn from war and from sport abound in the bulletins collected from both networks, not surprisingly, since they are central to news values, specifically conflict. Metropolitan bulletins are somewhat more likely to use metaphors, especially in headlines, contributing to the creation of an audience for this network that needs to be stimulated imaginatively by all the means available to radio: the language, as well as the content and the other sound of the news. The bulletins of May 23 1991 offer an example.

The Metropolitan headlines for the 7.45am bulletin personalise a country and a government:

India waiting for a new leader...
 The Queensland government welcomes World Heritage listing
 for Fraser Island...
7.45am Metropolitan news, May 23 1991.

Radio National's headlines at 7.15am for the same day on the other hand, avoid metaphor and are conventional summaries:

Rajiv Gandhi's widow asked to take his place ... but doubt over
 whether she'll accept ...
7.15am Radio National news, May 23 1991.

Again, on June 11,1991, the first Radio National headline is:

More controversy in South Africa for Australia's Foreign
 Minister...
7.15am Radio National news, June 11 1991.

Compare this with the first headline of the Metropolitan bulletin, which uses a sporting metaphor:

Gareth Evans offside with some Black Africans....

7.45am Metropolitan news, June 11 1991.

Two days later, the headlines of both bulletins feature metaphors of sport and war:

Australia's Foreign Minister again under fire in South Africa...
Boris Yeltsin out in front ... in early counting from the Russian Republic's presidential elections ...

7.15am Radio National news, June 13 1991.

Gareth Evans draws more fire from both sides in South Africa...

7.45am Metropolitan news, Thursday June 13 1991.

The Metro bulletin continues the battle metaphor in the story itself, which begins:

Both sides in South African politics have now taken aim at foreign minister, Gareth Evans, over comments during his current tour.

7.45am Metropolitan news, Thursday June 13 1991.

On May 18 1993, the Radio National headlines begin:

More embarrassment for the Federal Government over Pay TV....

7.15am Radio National news, Tuesday May 18 1993

The Metropolitan bulletin uses a war-like metaphor to headline the same story:

The Pay TV issues blows up again in the Government's face...

7.45am Metropolitan news, Tuesday May 18 1993.

The greater use of metaphors in both headlines and stories in the Metropolitan bulletins, and the more common use of metaphors of conflict, whether on the battlefield or sportsground, reflect the construction of an audience that needs to be attracted, held and entertained by spectacle. The more consistent and frequent use by the

Metropolitan bulletin of metaphors taken from battle and competitive sport reflects another characteristic of this bulletin; that it exploits the techniques of broadcast news writing more consistently and imaginatively than the Radio National bulletin, again in the service of creating the audience.

Style policies

The way language is used in the news also reflects style policies of news organisations. In a valuable article, Cameron (1996) has drawn attention to the connection journalists take for granted between certain linguistic values and professional journalistic ones. Using the style book of *The Times* newspaper as her example, Cameron argues that it makes “an explicit connection between certain formal qualities of language – clarity, simplicity, plainness and freedom from affectation – and a set of professional values that are not primarily linguistic, such as impartiality, judiciousness, cogency and good sense. ... [That is,] with the values that ideally underpin news reporting in democratic societies.” (Cameron 1996, pp.324, 325).

ABC Radio News produced a series of style guides as well as training manuals for internal use, over the period of this research. The Introduction to the 1987 edition (*ABC Radio News Style & Training Manual*) describes the aim of ABC Radio News as “the speedy coverage of news as objectively and impartially as possible. Above all else it seeks to be accurate and fair in all it does but is not afraid to tackle difficult issues” (ABC 1987b, p.1). In the sections of the manual that follow, these professional aspirations are linked with standards of writing, particularly in the work of the sub-editors who are called upon to “write clear, simple, forceful English” (ABC 1987b, p.15).

The 1990 *Journalism Training Manual* begins by setting out, with examples, the traditional news values of proximity, interest, conflict, and so on. The “basic aims” of a reporter are described as: “to find

the news quickly; to tell the news accurately; to explain the news clearly” (ABC 1990, p.6). The *ABC Style Guide for News, Sport and Current Affairs* (no date, but published either 1995 or 1996) similarly demands language that is “concise, precise ... devoid of clichés, jargon, abstractions, tired passive verbs and the noise of that strange, contrived language called journalese” (ABC c1995/6, p.1).

Throughout these documents there is the assumption, implicit or – as below - stated directly, that both content and style should be “calculated to have listeners accept them as authoritative. The achievement of this accolade is a product largely of our consistently being, as outlined above, both comprehensive and independent while, above all, being consistently accurate. We cannot be authoritative without being comprehensive and accurate. We cannot be confident about being accurate without being independent” (*Draft Mission Statement for ABC Radio News*, ABC 1988b).

In a May 1991 conversation with the researcher in the newsroom, three ABC Radio news producers said there were “no clear guidelines” setting out style and format differences between Radio National and Metropolitan bulletins. However, there clearly were expectations of difference, because one producer continued, “You have to pick it up by osmosis”. He joked that a story would be considered more appropriate for Radio National “if it’s long or with Pierre Vicary” (Pierre Vicary was at the time a courageous correspondent in Yugoslavia, whose reports tended to be lengthy, detailed, elegantly written and delivered in an educated English accent).

Writing news for radio

In linguistic terms, the “codes” for audio news are different from those for newspaper news, although equivalents can be found from one to the other. So, for example, the direct quotations to be found in

newspaper reports have their audio equivalent in the “grab” of “actuality”; that is, in hearing the person concerned speaking. Like the newspaper quotation, the audio grab is edited, selected out of what the reporter noted (newspaper) or recorded (radio). Just as the direct quotations contained in a newspaper report are surrounded by paraphrases of what was said, so too is the grab of actuality in a radio report.

An important characteristic shared by ABC Radio training documents from the late 1980s onwards is a consciousness of the radio medium and its stylistic demands, as opposed to those of print. An internal publication, undated but almost certainly written in late 1989 or early 1990, headed *ABC Radio News Presentation Guide*, opens with the following assertion: “The strengths of ABC Radio News are accuracy, balance and our ability to provide a network responsive to both the broadest national and international stories and to the most interesting local stories”. It concludes “In developing speedier presentation of stories and *concentrating more on developing the use of the medium* we are not going to sacrifice those strengths. Sometimes ABC bulletins have sounded dull, hard to follow because they’ve been written/produced in a *newspaper* style.”(ABC, n.d. but late 1989/early 1990, p.11. Italics added). The same guide emphasises the importance of the medium to professional practice on its cover page: “If there’s one simple message from this guide it is this: we are broadcast journalists, we are not journalists who happen to find ourselves in broadcasting”.

The Chief Producer, as detailed earlier, wrote or sub-edited headlines and lead-ins to stories for the Metropolitan bulletins. For example, on April 12 1991 there were no headlines for the 7.15am Radio National bulletin, while for the 7.45am Metropolitan bulletin the headlines began:

An apology and a surprise in Federal Parliament in the wake of the Perth Royal Commission...

Headlines, 7.45am Metropolitan news, April 12 1991.

This provides little information about the content of the story but is designed to arouse the listener's interest.

The Chief Producer described the "recognition that we're working with sound, with audio" as 'belated' and 'an awful long time coming' (1991, personal interview). He described the way in which taped inserts in the form of voice reports and actuality came into ABC Radio news bulletins only in the late sixties and early seventies, mainly from the overseas bureaux. News obtained these reports initially by poaching them from stories filed for Radio Current Affairs:

[W]e started to grab little bits of actuality, which ... actually then were seen to be the ... property of [morning current affairs program] 'AM'. ... The overseas offices would file voice reports for News and actuality for 'AM' and we decided we wanted some of that. But the recognition of that was very slow, and then getting local reporters to file voice reports and to file actuality and sound effects was very slow. And even slower was a recognition of the differences in them; that something could be of bad quality.

(Chief Producer. Personal interview, 1991)

He went on to say that "the old radio story wasn't really very different from the way a newspaper story would be written" but that, as ABC Radio journalists became more used to working in the medium, writing techniques developed for it, "along some lines which aren't so good and some which are better".

The specific example of a writing technique that he considered inappropriate for radio was the classic "inverted pyramid" of newspaper reporting, in which the opening paragraph contains all the essential information (at least the 'who, what, where and when'). "The way I don't like is the bald lead, which ... probably tells you too much and then drops straight to 'Joe Bloggs reports'" (Chief Producer

1991, personal interview,). A more appropriate style for radio, the Chief Producer argued – and this is borne out by most recent broadcast journalism textbooks as well as the ABC’s internal training manuals from the 1980s onwards – was to “tease” listeners. He described teasing the listener this way: “that is, get a lead to a story which excites their [listeners’] interest, then give them a little bit more, so that they’re inclined to stay on ... then ... the voice reporter comes in” (Chief Producer 1991, personal interview). This is how the example quoted earlier is structured (“An apology and a surprise...”). He went on: ‘And it’s got to flow. The sound of it’s got to flow.’ (Chief Producer 1991, personal interview). Notice again the all-important idea of ‘flow’ or connectedness between stories.

The Metropolitan bulletins show much more consistent use of the lead that “teases” listeners, than the Radio National ones. On June 25 1991, for example, both bulletins ran stories about the impact of competition between airlines on the price of airfares. At 7.15am, the Radio National headline for this story was: “Air fares still tumbling around the nation...”. The story was then framed as a war:

The domestic airlines price-cutting battle is continuing with a vengeance.

The latest salvo has been fired by newcomer, Compass, which last night offered fares between Sydney and Melbourne, 22 dollars less than those from Ansett and Australian Airlines.

7.15am Radio National news, June 25 1991 (spacing and punctuation as in original).

The 7.45am Metropolitan bulletin uses the Radio National headline as the lead sentence in its story and picks up the war metaphor in the third paragraph:

Air fares are still tumbling....

Executives at Australian Airlines meet today to decide whether they'll match the latest prices cuts from Ansett and Compass on the lucrative Sydney/Melbourne route.

Compass fired the latest shot in the domestic fare battle when it slashed its return fares between the New South Wales and Victorian capitals...by 22 dollars... to 176 dollars.

7.45am Metropolitan news, June 25 1991 (spacing and punctuation as in original.)

Radio National news stories are not written like newspaper stories – they are of the broadcast news form – but they are less likely to use the technique of leading with a single phrase designed to attract listener interest and attention rather than to provide new information.

Conclusion

This chapter has considered the “manufacture” or construction of the audiences for the Radio National and Metropolitan news bulletins through looking at the bulletins themselves, using framing as the basis for analysis. The surprising thing to emerge from this process is how many differences there are in the thematic, structural and rhetorical frames of the two bulletins under study, given how much all radio news stories must have in common in order to be recognised as radio news stories. These differences or “competing frames”, both reflect and constitute the different audiences constructed by the two bulletins and their networks. We have seen how the Metropolitan bulletin consistently frames stories in ways that constitute a different audience from that sited in the framing of the Radio National bulletin.

The audience called into being by the Metropolitan bulletins is one that has a lower level of inherent interest in news and requires devices to attract and hold its attention, including not only greater variety in the use of sound and language but also narrative structures that make news stories easier to follow without too much concentration.

However, this audience also expects a traditional hierarchy of news

values and a bulletin that makes room after politics and economics for humour and sport.

The audience created by Radio National bulletins is altogether more earnest. It is one prepared to concentrate on a news bulletin, assumed to bring contextual knowledge to its listening (and therefore able to make connections between stories unassisted by rhetorical or thematic devices). This audience is interested not only in national party politics but also in Aboriginal issues, the environment and social issues such as multiculturalism or police violence. To an even greater extent than that constructed for the Metropolitan network, the Radio National audience reflects news producers' perceptions of the programming around the bulletins.

The seven-fifteen [bulletin] coming in Radio National, which is essentially all talk, my belief is that people who are listening to RN are listening to hear information and to understand, and they want a fuller account of events as well as additional information. So they're in more of a frame of mind to concentrate if you like, so we use the word 'meatier' for stories [on Radio National] - a bit of extra length, a bit of extra analysis. Maybe not quite as much - I hesitate to say it - froth and bubble, but say, light items, more for divertissement.

(Radio National News Producer, personal interview, September 1991)

News producers are influenced by what they hear in the programming around the bulletins, because this is a primary source of information about the audience (who is listening) apart from ratings figures (how many are listening).

The images of audience produced by the sound of the network programs (which reflect policy) must be considered along with news values and work practices in the manufacture of audiences in the bulletins. Nonetheless, as the analyses in this chapter have shown, "audience images" are there in the bulletins, and they are different in the Radio National bulletins from those in the Metropolitan ones.

This chapter completes the investigation of ways in which audiences are “manufactured” through the relationships between editorial policy and news production practice. It remains now to discuss the findings and draw conclusions, and this is the work of the final chapter.

Chapter Six

Discussion and Conclusions

Is it possible to tell a society by how it edits? ... Are we in a period when it is not information, knowledge or culture as such that determine the age but how they are handled? If so, then a redactional society is one where such processes are primary, where matter is reduced, revised, prepared, published, edited, adapted, shortened, abridged to produce, in turn, the new(s).

In such a society, the journalist is well placed indeed, not as an original writer, but as a professional redactor.

Hartley, 2000, p.44. Emphasis in original.

Everyone is a journalist, and journalism is everywhere.
Hartley, 2000, p.45

Introduction

The previous chapter demonstrated the site of audience construction, in the bulletins themselves. It and the chapters that preceded it have built a case for the argument that the different audiences framed by the two bulletins reflect a kind of struggle over audiences. This struggle is informed on the one hand by the fourfold influence of corporate history, network policy, technological change, and economic forces. On the other hand, the professional norms and practices of news workers, including the specific practices and values of ABC Radio news producers, are also an influence. It may be simply depicted as a struggle between news producers and network managers to create and thereby control an audience. This is perhaps too simple, but does indicate that such a struggle is ongoing, inherent to the processes of media production.

This chapter is divided into two parts: discussion and conclusions. The longer part, the discussion, begins with an examination of how

the thesis has revealed that a struggle over audiences is manifest in historical and cultural differences between the radio networks under study and radio news. The next section of the discussion examines the findings of the case study regarding news journalists' audience image. As a whole, the discussion synthesises the factors informing the struggle over audiences, revealed through the research findings. It relates them back to the problematic relationship of the ABC with its audiences that was identified right at the beginning of the thesis and tries to point a way forward to a possible resolution. The next and final section of the discussion considers the significance of how much has changed since the time period of the case study, specifically technological, ABC policy, and cultural change, in terms of the relationship between news producers and their audiences. This part of the chapter ends by discussing the implications of the research for the importance of publicly funded, editorially independent broadcasting in the light of changes to the role of journalism brought about by technological and cultural change.

The thesis concludes that research in production and audience research cannot usefully proceed in isolation from each other, if we wish to achieve a deeper understanding of the communication relationship between producers, their product, and the audience. The research has suggested how the study of production and reception might be brought together using framing, in a way that neglects neither the agency of the audience nor the circumstances of production³¹.

³¹ Reese (2001, pp. 7, 8) has recently argued along the same lines, describing framing as a 'bridging model for media research' and as 'the interplay of media practices, culture, audiences, and producers'.

Discussion

Between policy and practice

Just as cultural theorists of the media can speak of a “struggle over meaning” (Ang 1996, pp.313-320) so the thesis has identified a struggle between news production and network policy over which audience is to be made. This struggle also reflects and is caught up in historical cultural differences between different departments of the ABC. The research has been specifically concerned with cultural differences as they have occurred historically between one radio network, Radio National, and the separate department of Radio News.

As the starting point for exploring these cultural differences, the thesis has taken the policy of creating a distinct identity for each radio network, articulated in the early 1980s. That policy also marks the beginning of the struggle for control over what audience is to be made. It was, in marketing terms, to build a “brand identity” for each network, within the wider ABC brand. The effect for both the local Metropolitan and national Radio National networks was to create a contradiction between the “station sound” and the place of news on each of these networks. The thesis has shown that network (or station) sound is a site of audience construction for radio news producers, in ways that more specifically affect their practice than previous research has explored.

The process of differentiation between the networks described in Chapter Three did not carve them up along simple demographic lines, as the 1994 network descriptions included in the Introduction make clear. As with the BBC before it, the ABC made assumptions about the ways in which audiences would assign themselves to networks. The distinctions were a mixture of demographic (a youth network), geographic (national and local networks) and ones of taste or cultural preference (for example, popular talk around local issues versus “serious” talk about national issues and specialist areas of knowledge).

The intention, however, is clear: to differentiate for the audience the role of each radio network. Each network is to “audience” differently³².

In this process of distinguishing the networks from one another, we have seen that the ABC chose to align the local Metropolitan network of city-based radio stations with “news and information”. The Metropolitan network thus contained a contradiction of focus, between the locally focused program talk and the much broader input of the news and current affairs departments³³. Furthermore, its “talk” was to be populist and popular, actively competing for audience with the commercial news-talk stations in the same market. By contrast, in news and current affairs it was to be far more extensive, serious and weighty (more like Radio National in fact), because it drew on areas of the ABC that self-identified as offering the highest journalistic standards, across national and international affairs.

For some years, until satellite technology and the abandonment of State-based programming “windows” made it a truly national network, Radio National suffered a lack of consistency in sound and identity. Network differentiation left this network to carry the “high culture” end of the obligations of the ABC Charter, such as to “reflect the cultural diversity of the Australian community”, to broadcast “programs of ... cultural enrichment”, and “to encourage and promote the musical, dramatic and other performing arts in Australia”³⁴.

Audience research done for Radio National in the late 1980s suggested that it had failed to reflect social and cultural changes that had in turn changed the way audiences listen to radio (Banks 1987,

³² See Footnote 1. While “audiencing” is predominantly used in the thesis to mean audience-making, here both meanings are simultaneously present: the audience is expected to assign itself *and* an audience-image is constructed.

³³ The status of News as a separate Division within the ABC, and its later integration with Current Affairs – but always remaining outside the networks – are significant factors in the history of the relationship between News/Current Affairs and the radio networks, as is acknowledged in earlier chapters.

³⁴ The Charter, ss6(1) and(2) of the ABC Act 1983, is available on the ABC Web site at <http://www.abc.net.au/about>

p.3). For these among other, policy-related reasons, discussed in Chapter Three, Radio National found it hard to retain the audience share it had before the network restructure.

The relatively peripheral position assigned by ABC Radio policy to news and current affairs on this network, further handicapped it. Audience research commissioned by the ABC in the late 1980s and early 1990s had consistently indicated that regular listeners to Radio National described themselves as curious about the world and as actively seeking out information and news (Banks 1987, ANOP 1990, Tan 1991, Yann et al. 1991). Yet, news bulletins were less frequent on Radio National than on the Metropolitan stations, and the major radio current affairs programs were either on the Metropolitan network (*AM* and *The World Today*) or simulcast on both (*PM*, from 1987). It was hardly surprising that by 1991 there was still considerable confusion among ABC Radio listeners as to which station they were actually listening to, Radio National or their local Metropolitan station (Tan 1991, Yann et al. 1991). The confusion usually worked in favour of the local Metro station, and showed up in the ratings figures as Radio National's loss. As a result, it was seen as Radio National's problem. Internal documents from the mid-eighties until the early 1990s show the network's managers trying a succession of strategies to win back audience numbers, by changes in program initiatives, presentation style and the program schedule.

As the thesis has described, these strategies included the development of an essentially news and current affairs based breakfast program, *Daybreak*, in 1990. Its existence outside what was then called the Information Programs (Radio) department (comprising radio news, current affairs and sport) caused concern to radio news managers and journalists. The development, in 1992, of a specific production brief for the main breakfast news bulletin on Radio National, had to occur within the framework of an industrial relations negotiation between management and the journalists' union. This was not only because it

required a change to work conditions, but also because of the suspicion, verging on resentment, felt by News towards *Daybreak* at that time.

Suggestions that the network might have been put in an un-winnable position by divisional and corporate policy were not seriously entertained until the early 1990s. In 1991, the Tan Research group suggested that ABC metropolitan and regional stations might actively promote Radio National (and ABC FM, now ABC Classic FM) as a way of providing committed ABC listeners with a range of alternatives within the “family” of ABC stations (Tan 1991, pp.58-60). However, it was almost five years before this actually happened and the policy met considerable and continuing resistance from Metropolitan station managers. The Metro managers faced a performance requirement to achieve audience share figures, which Radio National’s management did not have³⁵. As a result, “cross promotion” among ABC radio services today is occasional and very specifically targeted, rather than regular and routine, in the way that the Tan research suggested. There is, however, routine cross-promotion of specialist programs in science and religion between Radio National and ABC Television.

The internal contradiction between the place of news and current affairs on the radio networks and the network “sound” was reflected in the responses of radio news producers. The research has shown that they mainly “read the audience” for the main breakfast bulletins as inscribed in the sound of the network programming. These readings in turn affected the selection and presentation of the news bulletins. This differentiation was moderated by its professional production context, of a strong and persistent journalistic culture, which has been

³⁵ “Share”, a measure of how long a percentage of the listening audience stays with a particular station, is used by commercial and ABC Metro radio stations. “Reach”, a measure of how many people turn to the station at some point across a period of time is thought a more appropriate way to gauge the success of a Radio National, a specialist talk station formatted in “blocks” of discrete programs.

described in Chapter Four. The work practices of the national newsroom also meant that the same attention to audience constructions simply could not be put into the Radio National breakfast bulletin as went into the Metropolitan equivalent. Analysis of the bulletins collected in 1991 shows a different “framing of the audience” for the Metropolitan network compared with the Radio National network, as a reflection of both work practices and the network sound. The Chief Producer, with two journalists to assist him in the preparation of the Metro bulletins, could produce more consciously crafted stories and story forms, such as the “round up” or “briefs” that regularly concluded the 7.45am bulletin. This also meant he could pay more attention than could Radio National producers of the 7.15am bulletin, to the use of the radio medium, in headlines, or “packages” and “wraps”. The Radio National flagship bulletin had at times to run material written primarily for another network, while each story at 7.45am, as well as the whole bulletin, were always constructed for the Metropolitan network. The overall result, clearly demonstrated by the research presented in Chapter Five, was a more specifically and coherently constructed audience for the Metropolitan than for the Radio National network.

The change of work practices introduced in 1992, enabled by technological changes, meant that more time was available to tailor the Radio National bulletin to a brief that had been drawn up in consultation between senior managers from News and from the radio network. Yet the bulletins collected in 1993 still showed much the same differences appearing between audience constructions for the two networks. The audience image held by radio news producers persisted in the 7am Radio National bulletin despite changes meant to address production differences between it and the main Metropolitan breakfast bulletin at 7.45am. The intention was to encourage the producers of Radio National news better to reflect the audience that network was seeking to create through changes to network policy. However, interviews and participant observation show an audience

image generated by two factors – the programming of the network and the culture of the newsroom – to have been more powerful than the policy intentions of network managers.

ABC news producers experienced rapid and large-scale technological and policy change over the period of the research. All of it was stressful and some of it was less than successful (see the description in Chapter Four of the computerisation of the newsroom and the instability of touch-screen technology). Over the same period, as described in Chapter Three, there was a series of policy initiatives, not all of which survived. It culminated in the launch of NewsRadio (PNN) and then the ABC Web site, which have grown and prospered. This mixed experience of change is no doubt at least part of the reason for the reluctance of news journalists to alter their understandings of the audiences for the two networks. Only two years after the new “brief” for the Radio National bulletin, by 1994 news management concerns about the allocation of resources, as well as the establishment of NewsRadio, led to the end of the “tailored” 7am bulletin on Radio National.

Station sound as a source of journalists’ audience images

Interviews with the bulletin producers suggest that the images of the audiences for each network constructed by the journalists very much reflect the ideas they have about the network sound. The constructions of audience centre on how interested or otherwise the listeners are presumed to be in news. Gans (1979, p.238) identified this phenomenon. However, the journalists he interviewed appeared to have generic images of the audience, grouped by how interested or not they were in news, regardless of which news station or magazine the journalist was working for. The findings of this research suggest that, for ABC radio journalists, the image they have of the *non*-news programming surrounding the news is an important source of information in constructing the audience. The resulting audience

construct is one that includes not only the kind of news in which they are held to have any interest, but also the quality of their attention and how much they can already be assumed to know, about issues and people in the news.

The main breakfast bulletin on Radio National, one of the two daily bulletins studied in this research, was heard in the context of *Daybreak*, a “flow” program of topical commentary and interviews. While this was a break with the “block” programming that had characterised the network, the presenter behaved as a journalist in the tradition of public service broadcasting. The presenter did not strive to be a “personality”. Interviews could be assertive and probing, but avoiding any suggestion of partisanship or “bias”. The program’s content was dictated by the news agenda of the day, often using the depth of specialist knowledge available within the network. News from the worlds of science, art, religion or history, and about women, Aboriginal people, and other cultural and social minorities, were routinely covered by *Daybreak*. Its emphasis, as befits a national network, was on national and international news.

This context made news producers’ constructions of the Radio National audience unsurprising. This audience was represented as more aware of the news agenda, somewhat more interested in social and political issues, and as prepared to listen to radio with some concentration, following sequences of discrete stories, without having connections between stories made for them. News producers believe they can best serve this audience image by selecting and presenting news in certain ways. Thus, the Radio National news bulletins demonstrate a standard news agenda of federal politics, economics and so on, plus social issues such as the environment. They are also bulletins without much exploitation of the audio medium or many textual features of entertainment radio, such as the “tease lead”, the use of sound grabs at the start of the bulletin, or sound devices of drama. This is despite the network including in its self-description

that its programs would “explore the capabilities of the radio medium” (from the 1994 ABC presentation kit described in the Introduction). The research shows that news on the network could not reflect that intention, thanks to a combination of producers’ perceptions and newsroom work practices. Of equal significance is that, unlike the Metropolitan bulletins, those on Radio National tended not to provide listeners with links between news stories or implied interpretations of cause and effect.

The breakfast program on the Metropolitan stations was also a flow program, but altogether lighter and more local, to a specific city. The presenter tended to behave as a “personality” as much as a journalist, inserting him(or her)self into conversations and talkback segments, offering opinions and reactions, as well as conducting interviews. Interviews included light-hearted and human-interest stories as well as more sober ones, and a majority of the items was local to the city in which the Metropolitan station was broadcasting. The program was directly instrumental to the listeners, offering them the weather forecast, traffic conditions, information about any problems with public transport, all repeated and updated at intervals that acknowledged the fragmented nature of listening at that time of day. The Metro breakfast included items of pure entertainment such as competitions and talkback, which very rarely occurred on *Daybreak* on Radio National³⁶. News producers acknowledged this context in their story writing and bulletin construction, and framed an audience accordingly.

³⁶ In mid-2003, the Radio National Breakfast program introduced a daily “question”, asked before the 7am news and answered after the finish of the *AM* current affairs program. There were no prizes for listeners getting the right answer. The questions were cultural, not necessarily topical, but assumed a good education and wide general knowledge. For example, “Where does the quotation ‘All that glitters is not gold’ come from?” (July 22, 2003).

Framing audiences

ABC radio news producers can thus be seen to have created audiences based on their perceptions of the audience image for the radio network or station on which their news bulletins are heard. Over the period of the study, ABC Radio National networks managers created policies on the assumption that changes to news bulletins could play a significant role in summoning particular audiences, and underestimated the persistence of audience images in the professional practice of radio news producers. The struggle over audiences arises when there is disagreement over, or differing understandings of, the role that news plays in setting the character or sound of the station, and what audience is to be made thereby. As the study has documented, this is what happened in the case of Radio National.

What is at stake here is the way in which an audience may be said to be “manufactured”, by the inter-deterministic processes of network policy and news production practices. In a novel application of framing theory, the thesis has shown that framing analysis can be usefully applied to audience making just as it has been to the framing of issues in the news. The audience can be seen to be “framed”, structurally and rhetorically in the selection and presentation of news stories in bulletins, as inclusive of some characteristics while excluding others. The relationship between news frames of issues and events and people, and the framing of an implied audience, offers potential for future research. Previous studies of the way a news product (in any medium) frames stories have generally used news values and culture as explanatory. The thesis suggests that the basic journalistic process of selecting an angle and framing a story may be as often a response to (or caused by) images of the audience, held by news producers. In the broadcasting environment, these images of the audience may in turn may reflect not journalistic culture or the news policy of the organisation for which journalists work, but their

responses to the non-news programming in which the news sits. This warrants further investigation.

News producers' approaches to audiences, and public service broadcasting

In terms of their own professional inclinations, ABC news journalists did not necessarily empathise as much with their perceived Metro audience as with their Radio National audience image, which was after all seen as more interested in what they do. The interviews show journalists as feeling that certain types of story, such as international news, “get a better run” and “a better listenership” on Radio National. This parallels Gunter’s observation that there is “a belief, embedded in journalistic lore, that many audience members are not particularly interested in the news they now receive, preferring instead gossip about celebrities to those activities, events and issues deemed to be important by the news editors themselves” (Gunter 1987, p.319). However, the greater size of the Metro audience for the flagship bulletin was seen as a compelling reason for assigning it priority in time and other resources. This exemplifies the tension in public broadcasting between the size of an audience and its “quality” (Hawkins 1997). It also illustrates two approaches to audiences that Blumler and Gurevitch call “sacerdotal” and “pragmatic” (Blumler and Gurevitch 1995, p.117).

Studying television producers’ approaches to audiences in election coverage, Blumler and Gurevitch found that some producers “expected implicitly to cater either for voters who were already interested in politics or for viewers who could be helped to grasp the political significance of campaign events” (Blumler and Gurevitch 1995, p.118). These they characterised as “sacerdotal” in approach. Another group of producers, “more pragmatically disposed ... denied the intrinsic right of election material to programme prominence and

repeatedly asserted that it must ‘fight its way in’ on its merits” (Blumer and Gurevitch 1995, p.118). The “sacerdotal” approach has obvious affiliations with the public service broadcasting tradition but, as such, is liable to the same accusations of paternalism and even elitism, in its relationship with audiences.

Still pursuing this analogy, the approach of the Metropolitan network to audiences was certainly “pragmatically disposed”, and news producers acknowledged this in what they said about it. The pragmatic approach is less inclined to argue that certain program material is what the audience “needs”. Though the bulletins admitted variations as a result of these different approaches, all ABC news producers interviewed adhered to the normative ideology of news, found in the corporation’s Editorial Policies, which requires the news to be “objective, impartial and balanced”. Nonetheless, news cannot escape the process of audience making, any more than other kinds of production, however much it insists on claiming distance from concerns about who is listening and what they might want, as a way of protecting the disinterestedness of news, with its professional goal of “objectivity”.

It can now be seen that the process of creating separate identities for each radio network was a start to addressing the difficulties faced by the national public broadcaster in its relationship with audiences, identified in the Introduction. Public broadcasters (as organisations) have a different relationship with audiences and therefore different interests in creating audiences from those of commercial broadcasters³⁷. If Radio National represents the “sacerdotal” and the Metropolitan network the “pragmatic”, by differentiating news as well as non-news programming on the two networks, the ABC could encompass both relationships with audiences. As the bulletin analysis has demonstrated, this difference is manifest in syntactical and

³⁷ Of course, individual journalists may have a similar relationship with their assumed audience regardless of whether they work in commercial or public radio.

rhetorical structures of the news bulletins collected during this period as well as in the programs broadcast by the network.

Niches and fragments

The period of the case study saw the two networks concerned try to use news as one means of implementing the policy to create different audiences for each. In the period since that time the media are widely recognised as characterised by proliferating “niche” services and a fragmentation of audiences. These are predominantly the result of one enabling technological phenomenon, “the digital age” (see Green 2002). The developments in the technologies of newsgathering, selection and presentation documented in the thesis, made it possible to “tailor” news. They were equally responsible for the demise of the tailored bulletins because they made it possible for ABC Radio to produce more news with fewer people.

The arrival of NewsRadio, the 24-hour news service as part of the new Parliamentary and News Network (PNN), in 1994, put an end once and for all to tailoring different news services for Radio National and Metropolitan stations, for reasons explained below. There is a significant difference between the experience of a listener to ABC Radio news at the time this research began and that of the same listener by the time the research was completed. It is central to the case study that at the time the research was undertaken, someone listening to the peak breakfast news bulletins on Radio National would have heard different bulletins from those heard by a listener to the peak breakfast bulletins on any of the ABC Metropolitan stations. Someone listening today, however, to Radio National at 7am will be hearing the same bulletin as is being simultaneously broadcast on the Metropolitan station. The 7.45am Metropolitan bulletin is no longer in the format of ten minutes of national news followed by five minutes of State-based news; at the time of writing it is a 15-minute composite bulletin and different in each Australian state. At both peak and off-

peak periods of the radio day, the same bulletin may be simulcast across the AM band ABC networks and across the eastern States. “ABC News” on any of the Metropolitan, Regional and Radio National stations in the same Australian time zone, has become a generic product, while NewsRadio is the niche station that caters to the most news-hungry audience³⁸.

The provision of bulletins tailored to the other radio programming of each network, which was central to an attempt to build audiences for Radio National in particular, was short-lived; it lasted for only about two years, between February 1992 and the end of 1994. Ratings on Radio National peaked in 1992/3 and have since declined and plateaued. Triple-J still has its own national news service, although it is now produced from within the Sydney newsroom rather than from within the radio station. To some extent ABC Classic FM has retained a “tailored” news service, as most of its bulletins are prepared in Adelaide and not heard on other networks. However, the “dominant paradigm” of ABC Radio News is that which is heard on Metropolitan and Regional stations, and now also on Radio National. This may not be as well suited to the audience constructed by Radio National’s non-news programming.

PNN or NewsRadio has survived and prospered on its eight transmitters and, at the time of writing, is likely to be expanded. It mixes rotated news bulletins with sport and weather, “re-versioned” specialist material from Radio National, alternative listening times for the major current affairs programs such as *AM* and *PM*, and of course Parliament when it is sitting. It makes sophisticated use of the digital audio and networked news systems that the ABC has adopted in succession to the original Basys and D-Cart technologies, as well as of satellite subscription news services and the ABC’s own network of

³⁸ It does so through frequency and freshness of bulletins across “Australia wide” and “World” news, as well as specific bulletins of sports and business news, rather than through length of bulletins or depth of stories.

domestic and national correspondents. It is run on a comparatively small budget and with relatively few personnel (relative to other ABC radio networks and dramatically so in comparison with similar services in Britain or the United States). In its triennial budget bid in 2003, the ABC included a request for funds specifically to expand the audience reach of NewsRadio, reflecting its success over the ten years of its existence, with those who can receive it.

The reason for the loss of tailored bulletins to Radio National in particular was partly a matter of resources, as has been described. More importantly, it is not seen by ABC managers to matter so much that the wheel has come full circle, back to “news is news” on this network, because there are more choices for audiences specifically seeking news. The differentiation - or segmentation - of audiences has moved beyond the original radio networks to the niche ABC station NewsRadio, and to the still developing distribution means of the Internet.

When the ABC first produced a World Wide Web site, it was seen as “adding value to our programs - for example, a fact sheet or guide or provision of more information. It was a way of taking pressure off program units in the constant demand for more information” (Griffiths, in ABC 1998a, p.3). Today, however, it is seen as an ABC network in its own right³⁹, “a new distribution means”, which is bringing new audiences to the ABC. This audience is younger than the traditional ABC audience, especially the audience for ABC News. Until very recently, the ABC online news service largely re-wrote existing radio and television news material, formatting it “specifically for an online audience” (Amjadali 1998, p.5). Although less disruptive to established production practices, some ABC radio journalists still view news online with concern⁴⁰. They fear it is stretching limited resources too thin, or upsetting the balance of which the ABC General

³⁹ In 2002 ABC New Media became a Division in its own right.

⁴⁰ In personal interviews conducted in 2001.

Manager for Information Programs (Radio), Susan Kadar spoke in 1994 (see Chapter Three), between tailored services and a news service of high quality.

What this means for those distinctive qualities attributed to ABC News, and for the work of its journalists is a dilemma, expressed by Kadar. She said that as professionals, journalists “feel anxious” if news material is handled in a non-professional way. But at the same time, journalists want outlets for their product (Kadar 1994). It is significant that ABC journalists working in the Sydney newsroom expressed (in conversations with the author in 2001) some criticism of the quality of ABC News Online, suggesting it was “re-hashed from broadcast news, and not very well at that”. Since that time, the ABC has made strenuous efforts to improve online news. For a while this included giving lessons in spelling and grammar to journalists whose deficiencies were suddenly glaringly obvious in text online, where they had not been in the broadcast environment (aided by the tactful on-air editing of often more literate newsreaders).

The form of news and future journalism

It must be noted that the differences between the bulletins on each network, although the focus of this investigation, were never as great as the differences between the non-news programming on each. This is partly because journalists share a set of news values, as mentioned above, and partly because the *form* of news has not much changed, despite considerable change in non-news programming forms (from block to flow, live to pre-recorded to live again, to greater interaction with the listeners). News, as the thesis has demonstrated, has changed little in form, remaining “privileged” in its position on the “radio clock”, and in its other textual features. There have been very few examples in either radio or television of challenges to the form of

news⁴¹. Only now are we beginning to see fundamental change to the forms of news offered across the spectrum of ABC news services, through the Internet, via ABC News Online.

The news values epitomised in ABC editorial policy as “comprehensive, independent, accurate, impartial and objective” are under challenge as never before. The situation, in which journalists find themselves in the ABC no less than anywhere else, is that there is so much information and so many ways of handling and distributing it, that “journalism” and “journalist” require re-definition. Hartley has suggested such a re-definition: the journalist as “redactor” (Hartley 2000).

Framing theory argues that the intended meaning of a news story is conveyed by directing attention to some possibilities while excluding or restricting the availability of others. Hartley argues this is a central function of journalism, transformed by the Internet’s “democratisation of public writing” into what he calls “redaction” (Hartley 2000, p.43). Hartley uses the term in relation to the demand created by the Internet for “journalistic sifting and sorting of all the available material”. He distinguishes “redaction” from “editing” in the gate-keeping and agenda-setting sense, arguing that the Internet has created “a privatised, virtualised public” that sets its own agenda. The “whose agenda?” argument has been around a long time (see Blood 1989) but Hartley does not enter into it. Rather, the definition of “to redact” that Hartley quotes from the Oxford English Dictionary includes: “In modern use: to draw up, to *frame*”(quoted in Hartley 2000, p.44. Italics added).

⁴¹ See the Introduction for an example of a partial exception on Triple J, and for an account of a failed attempt to change news presentation style on Radio National, see Dunn in Breen (1998).

The notion of redaction as a kind of framing brings us back to the relationship between journalism and audiences, and to the role of public service broadcasting.

The findings of the study suggest a continuing concern with the role of the public broadcaster in relation to its audiences, among news producers as much as among network and corporate managers. News producers were found to be more interested in and more conscious of audiences than much previous research has suggested⁴². This concern for audiences informs policy making in response to the possibilities offered to public broadcasting by the Internet. Chief among these is the reputation of ABC news and current affairs for independence and accuracy.

Conclusion

The case study has offered a uniquely detailed account of ABC Radio news production processes at a particular historical moment. It illustrates the ways in which production was determined by a combination of editorial policies, network structures, changes in technologies, news values, and the views held by producers about their audiences.

Through interviews, participant observation, textual analysis and the examination of organisational documents, this research has addressed the problem identified in the Introduction: how do news workers “audience”? It has increased knowledge and understanding both of how news workers create images of their audiences and what the institutional factors are that influence the manufacture of audiences as they appear in the text of news bulletins.

⁴² The findings also confirm earlier researchers’ findings that news producers speak as if they know who the audience are.

Audience construction occurs not just through text, nor via the production process but through both together with organisational policy. Theoretical analysis of audience creation has not brought all these sites together in quite this way before.

In so doing, the case study has addressed in particular the selection and presentation stages of the news production process, and the institution's "sense of [its] audience" (Schudson 1989, p.272). Both have been neglected areas of research in studies of news work. The research identifies these latter stages, of sub-editing stories from reporters' and news agency copy, of editing and "freshening" the bulletins, as those in which the audience is most visibly manufactured.

The thesis put forward a conceptual model of framing (in Chapter Five) that demonstrates both the "multiparadigmatic" (D'Angelo 2002) nature of the concept and its potential as a "bridging model" (Reese 2001). Above all, the thesis has demonstrated ways in which framing can be used to research important processes in news production at different levels, from policy level to that of professional culture, and generate insights to the often bumpy relationship between them.

The cumulative evidence of field observation and interviews, documentary analysis, and a novel use of framing theory demonstrate the way in which a specific and coherent audience is constructed. The audience is thus "manufactured" through a combination of newsroom practices and organisational policy. In achieving the aim of the thesis, to investigate the ways in which audiences are made through the relationships between organisational policy and news production practice, the work has also "shed light on ... the cultural place of the media in the contemporary world" (Alasuutari 1999, p.7). Specifically in this research, light is shed on the role of public service broadcasting today, in a world of digital media.

The thesis identified that, for public service broadcasting, it is hard to change the form and meaning of news, that form having signified the unifying role a public broadcaster is expected to play in maintaining a sense of national identity, an affirmation of the nation state. This aspect of the public service broadcaster's role is changing, in response both to complex cultural factors and to technological ones. These factors, as the preceding discussion has shown, are also profoundly affecting the future of journalism.

The Internet, one manifestation of the digital media world, offers two possibilities for the future of broadcast journalism. On the one hand, the accessibility of the Internet to so many threatens the distinction between amateur and professional, in journalism as much as in other media forms or genres. Bromley (1997, p.346) has suggested this may mean "the final fragmentation" of journalism, into "entrepreneurial editors ... machine hands and extensions of the computer". On the other hand, the sheer volume of information offers the professional journalist the special role that Hartley suggests, of "redactor". And this is a role uniquely available to a public broadcaster that enjoys a high level of public trust, such as the ABC. Additionally, factors that have been identified in relation to the Internet as democratising (such as hypertextuality and interactivity) have great significance for the ABC's historically paternalistic relationship with the audience.

The struggle over audiences, for news and networks (which audience is it to be?) was a brief one at the site of radio news. The tailoring of news bulletins to network audience-making policy was abandoned. However, the Internet has produced an opportunity to take advantage of the amount of news the ABC generates nationally and internationally, through "re-purposing". The struggle has moved on, because of the Internet and digital convergence, perhaps to one for journalists themselves, in terms of professional identity, definitions of professionalism, and a relationship with audiences that is more of a

partnership than in the past. All of these issues are rich sites for further research.

News producers' constructions of audience are important because the research demonstrates that they affect what construction of news the real/actual listeners receive. There is scope for combining the insights of the research regarding news producers' audience-making with research into how actual audience members receive and interpret the different constructions of them produced by "tailored" bulletins.

How producers call up audiences provides a reference point for audience reception research. It is a logical conclusion from the thesis that we cannot study producers without at least taking into account the ever-present audience images that they make.

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