Tracing the political development of online news:
Two Australian case studies

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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17 March 2011
Declaration:

Except where due acknowledgement has been made, this work is that of the candidate alone. The work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award. The content of the thesis is the result of work that has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program. Any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged. Ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Lucy Morieson

17 March, 2011.
Acknowledgements:

This thesis owes a large debt of gratitude to my supervisors, Cathy Greenfield and Peter Williams, who through their teaching during my honours year developed in me a hunger for research and the pleasure of intellectual inquiry that ultimately led me back to RMIT University and to this research. I am so very grateful that they have generously nurtured that spark for the duration of my doctoral candidacy. In practical terms, Cathy made this thesis possible – not only because of the great consideration that she unfailingly invested in our thesis-related interactions, but also because of her generosity of spirit and demonstration of faith in my abilities, whether in my research or in my teaching work. Thank you, Cathy.

There are many others at RMIT who have provided great support, friendship and collegiality during the course of my PhD: Terry Johal for his generosity as a colleague, mentor and friend; Stephen Gaunson for being the personification of the best sort of researcher; Brian Morris for his guidance during the early stages; Angelo Tardio for answering my many questions about forms and procedures; and those who shared the student spaces in buildings 4 and 9. Thank you all for making the journey far more bearable.

I would also acknowledge the proofreading services provided by Julie Stafford (BA DipEd) during the latter stages of the thesis writing process. It is precisely because her efforts are invisible in these pages that I must extend my thanks and gratitude for her careful work.

I would also like to thank the people at The Age (Online) and Crikey who were willing to be involved with my research when no one else would. I would particularly like to thank Eric Beecher, Sophie Black and Jane Nethercote at Crikey, and Jesse Hogan at The Age. Added thanks goes to Eric Beecher for hiring me as a journalist at The Reader in 2003, and later allowing me to work on Crikey where the first seeds of an idea for a thesis were planted.

A very special thanks goes to Evet Jean who has never known me without this thesis, which in itself is quite an achievement! I am especially grateful that he has supported me through this project and enabled me to live a wonderfully happy life at the same time. Similarly, I would like to acknowledge the support of my friends whose belief in having a good time whatever else life brings has been most important for surviving the last five years.

My family has also been incredibly supportive, excited, and understanding of the demands of this ‘beast’. I would like to thank them for propping me up and cheering me on at every turn. The Jean family has also been overwhelmingly generous, providing me a writing space, and more importantly, a comforting escape when I have most needed it.

But, specifically, this thesis is dedicated to the women on both sides of my family who taught me what it means to be a strong woman: Mavis, Audrey, Carolyn, and, of course, my mother Anne whose voice in my head was always there telling me at the toughest of times to ‘Just do it!’
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Summary:

Traditional journalism is facing a broad crisis encompassing its economic foundation, its social legitimacy, a transformed technological environment and changing audience expectations and practices. Given the privileged position traditionally afforded to journalism in Western liberal democracies, there is great concern about what these changes might mean for political participation, as well as for longstanding media businesses.

Against this background this thesis provides an investigation into the changing political conditions that shape the operation of journalism as a cultural technology. Under the economic politics of advanced liberalism, journalism is being reshaped around increasingly financial objectives. Two Australian cases, The Age Online – the online version of a daily broadsheet newspaper – and Crikey, an online-only daily news email – are used to explore the relationship between the dominant contemporary economic politics and the current changes affecting news and journalism. The discussion is structured into four key areas: the changing political role of journalism; the professionalisation of journalism and the opposite but associated move towards more ‘authentic’ forms of (often, user generated) content; the changing news audience; and the centrality of the news ‘business model’ to discussions about the future of journalism.
At a time when changes to the news industry are being viewed with equal measures of concern and optimism, this thesis provides a conceptualisation of journalism’s changing political role that moves beyond the limitations of the ‘fourth estate’ rhetoric. By positioning journalism as a historically shaped cultural technology, it is possible to account for these changes without an appeal to a bygone era, while also taking of stock of those elements of ‘traditional’ journalism we might hope to maintain in the future.
Introduction

In August 2009 an article appeared in The Sunday Age newspaper, weighing the chances of journalism’s survival (Hyland, 2009). The problem, argues journalist Tom Hyland, is that the news industry is “cannibalising itself” – a phrase coined by Rupert Murdoch to describe the practice of providing free news content online when it is produced at a great cost. As Hyland acknowledges, “[Murdoch] should know”. Elaborating on the problem, Hyland argues that newspapers are losing money, mostly through the loss of advertising as its rivers of gold – the classified advertising that once paid the cost of journalism’s production – are drying up. Adding to these woes, print journalism is also losing readers, and online readers bring in less profit than their print counterparts. The result is not only the contraction of advertising-funded space for journalism, but also the jobs of people who make it. Hyland quotes the US blog, Paper Cuts, to report that more than 12,480 jobs have been lost in the US in 2009 alone. In the UK more than 60 local papers closed between 2008 and 2009. In France the government is pumping millions of euros into the newspaper industry and subsidising subscriptions for 18-year-olds in the hope of reviving the struggling business and creating a new, younger market for news. In the UK, the US, France, and a range of other Western liberal democracies, including Australia, newspaper journalism is in crisis.
This matters to Rupert Murdoch because if his newspapers are cannibalising themselves, what they are eating is the source of his profits. As Hyland reports in 2009, Murdoch announced a $US3.4 billion loss for his global news business, News Corporation. For Murdoch, journalism’s future is measured, in large part, in dollars. For others this cannibalisation elicits another sort of concern: one to do with what journalism does for societies. Hyland cites former journalist David Simon, who is now best known for his work as writer and producer of the television series The Wire, expressing his concern about the death of what he calls “high-end journalism”. What worries Simon are the implications for democratic processes and participation. He argues that the informed reporting and scrutiny of public institutions that has traditionally been provided by high-end journalism is vanishing, and “unless a new economic model is achieved, it will not be reborn on the web or anywhere else”.

Simon’s call for a “new economic model” is a familiar refrain for those engaged in debates about journalism’s uncertain future. It is also suggestive of the way in which different players in these debates attempt to locate a singular source of journalism’s woes. For Simon, it is the deterioration of the economic model that underpins journalism’s production that most threatens its future. So too for Michael Gawenda, former editor-in-chief of The Age and director of Melbourne University’s Centre for the Advanced Study of Journalism – and another expert cited by Hyland – who argues that “the fundamental problem is
that what once paid for journalism in newspapers no longer pays for it”. For Simon, Gawenda, Murdoch and many like them in the media industry, it is the economic model – or more commonly, the business model – that is both the source of the problem that journalism is facing but also, if the right model is found, the source of its redemption.

Among the experts Hyland sources for his article, Margaret Simons and Eric Beecher have become two of the more prominent voices in the discussions surrounding the practice of journalism and its future development in Australia. For Simons, who is a journalist, blogger, and the chair of Swinburne University’s Public Interest Journalism Foundation, the problem with journalism can be related to economic problems, but not necessarily the business model. Rather, Simons argues that it has been the short-term focus of news proprietors on their net profits (or bottom line) and share prices – rather than on journalism itself – that has crippled newspaper journalism in Australia. She argues, “the credibility of journalism is being mined all the time in an attempt to sustain large profits for as long as possible”. Eric Beecher, publisher of *Crikey* and former editor of *The Sydney Morning Herald*, agrees with Simons that part of the problem is credibility: “the credibility of the media generally, including the quality media, has never been lower and it keeps ratcheting down, therefore there is no public debate about this issue”. Beecher has positioned himself as a vocal critic of the mainstream media, and as an expert voice on matters to do with journalism’s future in Australia. For him, the
problem encompasses the changing news business model, but chiefly as it threatens the continued existence of “public trust journalism in Australia” – or, the journalism that fulfils the traditional *fourth estate* role many see as the primary function of the news media, and particularly newspapers.

What are the possible solutions to these problems? Hyland sources a number of remedies from his interview subjects. For example, Beecher calls for the preservation of ‘public trust’ journalism, something he argues cannot be delivered entirely by smaller online offerings like *Crikey*, but needs to be taken up by larger media companies in Australia – although exactly how this would be accomplished remains unclear. Gawenda calls for government subsidy, arguing that there’s a need for a “body similar to the government-funded Arts Council that would subsidise independent journalism projects”. Hyland’s article itself was prompted in large part by Murdoch’s plans to erect what are known as ‘paywalls’ around online content, requiring readers to pay for access to material that has previously been available free of charge. Hyland says that (then) Fairfax chief executive, Brian McCarthy, is considering something similar, perhaps including dual levels of access to different categories of materials so that readers only pay for access to “more upmarket, high-quality data and information”. But Hyland acknowledges that the expectation that people will pay for something they have grown accustomed to getting for free poses a great threat to the news business. Former *Age* journalist and current Professor of Journalism at the University of Canberra, Matthew Ricketson, tells
Hyland that such a move requires of news publications a “leap of faith”. But he also points out that habits around the use of media do change – “people now pay more for their phones than in the era before mobiles … many subscribe to pay TV … there’s evidence some people will pay and they can change their habits”. John Hartigan, chief executive of the Australian branch of Murdoch’s News Corporation, News Limited, certainly hopes so. He is confident that people will pay for “news that is original, exclusive, has authority and is relevant”.

While this article leaves the reader concerned about journalism’s future and unclear about the source of its possible conservation, I have outlined its arguments in considerable detail precisely because of the way it maps out the field of argument that surrounds print and online journalism in Australia. Hyland’s article encapsulates the problematisation of journalism in economic or political terms with the tendency for these two perspectives to be presented as irreconcilable in the struggle for journalism’s future. It also demonstrates the multiple accounts of the source of these problems, as well as the likely solution, along with the centrality of expert figures in translating, intervening and speaking for the various interests and conflicts bound up in this issue and its negotiation.

Against this background, this thesis asks the question: in what ways have changing political and economic conditions shaped the development of online
news in Australia? I explore these changing conditions in relation to two Australian instances, *The Age Online* and *Crikey* – the former, an online version of Melbourne’s daily broadsheet newspaper, *The Age*, and the latter, an online-only independent daily email newsletter, with corresponding website. Specific focus will be given to four key areas that have been identified as central to the development of online news: journalism’s changing political role; journalism’s professional status; the changing news audience; and the business of news.

The decision to use two Australian case studies was made in response to a gap in the scholarship around the development of digital news in Australia. Flew (2009) suggests there is a need for more close, detailed studies of specific news industries and the effects of new media:

> Given the propensity for speculative accounts and meta-theory around the social impact of new media, a case can be made for more empirical accounts that aim to develop a snapshot of developments around one medium in one location, and to seek to extrapolate from that towards understanding of wider trends. (p. 97)

This thesis responds to Flew’s call for a snapshot of a particular medium in a particular place by undertaking a study of online news sites in Australia. This thesis also aims to produce a snapshot by building up detail from a range of sources through the use of comparative case studies and the analysis of a
combination of material documents, artefacts, and the synthesis of diverse
critical materials, as outlined in Chapter One. As well as outlining the
methodological approach and materials adopted in this study, the first chapter
outlines the field of research in detail by mapping out the multifaceted nature of
the crisis afflicting newspaper journalism, as well as the number of *rhetorics* that
attempt to account for the source, nature and solution of this crisis.

As suggested by the use of the term *rhetorics* above, this thesis adopts an
approach to the development of online news – and communication more
generally – that understands language as rhetorical in nature. Leith and
Myerson’s (1989) rhetorical approach to communication positions all language
as an attempt to persuade in that it is a response to another possible speaking
position. As outlined particularly in Chapter One, but throughout this thesis,
multiple rhetorics surround the development of online news in an attempt to
make sense of its many changes. Indeed, online news operates as a site of
*multiple* rhetorics, and part of my strategy in the thesis is to trace these rhetorics,
and outline the way in which they attempt to provide explanatory frames for
the transformations affecting news in a changing economic, political, cultural
and technological environment. Within these explanatory frames, such as the
rhetoric of an approaching technological golden age, or equally, a lost golden
age of fourth estate journalism, the rhetoric of the business model, the rhetoric
of global competitive free markets, and the rhetoric of the durability of
journalism, while illuminating and persuasive, are ultimately insufficient in their capacity to account for the development of online news.

What these frames do not adequately account for are the broader changing political and economic conditions within which the migration of news online is occurring. This migration requires the navigation of four factors that most influence the changing shape of news online. The arrival at these factors in particular – that is, politics, professionalism, audiences and business – was informed by the elements that Schudson (2003) posits combine to shape the development of news: the news marketplace, news sources, the political culture of news, the news audience, and news as literature and narrative. Schudson’s factors account for the cultural development of journalism, but not at the expense of a range of other social factors, indicating the utility of an interdisciplinary approach to fully account for the development of news. My four areas of focus echo Schudson’s elements, though not entirely: my focus on the changing political role of news aligns with his consideration of the political culture of news; my consideration of rhetorics of professionalism resonates with both his emphasis on news sources and again, his concern with the political culture of news; my consideration of news as a business is aligned with his interest in the news marketplace; and finally, we both emphasise the importance of the news audience. Chapter Two is concerned with mapping the theoretical development of online news, and the broader approach to the field of study.
Through the investigation of these four areas, politics remains sharply in focus. Politics is used here in the broad sense to encompass any sort of power relation; or, as “the ways and means by which people negotiate the relations of power in which they find themselves in a host of institutions involved in the government of populations” (Greenfield & Williams, 1992). Politics is at play in the development of online news in the struggles, tussles, negotiations and decisions required to shape its future. The way in which these political struggles are played out are considered, first, through interrogating the rhetoric of journalism’s traditional fourth estate role, and the way this is being challenged in a changing media environment. Drawing on the work of Nolan (2008), I position journalism as a cultural technology, its characteristics and objectives shifting in relation to changing dominant political rationalities.

In Chapter Three I begin by outlining journalism’s long relationship with democracy and the centrality of this relationship to particular professional identities, before outlining in some detail the campaign fronted by *Crikey* publisher Eric Beecher for the preservation of what he calls (as Hyland reports) at different times ‘quality journalism’ or ‘public trust journalism’ in Australia. This is a form of journalism that maintains the fourth estate role of the press in Western liberal democracies – one he argues is under threat from a range of fronts, but mostly the financial crisis facing traditional news caused by the migration of advertising dollars and readers online. I use this example to
illustrate the problematic relationship between journalism and democracy and demonstrate that this relationship is historically contingent and tied to a particular form of liberalism under which this sort of journalism arose and flourished. I argue that the discomfort expressed by Beecher demonstrates the tension that arises around changing forms of liberalism – and it is the changing conditions of liberalism that constitute the political, economic and cultural conditions in which journalism operates. I argue that while Beecher, and hence *Crikey*, are experiencing these tensions acutely, *The Age Online* is demonstrating more flexibility and thus less tension around the changing conditions in which it operates.

If journalism is a cultural technology, it is involved in the task of governing, which, following writers such as Dean (2010), Dean and Hindess (1998), Miller and Rose (1990), and Foucault (2008), I define in the broad sense, not only as the preserve of parliaments and elected officials but as “any attempt to shape our behaviour according to particular sets of norms and for a variety of ends” (Dean, 2010, p. 18). Within this conception of government, technologies are the tools employed to know and govern populations, the “diverse and heterogeneous means, mechanisms and instruments through which governing is accomplished” (Dean, 2010, p. 269). Government occurs beyond the bounds of the parliamentary system and is dispersed across a range of social agencies and institutions, such as the school, the media, the prison, the church, the family, the workplace, and so on. Journalism then is bound up in
processes and practices of government, but it is also self-governing, as I outline in my consideration of the politics of professional status.

Specifically, I consider the extent to which the navigation of professional status is shaped by the political, economic and cultural logic of advanced liberalism. The way in which this thesis considers the changing political and economic conditions shaping online news is to pay attention to the intersections of particular elements of news with associated rationalities of liberal government. This is joined by use of a genealogical approach that helps to describe discontinuities as much as continuities between past and present, between newer and older forms of news. What is produced is a *history of the present* (Dean, 1997). I use the term *advanced liberalism* to signify the dominant contemporary political ethos of Western, and increasingly non-Western (Ong, 2007), liberal democracies. While the term *neoliberalism* has gained more popular mileage, I adopt *advanced liberalism* in recognition that contemporary government does not take a monolithic form. Rather, advanced liberal government inhabits a number of guises, of which neoliberalism is the most prominent. Forms of advanced liberal government are thus recognisable not by their declared ethos, but by their central elements, including the spread of the market into areas formerly of public provision, the adoption of indirect means of regulation, and the dispersion of government across multiple sites and forms of agency (Dean, 2010, p. 266).
Similarly, as the definitions of ‘news’ and ‘journalist’ are extended online – from independent but mainstream sites like Crikey, to citizen journalism sites and social media platforms – the professional status of journalism is being challenged and reworked. Extending the governmental approach outlined above, in Chapter Four I position professionalism as a means of journalistic authority in which journalistic autonomy, from government and economic interests, allows journalism to be shaped as a cultural technology for particular ends. I outline that the freedom secured by journalistic autonomy is not only the means through which journalists exercise their authority, but also the means by which their autonomy is acted upon to constitute particular kinds of journalistic cultures and practices, including professional norms and standards. I argue that Crikey inhabits a paradoxical position professionally, conflicted by its attempts to be recognised as professional by mainstream measures and its simultaneous rejection of these measures to suggest that it offers something more authentic than the mainstream press. It is through these publicly rendered discussions that Crikey is governing its own professional standards.

In comparison, The Age Online has demonstrated little engagement with discussions of professionalism and changing journalistic practices online. I argue that this does not represent an absence of professionalism, but rather a changed professionalism online. This is heightened by a newsroom divide between the print and online arms of the paper that sees considerably different forms of news gaining prominence in the two versions. This is a source of angst
for staff at the newspaper, and might seem to suggest a rejection at the online version of the traditional journalistic values embodied by the print paper. But what this represents is a different sort of professionalism online, more aligned with the cultural logic of advanced liberalism and its economic imperatives. Thus I argue that *The Age* newspaper and *The Age Online* find themselves working to different measures of professionalism and within different jurisdictions, while *Crikey* straddles the uncomfortable position between an older version of professionalism and new standards that have emerged online.

The interrogation of the political development of online news is further developed in Chapter Five through the consideration of the changing relationship between news producers and audiences. News has long shaped spatial and temporal identities, and in the digital era this history has resonance in the notion of interactivity. But interactivity is often held more as an ideal than implemented in practice, often because the practices of interactivity conflict with traditional liberal news values. This is demonstrated in the two cases where, although *Crikey* currently exhibits more interactive options, *The Age Online* demonstrates more potential for future interaction on its site because of *Crikey’s* attachment to discourses about traditional journalistic practices compared to *The Age Online’s* demonstrated flexibility around changing news practices online. Interactivity can also be read as part of sped-up processes of capitalism that Thrift (2006) argues are bringing producers and consumers into closer proximity with each other, resulting in new practices of innovation.
This new producer-consumer relationship can be demonstrated by the incident that saw *Age* columnist Catherine Deveny sacked after a flood of negative readers’ comments in response to her remarks on social networking site *Twitter*. I suggest that this incident can also be read as an example of the market populism that has increasingly become incorporated into the operation of online journalism. Market populism might also be said to underpin the operation of *social network markets* – the feature that separates the creative from other industries, according to Creative Industries scholars (Potts, Cunningham, Hartley, & Ormerod, 2008). Thus the final part of this lengthy chapter takes a detour to map the field of the Creative Industries scholarship and debates in order to demonstrate the politics of this rhetoric, which is increasingly shaping the practices, training and education of journalism, but also bringing it into being. Given the political focus developed throughout the thesis, this chapter ends by considering what the politics of the Creative Industries research and policy agenda might mean for the future of journalism.

Chapter Six is concerned with the business of news, entering the field by first outlining Rupert Murdoch’s introduction of *paywalls* around online content across his news sites, and the subsequent media response. Throughout these discussions the business model is upheld as an explanatory frame and diagnostic tool, which, it is hoped, contains the formula to guarantee a news site’s survival. However, discussion of the business model also involves
discomfort, as it requires recognition of the fact that journalism is a business as well as a social institution. I argue that the business model is an insufficient explanatory frame to come to grips with online news because it seeks to isolate the business element of journalism’s operation from its other roles. I draw on a number of sources to argue that businesses cannot be understood as singular, holistic entities, but rather as part of broader social networks, with a range of goals and imperatives. Nonetheless, the economic politics of advanced liberalism demands that economic imperatives such as shareholder value, become increasingly central to matters of culture, journalism included. I outline the way in which The Age Online is navigating this shift in ways that impact upon its cultural operation, to the concern of some critics. Similarly, I describe the way in which Crikey seeks to diminish the importance of its business model in order to assert its professional legitimacy and status within the mainstream media.

This thesis aims to present a close study of two prominent Australian online news sites, as well as a broader framework for the study of online news, amidst a changing technological environment which positions these changes alongside a governmental regime, to better account for the social development of online news. This detailed and localised account of two instances of Australian online news and journalism is made at a time of great change. While the study of news and journalism in the digital era is a popular field of inquiry, few studies have related these changes to the conditions of advanced liberalism,
and the tensions that arise in relation to a changing political and economic media environment. This is particularly pertinent given the great angst in some quarters, and in others, great optimism about the future of journalism as a profession and social institution. With changing political conditions come changing notions about the political role of journalism and particularly its status as the fourth estate and a vital mechanism in a democracy. As journalism is reshaped within a political economic rationality that places greater emphasis on market and shareholder value, it is necessary to break through the ‘threat or opportunity’ dichotomy that tends to dominate such discussions in order to accurately describe the way in which news is changing.

By drawing together analysis of the changing political, professional, audience and business elements of news in each case, I produce a detailed snapshot of two different but related cases of Australian online news. By positioning the development of these sites across the four key areas of professional concern in relation to the conditions of advanced liberalism, I provide an analysis of online news in relation to the broader political, economic and cultural conditions in which it emerges. Along with the empirical, historical detail provided about each case, I map an approach to online news that can be applied to a range of other cases in a range of other locations, both international and local. At a time when news and journalism faces enormous pressure and change from a range of fronts, this thesis maps an approach that
encompasses the social development of these changes. In the following chapter I begin by demonstrating the specific nature of the range of challenges currently afflicting news and journalism, before outlining the selection and rationale for the chosen case studies. This precedes discussion of my approach to news, journalism, communication and technology, which is then followed in Chapters Three to Six, by the analysis of the four key professional foci.
Chapter One:

The Problem of News
Journalism’s “golden age”?

In the first of his six Boyer Lectures for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) in 2008, News Corporation Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Rupert Murdoch declared that the world is on the cusp of a “golden age”, brought about by the transformations of the previous few decades and the “unleashing of human talent and ability across our world” (2008a). While the spread of democratic freedom, and with it global competitive free markets, is central to this vision, Murdoch posits that it is primarily communication technologies that are unleashing their transformative effects on citizens across the globe. He speaks of the Wall Street trader with access to real time global pricing information, the South Korean teenager connecting with their friend in Germany through social networking site Myspace (which is owned by News Corp. Digital Media, a branch of Murdoch’s own News Corporation), and “the research scientist in Bangalore who can tap into the expertise of the best minds from around the world to help to improve crop yields in the poorest parts of India” (Murdoch, 2008b).

But this ‘golden age’ is also ushering in something more worrying for the media mogul – a threat to the business model that has secured his wealth for six decades through the sale of news, and with it, advertising (Murdoch, 2008b). The reason? Consumer choice. The same choice that provides the foundation of Murdoch’s global competitive free markets is challenging the source of his wealth and authority. Consumers of news now have more choice than ever
before, thanks in part to the digital technology that is eroding the geographical boundaries that once constrained news audiences. The news business model that was based on these geographically organised readerships is being threatened by the mobility of audiences, and with them advertising dollars which are moving online – but not at a rate that can sustain news in the digital form – cutting off print news’s lifeblood.

Murdoch has responded to the present scenario by announcing plans to introduce what have become known in the news industry as *paywalls* around all News Corporation online content (Thorpe, 2009). These paywalls will require users to pay to see certain types of content, in an attempt to replicate the success of the paid subscription model of *The Wall Street Journal* – owned by News Corporation since 2007, with the largest circulation of all newspapers in the United States (US) – where subscribers pay considerable subscription fees for niche and premium content, often bundled with a print subscription. *The Wall Street Journal* online subscription model has generated 400,000 subscriptions (Plambeck, 2010) and thus been deemed a success, though *Crikey* publisher Eric Beecher (2010d) argues that success is not always measured in profit – the *Journal* lost $US80 million last year despite its healthy subscription rates. A reason for this could be the inability to match the advertising revenue of print, online. But through the widespread introduction of paywalls, Murdoch hopes that choice and the free market, the very thing that poses a threat to his traditional business model, will provide his redemption. Consumers will simply
have to pay for their news even if they have become accustomed to getting it for free.

But while Murdoch remains confident in the power of the free market to correct its own mistakes, others are less optimistic about the future of news in the digital environment. The rhetoric of the free web – that “information wants to be free” (Barlow, 1994) – is being increasingly challenged as the means of production online becomes increasingly consolidated1. While the early web seemed to promise a freedom and openness not found in traditional media, there is nothing to suggest this will remain the case. For instance, Scott (2005) argues that while there was initial optimism about the internet’s capacity to reinvigorate journalism, large media corporations – of which Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation is one – have acted with “unprecedented consolidation, concentration, and integration to severely narrow the scope of the press” (p. 111). For those who initially subscribed to a utopian view of the web, Murdoch’s move seems evidence of an approaching dystopia. But for journalism’s practitioners and observers, there is something of further concern in what Murdoch is addressing. His move to implement paywalls around online news is an attempt to stem the flow of revenue that is rapidly being bled from the news industry with the loss of print readers, the migration of advertising dollars online, and the current failure to ‘monetise’ increasing numbers of

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1 The rhetoric of consolidation is often found in discussions of the internet’s historical development, but it is one that Quiggin (in Quiggin & Potts, 2008) makes a strong case against. He argues that the internet is enabling a form of “cooperative enterprise driven by individuals and households rather than the market” (p. 145), often driven by altruistic motives rather than monetary incentives.
online audiences. In the face of this combination of factors, teamed with the threat posed by the rise of free, non-professional content online, traditional print news is floundering. The concern is that this threatens the financial position of print journalism and with it its traditional political role.

Journalism occupies a privileged social position in many liberal societies, where it is seen as central to the fair and transparent functioning of democracy, as a fourth estate – an informal but vital pillar in the democratic system of checks and balances. It also provides for its audiences the constitution of particular social identities and with it a sense of belonging. But in order for it to achieve this, it must also thrive financially. Many are critical of Murdoch’s paywall decision, seeing it as contradictory to the inherent nature of the web. For instance, Rundle (2009) argues that Murdoch is demonstrating his “arsed-up relationship with the internet” by refusing to acknowledge the extent to which digital technology has changed our relationship with news and information – “and to think otherwise is to believe that the middle ages could have uninvented block printing and gone back to the monasteries”. Huffington (2009), who also believes we are in the midst of a golden era, argues similarly that paywalls won’t work because they are based on an “old content economy”, rather than the new networked economy that thrives not on subscriptions and paywalls, but on links, online advertising, citizen journalism, and search engines.
Others argue that Murdoch’s paywall proposal poses a threat to the very nature of journalism itself. *Crikey* publisher Eric Beecher (2010b) argues that a move towards paid content, while necessary, further threatens the operation of quality local journalism online. Beecher suggests that with *The New York Times* now joining News Corporation publications in announcing plans to erect paywalls around areas of online content, lesser-known news sites will struggle to compete: “If I am forced to pay to read *The New York Times* online – which I will do willingly – there is far less chance that I will pay to read *The Australian*, *The Age* or *The Sydney Morning Herald* online”. Beecher continues to question the success of Murdoch’s “papers of influence” – *The Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Post* and *The Australian* – suggesting that Murdoch subsidises his prominent newspapers through other arms of his business in order to retain political influence in the polities in which he does business (Beecher, 2010d). In this environment, Beecher argues that smaller local sites will struggle to compete for audiences and thus for financial viability, rendering them less able to provide the sort of journalism that requires significant funding and is able to fulfil a democratic role.

**Journalism as a site of multiple rhetorics**

What this incident brings to the fore is a number of prominent rhetorics surrounding the development of online news, evident in Murdoch’s lectures, but also as I outlined in the introduction, proliferate around discussions of journalism’s future. First, there is Murdoch’s clear technological determinism in
his celebration of the approaching ‘golden age’. He positions technological advances as the clear driver of this radically different new era, suggesting that we are “in the midst of a shift from an industrial society to an information society”, and that those who do not keep up, risk being left behind like the Luddites of the Industrial Revolution who became “prisoners of the past” (Murdoch, 2008b). Such determinism pervades many accounts of the development of digital technologies and particularly online news, but fails to take account of the way in which technologies and their uses are social from the outset as well as in their design and implementation.

The second prominent rhetoric in Murdoch’s lectures is that of the ‘business model’ as central to the development and success of online news. Murdoch argues that “technology is destroying the business models we have relied on for decades” (Murdoch, 2008b), while Beecher (2009g) argues that we are in a time when “commercial media is grappling with a business model that may no longer sustain serious journalism”. In these and similar accounts which proliferate in discussions around the future of news in the digital era, the business model is presented as both the source of the crisis but also as the remedy that will cure the ills that are facing contemporary news businesses. Discussion of the business model becomes more complex in discussions about news than these analyses suggest because it usually fails to account for the complexity of the news business in which its routine objectives are often in conflict with its social objectives as the fourth estate. Thus when Beecher
proposes that it is necessary to consider philanthropic or public funding to preserve journalism’s democratic role (Beecher, 2009c), he is bypassing the uncomfortable fact that this is often secondary to the news’s commercial purpose – to make money.

The third prominent rhetoric is that of the ‘free market’ – the site of Murdoch’s challenge, as well as his solution. Murdoch positions the free market as the source of both individual and national growth arguing, for example, that for Australia to survive and compete against the rising superpowers of India and China, it must be less dependent on government – and more receptive to the opportunities of the global free market (Murdoch, 2008a) – while crediting the embrace of the twin forces of privatisation and liberalisation for the recent economic growth of these two Asian nations. However, the focus of the free market is ultimately the individual, who is both agent and benefactor in relation to this economic entity:

Being pro-market, pro-business and pro-globalisation means working for a society where citizens are not dependent on the government … And it means smaller government and an end to the paternalism that nourishes political correctness, promotes government interference and undermines freedom and personal responsibility. (Murdoch, 2008a)
The rhetoric of the ‘global competitive free market’ infuses Murdoch’s leadership of his news empire, and is exemplary of the economic politics of advanced liberalism.

The fourth prominent rhetoric in Murdoch’s lectures relates to the durability of journalism. Despite acknowledging that the form journalism takes in the future may change, Murdoch is confident that the task of giving readers “great journalism and great judgement” will persist (Murdoch, 2008c). Further, while many are forecasting the death of the newspaper (for example, see Meyer, 2004), Murdoch does not surrender to this popular rhetoric, arguing instead that “newspapers will reach new heights”. This rhetoric – or the opposed rhetoric of the imminent death of journalism – underpins many analyses of online news. But a belief in the durability of journalism is also productive of tensions around issues of journalism’s changing political role, journalism professionalism, and the changing relationship between journalists and audiences, as my investigation will illuminate.

These rhetorics, manifest in Murdoch’s lectures but extending well beyond them, begin to reveal some of the prominent ideas, arguments and discussions that presently surround the development and production of online news. Recognising them as rhetorics indicates that they mark out argumentative positions – made in response to other positions – and are thus

\[\text{For example, Philip Meyer (2004) predicts the death of the newspaper will take place in 2043, while others such as Jay Rosen (in Simons, 2008b) and Clay Shirky (2009) note that while newspapers may be facing imminent death, that doesn’t mean that journalism will be lost along with them.}\]
often the site of great tension and conflict. The speakers who utilise these various rhetorical resources often have much at stake, whether financially or otherwise, in the persistence of these rhetorics. For instance, Murdoch’s demonstrated belief in the durability of journalism is not merely rhetorical; at stake in Murdoch’s position is the persuasion of shareholders, audiences and other business leaders who must be convinced of his legitimacy to speak and act on their behalf. I will now outline the way in which these rhetorics extend across the discussions that surround the changing shape of news in the digital era.

News and journalism in crisis

While Murdoch focuses on the threat to the financial sustainability of news, this is just part of the broader social crisis facing news businesses and the profession of journalism. Some argue that the crisis is caused by the “uncomfortable transition” that comes with the “active migration of news online” (Chung, 2007, p. 58), while others insist it is not about readership but the migration of advertising dollars online (Beecher, 2009b). Flew and Wilson (2008) argue that the crisis arises from “a growing disconnect between journalism as an organized and institutionalized professional practice, and the audiences and communities it intended to serve” (p. 3), while Flew (2005a) argues that the problem that has faced print in the transition online, despite the appeal of the new medium – is a cultural one, leading to the tendency to replicate print ways of doing things online (p. 89).
Gitlin (2009) cites these and other issues, outlining what he posits are the five elements that constitute this crisis: the precipitous decline in the circulation of newspapers; the decline in advertising revenue, which combines with the first to badly damage the profitability of newspapers; the diffusion of audience attention across a range of new media; journalism’s crisis in professional authority; and lastly, “journalism’s inability or unwillingness to penetrate the veil of obfuscation behind which power conducts its risky business”. In his fifth point, Gitlin is referencing the decline in journalism’s willingness or ability to occupy the investigative scrutiny of power across and outside of government that inheres to its traditional fourth estate role. This, combined with his fourth point about journalism’s professional crisis since early this century, a number of incidents have worked to undermine the perceived authority and objectivity of the press. In the US, these include the blogger-lead exposé that Dan Rather relied on faked documents in a report that then President George Bush evaded military service (Steinberg & Carter, 2004), the discovery that Jack Kelley at USA Today (Steinberg, 2004) and Jayson Blair at The New York Times (Barry, Barstow, Glater, Liptak, & Steinberg, 2003) had fabricated sources and stories, and the lack of critical coverage in the lead up to the Iraq war, particularly around Iraq’s alleged possession of ‘weapons of mass destruction’ (Okrent, 2004). Studies have found that public confidence in the press is plummeting in the US, with 45 per cent of Americans believing little of what they read in their daily newspapers (Pew Research Center for People and the Press, 2005).
In the UK, reporting in the lead up to the Iraq war had an equally negative effect on the public image of journalism. In 2003, *BBC* reporter Andrew Gilligan reported that the British government had “sexed up” its dossier on Iraq, in particular, claims that it could have a missile ready to go within 45 minutes. The claims were traced back to an anonymous source – weapons expert Dr David Kelly, who committed suicide soon after he was publicly identified. A government inquiry into his death, the Hutton Inquiry, cleared the government of any wrongdoing, placing blame on the *BBC* and with responsibility laid at the feet of the broadcaster’s chairman and director-general – although the results of the inquiry were viewed with scepticism by the press (see "Hutton report," 2011). While journalists are not known for rating highly on measures of public trust, this has declined rapidly in the UK – down by 33 per cent since 2003 across all platforms, and down 24 per cent at *The Times, Daily Telegraph,* and *The Guardian,* usually the country’s bastions of quality journalism ("ABCs," 2010). More recently, the UK tabloid *News of the World* has been accused of illegally hacking into private phone calls to attain stories, a scandal that has reached the current British Prime Minister, David Cameron, with the resignation of his communications director, Andy Coulson, over allegations he may have authorised the use of phone hacking as editor of *News of the World* from 2003–2007.
In Australia, a 2006 survey found 85 per cent of respondents believe the media are “often biased” in reporting events, and a majority of those surveyed said they believed the media invaded people’s privacy unnecessarily (Roy Morgan Research as cited in Rodrigues, 2008). Rodrigues (2008) outlines a series of incidents in 2007 that raised questions about Australian journalists’ ethical standards. These included the theft and publication of an Australian Football League player’s medical records by television network Channel 7 journalists; the release by three journalists (one television, two print journalists) of details of an off-the-record lunch discussion with then treasurer Peter Costello; and the revelation that a journalist at The Australian newspaper promised an independent political candidate coverage in return for the direction of voting preferences. More recently, former transport minister David Campbell resigned after Seven News broadcast footage of him leaving a gay club (Crook, 2010); and the New South Wales Health Minister, John Della Bosca, resigned after the media uncovered his affair with a younger woman (Ellis, 2009). Both stories raise questions about the extent to which the media can justify intrusions into the private lives of public figures, and whether their publication is in the ‘public interest’ (Simons, 2009a). Crikey and ABC TV’s Media Watch have also accused The Australian newspaper of running a long and politically-motivated campaign against Victorian Police Chief Commissioner, Simon Overland (Holmes, 2010b; Simons, 2010a).
However, while the reputation of journalism has suffered in recent years, the issue of how to adapt journalism, as well as the economic model that has sustained it in print, is also working to erode journalism’s traditional political role. With the advent of online publishing models, increasing numbers of advertising dollars are migrating online, and the ‘rivers of gold’ – as classified advertising used to be known – that traditionally funded print journalism, are drying up. While advertisers are moving online along with print publications and audiences, the rates for online advertising are far lower than in print, and thus even combined with cover prices, fail to make up for the loss of print classifieds. Further, print newspapers are rapidly losing their audience. Print readership is in a long-term decline in Australia, the UK, the US and elsewhere – as I outline in more detail later in this chapter. While young readers have never traditionally made up large numbers of the print audiences, a US study suggests that they will no longer turn to newspapers as they age as previous generations did (Brown, 2005).

But while print news appears to be crumbling in the face of the combined threat of shifting advertising markets, declining readership and a tarnished public image, online news is looking healthier than ever. While this might sound like good news for journalism, there is a twofold concern. First, though audiences are increasingly seeking out news online, this is taking a

\[^3\] I use ‘traditional political position’ to suggest the liberal journalistic model that positions journalism as a fourth estate, providing an additional check to the operation of government power. I outline the origins of what has become accepted as the dominant, ‘traditional’, political journalistic model, as well as the problems with this ideal in considerable detail in Chapter Three.
different form than it did with the mass media of the 20th century. Second, despite the continued dominance of large media players, the increasingly ‘level playing field’4 of online news production means that it might also come from a number of non-traditional sources, or that readers are no longer as loyal to a single publication as they may have been with print. Further, there are concerns about the tendency for different kinds of news to excel online, particularly forms that are characterised as ‘tabloid’-style journalism. Tabloid journalism is positioned as the locus of concerns about the loss of serious, investigative, and public-oriented journalism, and its replacement with increasing amounts of ‘entertainment’. The fear, for critics such as Bob Franklin (as cited in Nolan, 2008), is that this sort of news production and consumption is chipping away at journalism’s traditional informative and investigative fourth estate role through the use of quite specific characteristics and techniques:

The diminution of international news on television and the concomitant rise of sports and entertainment stories; the reduction of average story length on television; the proliferation of spectacular demonstrations of technological capacity, such as the increased use of live ‘on-the-spot’ interviews with other journalists; the grooming of ‘star journalists’, anchors and commentators; and the increased use of spectacular

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4 This could itself be read as a rhetoric that surrounds the production of news in the digital environment, and, as I have outlined, there is great argument about whether the internet indeed provides a ‘level playing field’, or whether it only further consolidates existing media power.
graphics and visuals, which are geared to the generation of increased programme ratings. (p. 103)

However, while the increasing prevalence of these techniques and characteristics, especially online are concerns for some, for others they are cause for optimism about the ‘democratisation’ of the media (Hartley, 1996; Lumby, 1999; McNair, 2006). Following the work of Nolan (2008), in Chapter Three the notion of tabloidisation is repositioned as being part of broader tensions that arise around changes to journalism as a cultural technology. Nonetheless, it is necessary to register these various positions in order to demonstrate tabloidisation as an issue that contributes to the growing, cumulative sense of a journalistic crisis.

The second concern about journalism’s future is with the online business model. While readership online is soaring due to the disparity between online and print advertising, this doesn’t appear adequate to save traditional forms of print journalism. With new forms of news coming to the fore online, the concern is also that journalism is being attacked from both within and without, by its failure to adequately monetise its product online as well as the ever-proliferating number of online alternatives. Both of these have the ability to

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3 By this I am referring to a range of online news offerings, including: news aggregators, such as Google News; news portals, such as ninemsn or Yahoo7 News; independent news sites such as New Matilda and Crikey; the ABC’s online news analysis site, The Drum; and the panoply of blogs such as Lavantius Prodeo, Stilgherrian and Catallaxy Files, that are increasingly positioned as an additional critical perspective to mainstream news consumption.

6 However, while online offerings might prove successful in an ‘attention economy’, they are often negotiating the same financial difficulties as their ‘traditional’ competitors, as New Matilda’s recent
compromise journalism’s traditional political role and are two sides of the one coin. If journalism can no longer provide serious investigative journalism that is seen as essential to the health of democracy, then its public standing in that democracy is challenged. Further, with the challenge to its business model that online news brings, traditional news institutions are no longer able to fund this sort of journalism, creating a cycle that is challenging and disrupting the production, use and funding of news across print and online.

But while many decry the erosion of traditional print journalism online, and its implications for democracy, others argue that conversely the digital environment could renew forms of participation and engagement both in news and democratic processes. This is facilitated in part by the reduced barriers of entry to participation in the production process online and with it the breakdown of what has traditionally been a clear division between journalists and audiences, or content producers and content consumers, making this relationship itself more democratic. For instance, Rosen (2006) has coined the term “the people formerly known as the audience” to describe the more active consumers of content online, while Bruns (2007) has further developed this notion with his articulation of the prosumer. This melange of the producer and consumer makes active the work of the consumer and recognises its significance in the continual and open chain of production and meaning around digital media content.

history suggests – announcing its imminent closure in late 2010 before making its comeback shortly after as a reader-funded site under the leadership of editor Marni Cordell.
Benkler (2006) argues that internet technologies are capable of radically reconfiguring the hub-and-spoke model of mass media, where news was collected by a few and distributed to many, into a networked public sphere of collaborative information gatherers and distributors. Gillmor (2004) makes similar claims in his manifesto for citizen journalism, arguing that the journalism of tomorrow will no longer be a lecture but a conversation in which users play an equal role to producers. These sorts of visions involve variations on the idea of citizen journalism, which in some cases have shown great promise in engaging citizens and fulfilling the rhetoric of the web’s democraticising potential. But it is by no means a perfect ‘model’ – with the world’s poster child for citizen journalism, South Korea’s *Oh My News*, facing continuing financial difficulties (Ihlwan, 2006), while an Australian exercise in citizen and “pro-am” journalism, *You Decide 2007* demonstrated the need for the ongoing support of teams of trained professionals to manage the recruitment of citizen journalists and the nature of their contributions (Flew & Wilson, 2008).

Beckett (2008) makes more cautious claims about digital journalism, arguing that in what he calls *networked journalism* audiences become central, but only in the way that they work with, and not in place of, trained journalists. This sort of news production has also been called ‘computational.

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7 Some notable examples of successful citizen journalism sites include: *Indymedia*, an international ‘grassroots’ news network; *DigitalJournal.com*, a digital news site populated with content from amateur ‘digital journalists’ from around the world; and *Wikinews*, a collaborative news site managed by Wikimedia and run much like Wikipedia.
journalism’. For instance, the highly successful online site of *The Guardian* newspaper, *guardian.co.uk*, has pioneered a ‘web-first’ approach to news, as well as a number of innovative interactive publishing processes (“History of guardian.co.uk,” 2011), demonstrating great promise to engage audiences, utilise their skills, and maintain the authority of journalists in the production process, producing results with significant political relevance (Daniel, Flew, & Spurgeon, 2010).

In one instance, explored by Daniel, Flew and Spurgeon (2010), *guardian.co.uk* made available the data relating to Members of Parliament’s expenses in a Google Document. Readers could then search this document and send any questions or comments to *Guardian* journalists who could then investigate these questionable claims and, where appropriate, develop them into stories. This sort of computational or networked journalism comes with more qualified claims about the potential for the internet to democratise news production processes, as well as political participation itself. But as the *guardian.co.uk*’s MP expenses example demonstrates, there is real scope for this sort of working relationship between consumers and producers of news to yield promising results. This sort of arrangement also works to co-opt voluntary audience labour to allow the production of investigative journalism that is otherwise costly and time-consuming. For instance, in the MP expenses case, over 20,000 consumers participated with 170,000 documents viewed in the first 80 hours. As Daniel et al. note, this worked to “enhance the reputation of *The*
This example encapsulates the complex and often ambivalent relations news producers and consumers find themselves in amidst a changing media landscape. It is against the backdrop of these multiple debates, positions and rhetorics that I position my case studies. In the following section I outline my case study method, as well as the two cases chosen, providing a rationale for their selection in relation to a range of other possible cases.

**The case studies**

A case study can be understood as an “empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2009, p. 18). The phenomenon I am investigating (online news) is difficult to extract from the context of its environment. This includes the professional practices that surround online news, its audience, and its status as a business. Due to the multi-layered complexity of this environment, a case study offers the best way to explore these relationships. Case studies do not dictate a particular method but rather a project design, and it is their methodological flexibility that makes them so valuable to a range of research areas (Platt, 1999, p. 2). But the primary value of case studies to this research is their ability to get across the range and depth of detailed material
necessary to provide the ‘snapshot’ that this research seeks to form. Platt argues that it is the rhetorical value of case studies that enables them to provide the “rich and specific detail” (1999, p. 6) that will help compose this ‘snapshot’.

In order to structure my case studies, I am undertaking a comparative approach considering both cases (The Age Online and Crikey), and their similarities and differences in terms of the four key areas of my analysis: the changing political role of news, journalism as a profession, the changing news audience, and news as a business. An example of a similarly structured comparative case study is Qiu’s (2008) investigation of the role of mobile telephony in two social movements in southeast Asia. He examines the People Power II movement in the Philippines and the Nosamo movement in South Korea through the lens of his analytical categories. These analytical categories, like those adopted in this study, were informed by the broader social context in which the social movements were situated, including: speed and scale, organisational form, historical and institutional context, and the inter-media relationship. By structuring my study similarly I can move through the key areas of analysis comparing two cases as I go, before moving on to a broader discussion of the overall similarities and differences between the two cases. The structure is evident in Table 1, below.
Table 1

*Structure of methods and cases*

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Areas of analysis</th>
<th><em>The Age Online</em></th>
<th><em>Crikey</em></th>
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<td>Political role</td>
<td>Material documents &amp; artefacts</td>
<td>Material documents &amp; artefacts</td>
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<td>Similarities and differences</td>
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<td>Professional status</td>
<td>Material documents &amp; artefacts</td>
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<td>Interview</td>
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<td>Similarities and differences</td>
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<td>Audiences</td>
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What can also be seen in Table 1 are the two main categories of methods used: description and analysis of material documents and artefacts, and of interviews. Material documents and artefacts are my main sources and the primary means of assembling evidence for my argument about the development of online news. I use the term material artefacts to describe the websites I will be analysing – the sites of *The Age Online* and *Crikey* themselves, as well as other sites in the surrounding media landscape. I compare these sites to each other, as well as other examples; I also compare *The Age Online* to its print counterpart, *The Age*. In analysing these sites, I am broadly interested in what can be called their structural elements: their layout, sections, content types, modes of presentation and embedded technological capabilities. I use these various markers to determine the influence of professional practices, audience considerations and business factors on the structure and development of the site. While this sort of analysis is used to provide a broad comparison of the two sites, I also use many examples of particular news stories to provide the empirical detail that produces the ‘snapshot’ of each case. In these instances, I will be analysing not just the structural elements of the site, but also the content – from the cases themselves, as well as surrounding examples – in order to undertake a rhetorical analysis.
A rhetorical approach to communication dispenses with a familiar, exclusive focus on ‘meaning’, broadening its categories of description and analysis to attend to occasion, outcomes, composers, audiences and techniques, as well as argument (Leith & Myerson, 1989). It regards all language as rhetorical insofar as all language use inhabits a particular position, and is always, in some way, a response to another speaking position whether stated or otherwise. A rhetorical approach informs this study for a number of reasons: it is flexible, it suits a range of forms of address (whether a speech, a news story or website), and it is attentive to the material circumstances in which various forms of language are produced and deployed. As well as its attention to the materiality of communication, the rhetorical approach is appropriate for examining the rhetorics that surround the production and development of online news. It is these rhetorics that in part maintain the current notions of journalism’s social and political role.

A rhetorical approach will be used to name, describe, and analyse the sorts of rhetorics that surround the development of online journalism and the

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8 It is necessary to note that the material definition of rhetoric, as outlined by Leith and Myerson and adopted in this thesis, meshes with Foucauldian notions of discourse in terms of power-knowledge relations. That is, a focus on the material techniques, occasions, audiences, and outcomes of persuasion finds itself aligned with a Foucauldian view of discourse as materially, institutionally and historically produced and deployed as an integral part of governmental power. If, as discussed in Chapter Three, government is made possible through modern intellectual technologies, such as journalism, then the textual forms produced and circulated through these technologies can best be analysed as instances of rhetoric: that is, as strategic uses of communication. In other words, this is an understanding of rhetoric that departs from its classical and more restricted sense as “a system of rigid categories” (Leith and Meyerson, 1989, p. xii) and is closer to the “new rhetoric” (Alasuutari, 1995, p. 100). Freadman’s (2009) account of rhetoric is further demonstrative of this broader view, focusing on the close relations between rhetoric, politics, and the negotiation of power. She usefully defines rhetoric as “a theory of use, of the strategic use of language to achieve specifiable effects, of the successes and failures of those strategies, and of the strategic uptake of utterance” (pp. 75-76).
related changes that affect the online news industry. It will also be used to deal with the variety of textual materials and performances analysed throughout the thesis. Instances of rhetoric will be drawn from within the two cases, as well as surrounding media sources (both local and international), but also from company statements, reports on secondary data (such as audience and circulation figures), and from within academic analysis of the situation of online news. Practically, the task of rhetorical analysis of this range of materials involves using the key questions of the rhetorical approach, as outlined by Leith and Myerson (1989), to interrogate instances of rhetoric. These questions are: Whose words are these? To what are they replying? What argument are they proposing? To whom? On what occasion? To what persuasive effect? Using what materials and techniques? To what possible outcomes?

My analysis of material artefacts and documents is supplemented by informal interviews with professionals involved with *The Age Online* and *Crikey*. These interviews are used as additional source material, which adds to the scope of rich detail provided by the two cases, allowing for an ‘insider’ perspective on each case. In this way they are a further source of rhetoric surrounding the development of online journalism as well as a source of historical detail. The interviews also provide an important point of reference for me to be able to cross-examine the material evidence I have amassed. This will allow me to confirm and add weight to my analysis of material artefacts and documents.
It is worth documenting that the interviews were not easily attained, particularly at *The Age Online*, where much resistance was encountered. As I outline further in Chapter Four, this resistance can be read as suggestive of the professional pressures currently being experienced by the industry\(^9\). Only one interview was gained at *The Age Online*, with that interview itself suggesting possible reasons for this, including tension between the print and online newsrooms. Interviews at *Crikey* were more easily attained, probably due to a pre-existing working relationship with the publication. This enabled three interviews with a range of staff in a variety of positions, allowing a breadth of perspectives to be documented. Ideally, this scenario would have been repeated at *The Age Online*, but despite repeated and insistent efforts, it was not. However, some insight can be gained from the relative silence at *The Age Online*, particularly given the tumultuous industrial conditions experienced at Fairfax during the course of this project, as I outline further in Chapter Six. From the point of view of this thesis’ research design, the paucity of interviews from *The Age Online* does not have serious implications for the reliability of the evidence provided by the case study; that is, the status of the interviews is an additional,

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\(^9\) It is also worth noting here something of the original shape this project had intended to take. This thesis was originally planned to provide an organisational history of the development of *The Age Online*. It was hoped that close contact could be formed with those involved in the site’s development, as well as those who presently work on it. In this earlier version of the research project, it was hoped that interviews would be numerous – with journalists, managers, designers, marketers, and so on – and that these would be supplemented by access to internal documents tracing various plans and decisions, as well as audience figures and financial forecasts. But this project was stopped short when access proved difficult. It seems that it was just the wrong time for this sort of project to be undertaken, though it is likely that such research will emerge in coming years when many of the current issues, arguments and debates are more ‘settled’. Further, it is worth noting that Margaret Simons, in her book *The Content Makers* (2007b) provides some of this (excellent) insider detail. But this was no doubt aided by her position as an industry insider, given her history as an *Age* journalist herself.
not primary source. Even one interview at *The Age Online*, with the three gained from *Crikey*, provides an additional source of rhetoric to analyse, access to important historical detail to bolster my snapshot of the two cases, and evidence to confirm my analysis of the other materials.

**The selection of cases**

The cases of *The Age Online* and *Crikey* were selected from among a host of other international and local possibilities. They were chosen partly for their location and ease of access, as interviews were sought to supplement other case study materials. As a former employee of *Crikey*, I began with a strong working knowledge of the site and its workplace structures and routines. This also allowed me access to interviews with the editor, Eric Beecher, and other editorial staff, which have been used to supplement other case study materials. Similarly, *The Age Online* was chosen due to its perceived ease of access – many former classmates and colleagues now work there, and it was hoped that interviews would be easily arranged. In fact, they were not, as I will outline in more detail as I discuss the methods further below. However, the rationale for the selection of the cases remains and the silence from *The Age Online* provides for a different sort of insight into the operation of a particular media company in a time of change.

But the decision to focus on these two cases was not merely practical. Certainly it was beyond the scope of this project to travel internationally to gain
the kind of access to overseas publications needed to garner organisational detail. But the selection of two local cases was also informed by the wider need to undertake a close examination of the changing Australian media landscape. The experience of Australian media organisations is unique in comparison to their major global counterparts. In the English-speaking world, both the US and UK print news industries are feeling the effects of a changing news market more acutely than Australia. For instance, in the US from 2007–2009, advertising revenue has fallen 43 per cent, there are 15,000 less full-time reporting and editing jobs (or, “to put it another way, newspapers headed into 2010, devoting $1.6 billion less annually to news than they did three years earlier”) and newspapers have lost 16.9 per cent circulation in these three years and 25.6 per cent since 2000 (Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2010).¹⁰

These extreme conditions in the US, accelerated by the market conditions following the global financial crisis (GFC) of 2007–2010, have resulted in the closure of a number of print newspapers while others have ceased their print operations, publishing solely online. For instance, The Cincinnati Post ceased production on 31 December 2007. The Post’s weekday circulation had fallen nearly 90 per cent in its last 30 years of operation, and its final circulation stood at only 27,000, compared to the 200,000-strong circulation of its major competitor, the Cincinnati Enquirer (Schulhofer-Wohl &

¹⁰ For a compelling visual representation of the long-term decline of the US newspaper industry see The Awl’s excellent ‘Graphic History of Newspaper Circulation over the Last Two Decades’ (Sicha, 2009).
Garrido, 2009). The Post had only survived as long as it did due to a government-ratified Joint Operating Agreement with the Enquirer, which allowed the two papers to maintain a monopoly in the market by setting market prices for subscriptions and advertising so long as they maintained independent newsrooms (Schulhofer-Wohl & Garrido, 2009). While in other circumstances this behaviour would be against anti-trust laws, in this instance it was approved by the government under the Newspaper Preservation Act (1970) in order to maintain a diversity of media voices in the interests of press freedom (Schulhofer-Wohl & Garrido, 2009). The closure of The Cincinnati Post leaves the United States with only 15 cities with competing newspapers – a century ago, that figure was 689 (Schulhofer-Wohl & Garrido, 2009). Other recent losses have included Denver’s Rocky Mountain News, and Tucson Arizona’s Tucson Citizen, which continues online in a different guise through the work of citizen journalism and a network of blogs. While the Seattle Post-Intelligencer and The Christian Science Monitor ceased publishing daily print versions in 2009, the former remains in a slimmed-down online version, while the latter prints only a weekly hardcopy version while maintaining the website as a daily news source (Clark, 2009b; Cook, 2008).

In the UK, a 2010 OECD report, ‘The Evolution of News and the Internet’, found that newspaper circulation fell by 25 per cent between 2007–09, second only to the US where the decline was 30 per cent. Greece, Italy, Canada and Spain also faced serious circulation drops while Australia fared...
exceptionally in comparison as I outline in the following paragraph. While the report outlines that most OECD countries saw a growth in their newspaper markets between 2004 and 2008, the UK, which also had one of the largest newspaper markets (behind the United States, Japan and Germany), lost seven per cent of its market while the United States lost a staggering 20 per cent. Recent annual figures demonstrate dramatic decline in circulation across all national metropolitan dailies in the UK. The largest declines include a loss of 12.33 per cent at The Independent between 2007 and 2008, 13.22 per cent at The Times from 2008–2009, and 12.38 per cent at The Guardian over the same period ("ABCs," 2010). Figures compiled in 2010 to date demonstrate similarly dramatic year-on-year declines. There are signs however that the situation is beginning to improve, with the UK newspaper advertising market predicted to grow slightly for the first time in three years in 2010 (Sweney, 2010).

The OECD report found that the GFC of 2007–2010 worked to intensify and accelerate some of the pre-existing problems facing the newspaper industry, particularly for the US and the UK. The US was worst hit, with significant drops in newspaper circulation figures, advertising sales, stock prices, and operating margins. As mentioned above, some US papers have closed altogether. The loss of newsroom staff is also linked to the GFC, and many newspapers in the US, including industry heavyweights, The New York Times, The Washington Post and The Boston Globe, have been shedding staff (Bensinger, 2009; MacAskill, 2009; Perez-Pena, 2009). Paper Cuts, a website that collates data on
newspaper job cuts in the US and represents them on an interactive map has traced more than 1800 job layoffs and buyouts around the country since 2007 — and that figure is not comprehensive (Smith, 2010). In the UK, the GFC has been most strongly felt in the steep decline in circulation of regional daily newspapers, with 60 regional titles closing between 2008 and 2009 and more than half of the approximately 1,300 remaining local titles expected to close in the next five years (Burrell, 2009; Oliver, 2009). Significantly, the UK decline in advertising revenues of 26 per cent in 2009 are the steepest in Europe (OECD, 2010).

In the face of these dramatic international trends the Australian newspaper industry is outperforming the US and UK. The Newspaper Works, an Australian industry body formed by Fairfax and News Limited in order to increase advertising sales on newspapers, extrapolated from the data available that newspaper circulation has dropped by three per cent in Australia since 2003, compared with eight and ten per cent falls in the US and UK respectively ("Australian Newspaper Industry," 2009). Similarly, the OECD has found that Australia’s newspaper publishing market only declined three per cent in 2007–2009, compared to drops of 30 and 21 per cent in the US and UK respectively (OECD, 2010). This trend is reflected in relatively healthy advertising revenues at newspapers, compared with dramatic declines recorded internationally, with The Newspaper Works finding a 12 per cent decline in advertising revenues in the UK, 17.7 per cent in the US, but only 0.6 per cent
for the same period in Australia ("Australian Newspaper Industry," 2009).

Between 2006 and 2008, circulation of major Australian daily print newspapers dropped only 0.7 per cent (McKinnon et al., 2008) and in 2009, circulation even improved for some papers – with The Australian, The Age and The Sydney Morning Herald reporting a combined 0.2 per cent increase in their Monday to Friday editions. Further, the long-term trends over the past ten years in Australia are far less dramatic than in the US. Nonetheless, newspapers in Australia are still in a long-term decline, particularly when it comes to readership, with readership of weekday editions of print newspapers falling by 21 per cent between 1993 and 2005, and most of that – over 15 per cent – since 2000 (Este et al., 2008, p. 9; OECD, 2010).

All of this is to say that while the Australian newspaper industry is in a downturn, its situation is different to the UK and US scenarios. One thing that accounts for this is the structure of the media industries in each country. While the UK has a strong history of public broadcasting, the US has a history of commercial networks. In both countries the commercial media – across print, broadcast and the internet – has been increasingly concentrated into fewer hands, particularly since the 1990s (McChesney, 2008). Australia’s broadcasting system is unique in its adoption and adherence to the ‘dual system’, which dates back to the 1930s. The dual system allowed for the coexistence of public service and commercial broadcasters, with the two sectors classified as either ‘A’ or ‘B’ class stations, with “the implicit labeling of
audiences according to the obviously hierarchically arranged categories of cultural consumption” (Johnson, 1981, p. 174). This history, while specific to its broadcast sector, sets up a set of expectations about the operation of media industries in general. While Australia has a strong history of public broadcasting in the form of the ABC (the Australian Broadcasting Corporation – formerly the Australian Broadcasting Commission), its print newspaper ownership has been traditionally, and is increasingly held in very few hands, with Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation dominating the market. This combination of a strong history of public broadcasting, inherited from Britain, and an increasing trend towards concentrated ownership makes Australia a special case. But because of the increasingly shared concentration of ownership, especially News Corporation whose dominance spreads across Australia, the US and UK, this study may have implications for scholars and journalists in all of these countries.

Thus far I have outlined the strengths of an Australian case study in comparison to choices from the US and UK media landscape. But what of other international possibilities? The OECD argues that while many national newspaper industries are in a serious decline, this must not be taken as the general global state of affairs:

Large country-by-country and title-by-title differences and the data currently do not lend themselves to make the case for “the death of the
newspaper”, in particular if non-OECD countries and potential positive effects of the economic recovery are taken into account. (OECD, 2010, p. 7)

While some newspaper markets in Europe are facing similar difficulties to the UK and the US, such as Greece, Italy and Spain – others like Austria, France and Denmark are more closely aligned with the Australian experience. Indeed, Eric Beecher, publisher of *Crikey* has suggested that Australia learn from the recent significant French government subsidy of the newspaper industry to ensure its survival as a vital part of the country’s democratic institutions (‘Crikey Says’, Crikey daily newsletter 27 January 2009). But conversely, in some European OECD nations, circulation has seen significant increases between 2000 and 2008, including Ireland (30 per cent), Poland (24 per cent), Turkey (20 per cent) and Portugal (10 per cent) (OECD, 2010, p. 24). Europe’s newspaper market is so diverse that it cannot be taken as a whole, and while it offers a range of possible future cases for comparison, it does not offer the same relationship with the US and UK markets that Australia does.

Similarly, Asia is not facing a declining newspaper industry but a growing one. Manfred Werfel, of the World Association of Newspapers, argues that, “we consider the worldwide newspaper market as being currently divided into a stagnating market (in the west) and a fast growing market in Asia” ("Asian newspaper industry," 2006). Asia is home to some of the most popular
newspapers in the world – Japan’s two largest dailies, Asahi Shimbun and the Nikkei, are the two most popular newspapers in the world (Tabuchi, 2010), while The Times of India is the world’s number one English newspaper across all its formats, both print and online (“TOI Online,” 2009). Asia does offer a range of unique case studies, such as the citizen journalism model developed by Oh My News in the Republic of Korea (South Korea), Malaysia’s independent online voice, Malaysiakini, or the negotiations between state control and a growing media market in countries like Singapore, China and Vietnam\textsuperscript{11}. While these cases offer rich areas for investigation and comparison, and indicate future fields of study, they do not offer the same basis for comparison that the broader US and UK context does here. This is largely due to a specific relationship between the media industries in the three countries shaped by different media systems but also by a shared Murdoch-led move towards concentration of ownership.

The two chosen cases, while both examples of online journalism, were also selected with a view to their relationship with print news. The newspaper industry is experiencing more acutely than other industries the tensions that arise when professional and cultural practices intersect with significant technological developments. While broadcast mediums\textsuperscript{12} are facing a more

\textsuperscript{11} See, for example, Graham Brown’s (2005) work on negotiating space online for alternative political voices in Malaysia, James Gomez on the legislative challenges to internet publishing in Singapore (Gomez, 2002) and elsewhere in Asia (Gomez, 2004), and Chengju Huang on China’s changing newspapers markets (Huang, 2001, 2007).

\textsuperscript{12} While the comparison of online news with newspapers might seem self-evident, it would also be possible to compare online news to television due to the similarity in the operation of scheduling and update. Despite this resonance, newspapers (and newspaper journalism) are the focus of this study.
fragmented audience with less interest in news, television and radio, news still rates highly with Australian audiences, though this audience is ageing and it seems unlikely that the next generation will repeat its viewing and listening habits. But newspapers are the medium under the greatest threat from new sources of news online. Further, newspapers provide an appropriate point of comparison to online news as early forms of news online were drawn almost directly from newspapers. The internet was initially exploited for its textual capacity, and here its roots have remained: while video and audio now abound online, online news remains overwhelmingly textual. Finally, as I outlined above, I am interested in the extent to which the socially constitutive nature of news is maintained or reinterpreted online. The two chosen cases allow for this sort of comparison. While *The Age Online* is a digital incarnation of a print newspaper, allowing for direct comparison with its print counterpart, *Crikey* exists online only, in email and website form, allowing for comparison across the two cases about the impact of a news product’s provenance on its development.

It is also for this reason that online news sites were chosen rather than various forms of social media such as blogs and Twitter. Both *The Age Online* and *Crikey* now incorporate many of these elements in their daily operations. Both publications run a number of blogs under their mastheads, and operate a number of Twitter accounts for a range of purposes, the main being promotion particularly because of the spatial and temporal identities entailed in their consumption and social use. However, the relationship between online news and television remains a possible area for future investigation.
of stories. Further, a number of key blogs, such as Larvatus Prodeo and Stilgherrian, have become a legitimate part of the Australian media landscape, while others have been subsumed into existing media organisations’ websites, such as Road to Surfdom, which became Blogocracy at News Limited’s news.com.au website, and The Poll Bludger and Pollytics, which were integrated into the Crikey network of blogs. While I acknowledge the success and importance of these blogs within the broader Australian media landscape, they do not fit the criteria for case studies needed to pursue my research question. While blogs are a part of the environment in which news finds itself online, they are not generally regarded as professional journalism. While this distinction is becoming more difficult to make, as blogs are coopted into professional news sites, it remains an important one for me in selecting my cases as I am interested in examining the extent to which professional journalistic practices influence the development of online journalism.

In this context, The Age Online and Crikey are valuable as individual cases for a range of reasons. The most obvious contender as an alternative case is The Australian as it occupies a unique position within the Australian media landscape as the country’s only daily national newspaper. Further, its development online has traced a different path to The Age Online and Crikey as it exists both at its own site – theaustralian.news.com.au – but is also integrated into the News Limited online portal at news.com.au. Its ownership by News Limited also offers rich material for exploration given CEO Rupert Murdoch’s stance on new media
and paywalls (Thorpe, 2009). But the *Crikey* and *Age* case studies offer something else – they are in the unique position of being within the mainstream\(^{13}\) but operating against the Murdoch monopoly. While it would have been possible to compare the two cases of *The Age* and *The Australian*, in *Crikey* I am able to explore a publication that occupies a truly unique position in the Australian media landscape as the only independent, national, email news source. While *Crikey* is continually and vociferously derided from within the mainstream media for its lack of journalistic credibility, it has worked hard to position itself as a serious news source, breaking stories and reporting general news in its key areas of interest – politics, media and business. *Crikey*’s determination to be considered a mainstream news source can be seen in its three-year campaign to be admitted into the budget lock-in (Barns, 2007).

While the new Fairfax online-only publications, *WA Today* and the *Brisbane Times* demonstrate a new willingness for traditional print media organisations to invest in online news they do not inhabit the independent position that *Crikey* does. Similarly, the revived *National Times*\(^{14}\) is not an independent news site, but an opinion-centred supplement to the news found on other sites under the Fairfax umbrella. Further, the daily nature of the *Crikey* email resonates more with print deadlines than it does with the fluid nature of

\(^{13}\) *Crikey*’s mainstream status is highly contested, as I demonstrate in Chapter Four. But it is the very fact that its professional status is of such concern to established news sources like *The Australian*, who engage in the discussion of *Crikey*’s status on their editorial pages, that proves that *Crikey* poses a threat to their *modus operandi*, and hence its ever-increasing encroachment into the Australian mainstream media.

\(^{14}\) From 1971–1987 the *National Times* operated as a weekly print newspaper providing analysis on politics, business and the arts. It now produces and aggregates opinion and analysis across the Fairfax Digital media network.
the online news continuous deadline. It is this interesting hybridity that *Crikey* embodies, situating it between new media and old, that makes it such an interesting case for comparison with an old media product that is encountering these same contradictions in the reverse. That is, while *Crikey* is an online publication adapting to the practices of print journalism, *The Age* is a print publication adapting these practices to the online environment. It is the intersection between these two processes and publications that makes them such excellent cases for study.

As I have demonstrated in this chapter, news and journalism, particularly in Western liberal democracies, faces challenges from a range of fronts encompassing a changing technological environment, economic challenges, a changing news audience and declining audience trust. However, despite these challenges, many are optimistic about what this changed environment might bring, suggesting that the capacities of the internet alongside altered relationships between content users and producers might spell the beginning of a more democratic age of media production. Against this background of multiple rhetorics I have selected two case studies – *The Age Online* and *Crikey* – to explore the navigation of these issues within the Australian context that provides a unique comparison to the experiences of the UK and US environments. In the following chapter I map my approach to the field of study that surrounds my topic, including news, journalism,
communication and technologies, before embarking on my analysis in Chapters Three to Six.
Chapter Two:

Assembling an Approach to

Online News
**Introduction: the field of research**

As with other studies of media and communication, this study of online news falls into the broad category of qualitative research. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) map out the breadth of qualitative studies and the range of methods they encompass in this definition:

> Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 3)

Qualitative research can inhabit a range of epistemological positions, including positivist, interpretive, critical and constructivist, though often the boundaries between these are not clear, or multiple approaches are used. Qualitative research is adaptable, as there is no set methodological formula that must be followed, as in some types of quantitative research.

Because of the seemingly ad hoc nature of qualitative research, the qualitative researcher is often called the *bricoleur*. Denzin and Lincoln cite Levi-Strauss in defining the *bricoleur* as the “Jack of all trades or a kind of professional do-it-yourself person” (Levi-Strauss as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 3). The *bricoleur* makes use of whatever materials are available to solve the problem
at hand. Thus “the researcher-as-bricoleur uses the tools of his or her methodological trade, deploying whatever strategies, methods, or empirical materials are at hand” (Becker as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, p. 3). This description of the “researcher-as-bricoleur” resonates with the way in which I have gathered materials from diverse fields to develop my approach to online news. In this chapter I outline the key literature around media and communication, technology, news and journalism in order to establish my critical approach to these areas.

**Defining news: institutionally located, socially constitutive**

‘News’ is a term that, despite – or perhaps because of – its widespread use, is rarely defined. Most broadly, news is the dissemination, via a form of media, of something new that will have some sort of social outcome. Mitchell Stephens (2007) defines news as “new information about a subject of some public interest that is shared with some portion of the public” – or more loosely, “what is on a society’s mind” whether it relates to politics or sport or celebrity (p. 4). Similarly, Harcup (2009) posits that “journalism informs society about itself and makes public that which would otherwise be private” (p. 3). Often, acknowledging the difficulty of providing a definition, news is reduced to the indefinable quality of ‘newsworthiness’, the recognition of which is cultivated through professional experience and expertise: “many experienced reporters are hard pressed to define exactly what constitutes news although they say they know what makes a good story when they find it” (White, 1996, p. 4). White’s
(1996) outline of the various uses of the term ‘news’ goes some of the way to considering news as part of its broader social context. These uses include providing stimulus for conversation, operating as entertainment in order to produce an emotional response, providing the necessary monitoring for citizenship, as well as providing information for making decisions about daily life (pp. 11–20).

More useful is Michael Schudson’s (2003) definition of news as “what is publicly notable (within a shared understanding that judges it to be both public and notable)” (p. 6), because it is this sense of a “shared understanding” that signals the culturally formed nature of news as it is practised, understood and popularly defined. More broadly, his definition of news sits alongside his definition of journalism:

Journalism is the business or practice of producing and disseminating information about contemporary affairs of general public interest and importance. It is the business of a set of institutions that publicizes periodically (usually daily) information and commentary on contemporary affairs, normally presented as true and sincere, to a dispersed and anonymous audience so as to publicly include the audience in a discourse taken to be publicly important. (Schudson, 2003, p. 11)
Schudson’s broad definition encompasses the professional practices that are bound up in the production of journalism and its public identity. It is also valuable because it situates journalism as a business, and recognises the centrality of the audience to news production. But, in particular, Schudson positions the field of journalism within the institutional context that facilitates its broader social function.

The relationship between news and institutions is threefold: news is an institution, it is about institutions, and it requires institutions to operate (Hartley, 1989). Hartley positions news as both a social institution and an industry whose techniques have become so familiar to us that it can be delivered as a “pre-existing discourse” (p. 5), shaped by the practices of journalism and audience understanding. Following the threefold definition above, news is not only a public institution, it is also reliant upon other institutions for the supply of information: “news mediates the wider socio-political environment to its audience, but in turn its content has been mediated by its reliance on how other institutions make information available” (Tiffen, 1989, p. 32). Similarly, Hartley (1989) argues that news is given meaning and brought into being only in relation to other institutions operating at the same time, such as the state, the law, and the audience (pp. 8–9).

One aspect of news as an institution is its status as a profession for those who carry it out – primarily, journalists. Tiffen (1989) advocates an approach to
news content that gives primary attention to production processes that are embedded in institutionalised routines (p. 4). Similarly, Hartley (1989) argues that news must be understood in relation to the processes and conditions of its production:

We have to understand the news not as a separate force, outside the social relations it seeks to report, but very much a part of them. Part of what determines the discourse of the news is the way the news-makers themselves act within the constraints, pressures, structures, and norms that bring the larger world of social relations to bear on their work. (p. 47)

The processes of news production are largely governed by the temporal and spatial demands necessitated by the professional routines of journalism. News is routinely produced within a specific timeframe (for example, daily, hourly) and to set temporal-spatial requirements (such as column space, or a half-hour block within the television program schedule).

This is complicated by the fact that often these factors are not made explicit or are ‘hidden’ in the final product of news – both to news audiences and news producers. To those deeply involved in its production, and to those consuming it from a distance, news appears to be the result of the chance combination of chaotic occurrences. Schlesinger (1978) suggests that this is central to the myth that surrounds the production of journalism: “entrenched
in newsmen’s [sic] mythology about their work is the belief that news is somehow the product of a lack of organization” (p. 47). But by studying the production of news, Schlesinger found clear and organised systems at work in the processes of news-making, operating with a “determinate set of routines” which affect the news we read (p. 47). One of the most dominant routines structuring the news is its temporal cycles. These cycles of hourly, daily or weekly production and distribution structure not only the patterns of news making and its associated divisions of labour, but also the sorts of stories that are produced.

While a number of journalism scholars argue that journalism constructs reality (Bird & Dardenne, 2009), the way that news is shaped by temporal cycles is suggestive of the ways in which news and journalism are socially constitutive. Hacking (1999) argues that a constructivist approach makes at least one of three conceptual steps: first, that a particular thing (or construct) is not inevitable (that is, that it is socially constructed); second, that that thing is quite bad as it is; and third, that we would be much better off if it was done away with or radically transformed (p. 6). Hacking argues that having once accepted something as socially constructed, the researcher can respond in a variety of ways, from accepting something as historically contingent to rebelliously questioning a social construct, or by taking a revolutionary approach to its upheaval. While it is possible to acknowledge the socially located-ness of notions of journalism, this requires attention to its historically contingent
development. Hacking argues that ideas occur within matrices of complex, institutional, social and material infrastructure and relations. For example, Hacking outlines the various material and social factors that work to construct the category of ‘woman refugee’:

The matrix in which the idea of the woman refugee is formed is a complex of institutions, advocates, newspaper articles, lawyers, court decisions, immigration proceedings. Not to mention the material infrastructure, barriers, passports, uniforms, counters at airports, detention centers, courthouses, holiday camps for refugee children. (p. 10)

Similarly, understandings of journalism and its various social roles are formed within the matrix of professional practices, social expectations, audience relations, and business concerns. While my positioning of news and journalism as historically formed and socially constitutive does away with the notion that any of these social roles are ‘natural’, it nonetheless takes them seriously in tracing their historical formation and current operation.

If news and journalism are socially constitutive, then they are active in the constitution of particular social relations and identities. Morley (2005) summarises Benedict Anderson’s (1991) seminal demonstration of the way in which communication brings particular kinds of social relations into being
through the example of community: “a community is not an entity that exists and then happens to communicate. Rather, communities are best understood as constituted in and through their changing patterns of communication” (Morley, 2005, p. 50). Communication of different kinds is active in the constitution of different types of social identities, relations, and ideas. As Anderson demonstrates – and as I outline in greater detail in Chapter Five as part of my discussion of the changing news audience – news, in particular, plays an active role in the constitution of national identities and relations15. In this thesis I consider the way in which changes in the nature of news may bring into effect changes in related identities and relations, particularly those of audiences.

**News and journalism as material culture**

While a focus on identities and relations may at first appear abstract, by attending to the constitutive nature of news and journalism, I am also marking out my historical perspective. This perspective requires attention to the material conditions that give shape to changing social relations. Thus this thesis is also concerned with news and journalism as instances of material culture that make up lived experience. Braudel (1992) argues that “material life is made up of people and things” (p. 31), listing food, housing, clothing, luxury, tools and currency as examples. The elements of material life are potentially endless and constantly changing. Following Braudel, we can adopt a particular focus so as

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15 As I outline in Chapter Five, Anderson demonstrates the central role of newspapers in the constitution of a shared national identity. His development of this concept is taken up in the work of Mercer (1992), Schudson (2003) and Morley (2003, 2005), who explore the relationship between media and temporal and spatial relations.
to notice and take serious the ‘things’ that make up material life, as well as the
events that surround them:

Everyday life consists of the little things one hardly notices in time and
space. The more we reduce the focus of vision, the more likely we are to
find ourselves in the environment of material life: the broad sweep
usually corresponds to History with a capital letter, to distant trade
routes, and the networks of national or urban economies. If we reduce
the length of the time observed, we either have the event or the everyday
happening. The event is, or is taken to be, unique; the everyday
happening is repeated, and the more often it is repeated the more likely
it is to become a generality or rather a structure. It pervades society at all
levels, and characterises ways of being and behaving which are
perpetuated through endless ages. (Braudel, 1992, p. 29)

In this study I am interested in “the little things one hardly notices in time and
space” and the way in which they become normalised and naturalised. I am
interested in the way that journalism is shaped not only by large events, such as
(apparently) sudden technological advances, but also by smaller, material
factors, such as professional routines which have become everyday ways of
embedding broader ideas about journalism, the way that it is practised and its
social implications. The panoply of ‘little things’ that online news entails
invites just this focusing of vision entailed in Braudel’s approach.
In making a case for the study of material culture, Ian Hodder (1998) draws from Derrida to argue that “Western social science has long privileged the spoken over the written and the written over the nonverbal” (p. 111). Hodder argues that, just like written text, the meaning we attach to material artefacts is shaped by the historical context of their creation, interpretation, and possible reuse. So artefacts, when compared to documents and records, provide different but no lesser pictures of a particular historical context. In fact, in some cases, such as Hodder’s example of a path worn into a patch of grass, material artefacts can speak louder or more clearly than words. While records of popular pedestrian routes and interviews with pedestrians provide particular types of evidence, the material trace found in a worn patch of grass offers a visual resonance that speaks in itself of types of human activity.

It is possible to extend Hodder’s approach to make a case for the study of websites as material culture. While individual news stories can be read and analysed textually, the meanings attached to a site itself are more complex, socially located, and practically formed. Hodder provides the example of a garlic crusher, which has no overt symbolic meaning, but through “a complex set of practices surrounding food and its preparation, [in the UK], the crusher has come to mean class through evocation” (p. 116). Similarly, the meaning attached to a newspaper is not limited to the symbolic content of the stories. Anderson (1991) speaks of the “extraordinary mass ceremony” (p. 35).
performed by thousands of anonymous readers of the daily newspaper through which the act of consuming the news gains a broader meaning and becomes imbued with notions of shared time and space. This resonates with Hodder’s argument that some material objects come to gather meaning through “sets of practices within individual experience” (p. 116). In considering the newspaper or news site as a material artefact, it is necessary to read it not just textually, or symbolically, but for surrounding social uses and attached meanings. These can be gained from close analysis of the artefact itself, as well as traces of the social uses and practices that grow around it – for example, through the study of audience data. Insights about the material, social significance of changing forms of news come not just from a reading of symbolic content, nor solely from audience studies, nor simply studies of journalism production. While I draw on all of these approaches, I also attend to a source that is often precluded by these: the materiality of the site itself and the culture that surrounds it.

The genealogical approach

This focus on the materiality of online news, by attending to the daily, the ordinary, the ‘little things’, dispenses with a view of the history of online news that seeks to locate present events within an over-arching, supra-historical narrative. While I take a historical approach, I don’t assume that the present is the already-written result of the past. The history of online news I am interested in contributing to is not ‘a history whose function is to compose the finally
reduced diversity of time into a totality fully closed upon itself’ (Foucault, 2000, p. 379). That is, it does not seek to argue that online news, in the shapes it is taking, was always on the horizon, imminent in earlier incarnations of journalism. Instead, I aim to be attentive to the ways in which historical circumstances, events, and decisions have helped to shape present events and conditions. The current shape of online news is thus historically contingent but not pre-determined. In taking a historical approach to the study of online news, I am aiming to contribute to what Foucault has at times called a ‘history of the present’, and at others, a genealogy.

Foucault (2000) outlines the way in which a genealogy resists the essentialising tendencies of narrative histories:

“Genealogy does not pretend to go back in time to restore unbroken continuity … its task is not to demonstrate that the past actively exists in the present, that it continues secretly to animate the present, having imposed a predetermined form on all its vicissitudes … [Genealogy] is to identify the accidents, the minute deviations – or conversely, the complete reversals – the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things which continue to exist and have value for us …” (p. 374)
As I have attempted to outline thus far, and will continue to aim to outline throughout the extent of this thesis, the history of online news has been replete with accidents, faulty calculations, and so on.

Genealogy is also concerned with problems, or rather, the process of *problematisation*, through which particular areas of life are shaped up into commonly held problems. Problematisation is “the level at which the agenda is set for common problems under discussion in a particular time and place” (O'Farrell, 2005, p. 70). In seeking out problems, Foucault (as cited in O'Farrell, 2005) argues that genealogy is concerned with “the analysis of the way an unproblematic field of experience or set of practices which were accepted without question … becomes a problem, raises discussion and debate, incites new reactions, and induces a crisis in the previously silent behaviour, habits, practices and institutions” (Foucault as cited in O'Farrell, 2005, p. 70). Foucault further explains the way in which particular ‘domains of action’ become problematised through the identification of changes and difficulties within that domain:

Actually, for a domain of action, a behaviour, to enter the field of thought, it is necessary for a certain number of factors to have made it uncertain, to have made it lose its familiarity, or to have provoked a certain number of difficulties around it. These elements result from
social, economic, or political processes. (Foucault & Rabinow, 1997, p. 117)

As I have mapped out in this thesis thus far, journalism is a domain that has become problematised. Indeed, I have hinted at this in the previous chapter’s title: *The Problem of News*. As Foucault indicates, problematisation of particular domains of action – in this instance, the domain of action under consideration is ‘the media’, and more specifically, news organisations and the institutional practice of journalism – requires uncertainty and difficulties to inhere to these areas. With the ‘settling in’\(^{16}\) of internet technology, and a range of political and economic shifts, the domain of journalism has faced increasing uncertainty and difficulty, and has thus been shaped into a shared social problem. It is from within this problem that this research begins.

As well as beginning from the point of a shared social problem, a genealogy produces a ‘history of the present’. By this it is meant that a genealogical approach does not seek its answers in the past, but is grounded in a rejection of “naïve empiricist accounts of historiography as a reconstruction of the past” (Dean, 1997, p. 9). Rather, history is mined not only as a source of continuities between past and present, but also for the discontinuities, errors,

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\(^{16}\)This is a term used by Thrift (2006) to describe the complex processes through which technologies settle into particular patterns of use. The process of settling entails the intensified processes of capitalism that bring producers and consumers into closer relations with one another, as I outline in Chapter Five. The idea of ‘settling’ is also adopted by Boczkowski (2004a), as I outline later in the present chapter.
and other possible ways forward. Writing about this in relation to the development of media, Boczkowski (2004a) has said:

A historical perspective helps the analyst to elicit the influence of extended longitudinal patterns in the ways actors deal with new technologies, thus achieving a more sophisticated assessment of continuities and discontinuities in media evolution (p. 4).

Present circumstances are positioned as the outcome of past conditions, but not inevitably so. A view to historical contingency looks not only for possible sources of what was, but also what could have been. In the case of the development of online journalism it does not seek a definitive ‘origin’ of present forms, but the various conditions and circumstances, the decisions, mistakes, oversights and miscalculations from which our complex present arose.

An emphasis on historical contingency works against the tendency for technological determinism in discussion of the development of new communication technologies. Rather than positioning technology as the key driver in the development of new communication forms – in this case, online journalism – I follow Raymond Williams in refusing technology such a singular, abstracted status. Williams (1989) does this by defining technologies as socially formed, arguing that communication technologies cannot be abstracted from the social conditions of their development and use, proposing that such
abstraction routinely results from a confusion of technical invention, such as packet switching, and a technology, such as the internet:

A technique is a particular skill or application of a skill. A technical invention is then a development of such a skill or the development or invention of one of its devices. A technology by contrast is, first, the body of knowledge appropriate to the development of such skills and applications, and, second, a body of knowledge and conditions for the practical use and application of a range of devices. (Williams, 1989, p. 173)

By beginning his definition with technique, at the level of human skill, Williams immediately locates the development of technologies within and not outside of the field of social action. The next step to a technical invention brings this human technique into play with a range of social, political, economic, and importantly, institutional factors (such as the science laboratory, the university department, government funding bodies, entrepreneurs, specialist businesses, and so on), in order to follow its development into an integrated invention. Finally, the definition of technology as the third stage in this three-step process includes these skills, techniques and devices, but also their associated, institutionally located knowledge and actual uses and applications. It is therefore possible, when starting with this broad definition of any technology, to see communication technologies as always fully social, and historically and institutionally formed.
While a historical approach often tends to highlight ‘key moments’ in the development of phenomena, it is important not to over-emphasise these instances. Bozckowski’s emphasis on the continuities and discontinuities, as well as Foucault’s call to consider equally the accidents, deviations and errors along with the ‘big decisions’ and triumphs, provide constructive remedies.

Regarding the same problem, Allan (2006) carefully negotiates two moments that might both be seen as ‘tipping points’, a term he draws from Gladwell (2001) in the development of online news: Rupert Murdoch’s 2005 address to the American Society of Newspaper Editors;17 and the 2004 Southeast Asia tsunami, and the vast and immediate citizen response. Allan signals the danger of “reifying these ‘magic moments’”, arguing that news is far messier than these “formative instances” indicate (p. 11). He suggests that such key moments are better understood as:

… indicative of a complex – and always contradictory – array of interrelated imperatives. To the extent that it is possible to discern the contours of these imperatives, especially with respect to the economic, political and cultural dynamics which imbue their logics, it is likely they will be more apparent in retrospect than they were at the time. In other words, when examining them from the vantage point of today, it is a

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17 Allan suggests that Murdoch’s (2005) address was a turning point for news businesses because of his overt recognition of the threat posed to traditional ‘business models’ by the growing dominance of the internet and the changing audience practices of ‘digital natives’ who have grown up with the internet as part of their daily lives (Allan, 2006, p. 2).
challenge to appreciate the socially contingent, frequently contested nature of their lived negotiation. (p. 11)

This does not mean that these ‘key moments’ should be ignored, but that it is necessary to be attentive not only to the key moments in the development of online news, but also the social context that surrounds them. This is why the attention to the social, cultural, political and economic factors and the decisions, debates and negotiations undertaken by key actors that shape the development of online news is so necessary, as it avoids endowing any moment or any of these categories with too much influence. Rather, online news is shaped in specific ways by a range of factors that come together in historically contingent circumstances.

The development of online news

Boczkowski (2004a) places similar emphasis on the importance of broader context as he outlines the development of online news, arguing that “new media emerge by merging existing social and material infrastructures with novel technical capabilities, a process that also unfolds in relation to broader contextual trends” (p. 4). Here, I outline in some detail an example from Boczkowski’s discussion of the broader contextual factors, as well as the smaller details of history that surrounded the development of online news in the United States. Boczkowski explains that US newspapers were already looking at alternatives to print before the boom in personal computing, in response to
changing socio-economic trends that saw less interest in print, particularly among younger audiences. These trends included a move towards urban sprawl and related work and commuting practices, the rise of broadcast media, and the gradual fracturing of the ‘mass’ audience. While these trends triggered experiments with new forms of news, such as facsimile editions, it wasn’t until the popularisation of the world wide web in the mid-1990s that print newspapers found a medium that offered a real alternative to their existing problematic form.

Boczkowski goes on to map the way in which the development and acceptance of “the web” (along with the necessary browsers for accessing it) intersected with a time at which, in the US at least, “the print daily newspaper industry was quite profitable yet showing clear signs of economic decline” (p. 7). He explains that the signs for newspapers were not all bad: there was still revenue growth, and newspapers still lead the way in advertising, ahead of television and radio. However, circulation was already showing a long-term decline, and figures indicated that with the ageing population, young readers weren’t turning to newspapers like their predecessors. In this environment he suggests, “it is not surprising that many print papers launched online editions on the web during the second half of the 1990s” (p. 8). In the US, the migration online was swift – in 1995, 175 US newspapers were found to have developed a presence online, while in 1999 the figure was 702. Usage of online news showed a similar explosion of use so that for instance, in December 1998,
USAToday.com reported 2.5 million visitors to its website for the month; three months later that figure had soared to 923,000 users a day.

Thus Boczkowski demonstrates that the development of online news in the US was not simply the result of the availability of a new technology, as it has often been presented, but rather the result of the convergence of a range of social, economic, cultural and technological conditions, in a particular historical moment, which produced a particular and entirely contingent outcome. However, despite being attentive to contingency, technologies do become ‘settled’ in particular ways. Lievrouw and Livingstone (2006) argue that technologies, while often open to a range of possible uses, are not always and infinitely so. Rather, infrastructure – that is, the combined artefacts, practices and social relations around a technology – “can and do become routine, established, institutionalized, and fixed to various extents, and so become taken for granted in every day life” (p. 3). Similarly, Boczkowski (2004a) uses the word ‘settling’ “to make sense of the passage from multiple options to a preferred one” (p. 19):

I utilise the word ‘settling’ and weave together the notions of settling a dispute, settling in, and the actors as settlers … This leads to the notion of settling in as a development-oriented activity illuminating how

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18 Rupert Murdoch, for instance, a key global figure in the production of news, frequently deploys technologically deterministic rhetoric, presenting the current changes to journalism as a direct result of the availability of the internet, in his speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors (2005) and his Boyer Lecture series (2008a, 2008b, 2008c).
sociotechnical options continue to unfold after the emergence of a dominant alternative, and to the notion of the actors as settlers moving into a territory new to them but having a preexisting social and material basis. (p. 19)

The settling of communication technologies into particular, institutionalised forms and infrastructures means that particular care is needed when attending to what is ‘new’ about an apparently ‘new media’, such as online news.

**From ‘new’ to ‘digital’ media**

Lievrouw and Livingstone’s (2006) definition of new media includes the artefacts, practices and social arrangements that arise around new communication technologies (p. 23). Flew (2005a) puts forward a similar threefold definition of media, encompassing the technological means of communication, the institutional and organisational forms through which media content is produced and distributed, and the informational and symbolic content that is received and consumed by readers, audiences and users. He suggests that the ‘newness’ of some supposedly ‘new’ technologies is often undermined by a careful attendance to history: “for instance, the technology of the digital video disc (DVD) is new when compared with the video cassette recorder (VCR), but appears less new when compared with the compact disc (CD), whose principle features it extends into audiovisual media” (p. 1). Rather, new technologies need to be understood as more than just a series of
incremental technical developments but in terms of the level of qualitative change they represent to old technologies.

Thus while the term ‘new media’ opens up a number of heuristic questions about what is new and for whom, a more useful term for this thesis is ‘digital media’. Digital media encompasses forms of media content that “combine and integrate data, text, sound, and images of all kinds, are stored in digital formats, and are increasingly distributed through the digital, networked environment” (Flew, 2005a, p. 83). The internet is both the greatest exemplar of digital media, as well as the place where a range of other forms of digital media are aggregated, shared and distributed. Flew explains that digital media often integrate existing media formats into digital forms – so that printed text, films, music and television are all interpreted in the digital environment. This helps to bypass the ‘what’s new about new media?’ question while at the same time acknowledging that when existing media forms enter the digital environment, there is the possibility for them to be reinterpreted and reshaped. Flew also flags two important characteristics of digital media: the more active role for users in generating content, and a blurring of lines between producers and consumers (explored in more detail in Chapter Five); and the transmission of material through broadband and personal computers, but increasingly on mobile digital devices. The social development and use of digital technology has contributed in large part to the ‘problem’ of news.
Defining online news and journalism

In its early days, online journalism was commonly defined as the repurposing of content prepared for traditional journalism for a companion website (Massey & Levy, 1999). But today, digital news sites go far beyond offering a digital version of their print counterpart. Deuze (2003) uses the term ‘online journalism’ rather than digital news, recognising the way that the internet has intersected with the existing institution of journalism to create “its own professional type of news work: online journalism” (p. 205). Bardoel and Deuze (2001) argue that the key characteristics of online journalism are interactivity, customisation of content, hypertextuality, and multimediaility. Deuze (2003) further expands upon these characteristics:

Online journalism is seen as journalism as it is produced more or less exclusively for the world wide web (as a graphic interface of the internet). Online journalism can be functionally differentiated from other kinds of journalism by using its technological component as a determining factor in terms of an (operational) definition. The online journalist has to make decisions as to which media format or formats best convey a certain story (multimediality), consider options for the public to respond, interact or even customize certain stories (interactivity), and think about ways to connect the story to other stories, archives, resources and so forth through hyperlinks (hypertextuality). (p. 206)

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19 Massey and Levy are drawing on the work of Pavlik (1997) in this definition.
Deuze limits his claims about the determining influence of technology by framing this as a working definition, and it is necessary to display similar caution when considering the role of technology in the development of particular communicative forms. Certainly news has changed in radical ways as it has intersected with digital technology, but these changes have been gradual and socially grounded. When online newspapers first appeared in the mid-90s, they were, as Massey and Levy describe, simply a repurposing of an existing product in a new format. Much has changed since then and online newspapers now do far more than their print equivalents. In some areas they do less. But this change is not simply the result of technology, but rather the result of the social processes of the ‘settling’ of this technology.

Nonetheless, news that is produced for online does have defining characteristics that set it apart from other forms of journalism, much as we separate print from television and television from radio news. Axel Bruns (2004) argues that online news has three key affordances20 that distinguish it from other forms of news: “the ability to combine text, images and audiovisual material in innovative ways; the possibility of involving news audiences in a highly interactive fashion; and the chance to use hypertext to create connections between published news items and the wider Web” (p. 178).

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20 Affordances are “the perceived properties of an object that suggest (but do not determine) how it might be used” (Rappert, 2003, p. 566 – original emphasis), and can also be thought of as the capacities or properties of a particular technology. The term affordances is particularly constructive as it avoids assigning a determining role to technology, instead recognising that actual social uses always influence the development of technologies, and fits with Williams’ view that technology is always fully social.
However, he points out that in Australia, at the time of his writing, most news organisations had failed to adopt these possibilities. Thus they remain potential capabilities, and not defining characteristics. McAree (as cited in Flew, 2005a, p. 89) argues that it is the interactive content, the scope for continuous feedback with audiences, dynamic content, the never-ending deadline, and the capacity for highly targeted marketing that differentiates online news from other forms.

Boczkowski (2004a) outlines three key characteristics of online news: it is more user-centred than print news, it is no longer a unidirectional monologue (spoken by journalists to their audience), but it is now part of multiple ongoing conversations, and it has an increased micro-local focus when compared to the broader scope of news catering to a mass audience. In seeking a definition for online news, Boczkowski argues that it is “what those contributing to its production make it” – and with the “reconstruction of news online”, more and different actors are involved in its production than in the print form (p. 83). That is, news is no longer solely the product of journalists and editors. It now increasingly involves more diverse groups of people, such as both print and online newsrooms (although increasing numbers of newsrooms are moving towards integration of the two)\(^2\), advertisers and marketers who have an interest in aligning their work with content, technical and design personnel who

\(^2\) The rhetoric of structural integration has been central to the development of online news. In practice, the integration of print (or radio, or television) and online operations is productive of a range of tensions around the labour demands, routines, expectations and practices of journalists and other production staff. In 2007, *The New York Times* and the London *Telegraph* were two of the first newsrooms to integrate its print and online operations, and established as models for other newspapers to follow. While Fairfax Media, the company that owns *The Age* has announced plans to integrate its newsrooms a number of times, in practice, the print and online arms remain separate, as I will outline in Chapter Four.
manage the presentation and availability of multimedia and interactive
material, and finally, the users (or audience) whose presence is felt through their
contact with journalists and other users through comments, forums, email and
so on. In this changing news environment Boczkowski argues that it is those
who work to coordinate these various actors and roles that have a heightened
importance in the news production process.

Others argue for the possibility of dramatically new forms of news
online. For instance, Charlie Beckett’s (2008) formulation of “networked
journalism” (briefly outlined in the previous chapter), combines professional
and citizen journalism. This networked journalism is reactive, user-led,
collaborative, process-based, constant, cheap and unprofitable, setting it apart
from traditional journalism, even as it is practised on the web, in a number of
ways. Similarly, Lasica (2003) argues that we are witnessing the rise of
participatory journalism across a range of forms, from the incorporation of
audience participation at mainstream news sites, to fully fledged participatory
news sites such as OhmyNews, and everything in between. Dahlgren (2009)
makes more qualified claims about what this changed media environment
might mean for democracy, cautioning that “‘better’ technology does not
always lead to ‘better’ journalism” (p. 174). But on balance, Dahlgren argues
that greater access to the information and publishing channels that constitute
“this new era of journalism” offers “enhanced possibilities for civic knowledge
and access to a broader range of ideas and debates” (p. 175) that ultimately
benefits civic cultures. Whatever it is called, there is a growing international (though predominantly Western) chorus arguing that journalism is being and will continue to be transformed as it intersects with the internet in new ways – whether in the form of its production (Benkler, 2006; Gillmor, 2004; Glaser, 2006), delivery (Shirky, 2009) or reception (Rosen, 2006).

So how do I define online news? I suggest that online news appears on the internet, is designed for access via personal computers and laptops – and not mobile devices, around which even newer forms of news are developing\(^\text{22}\) – encompassing both material that has been repurposed from print, and original material produced for the online environment. Boczkowksi (2004a) speaks not of a new news online but of the “reconstruction” of news online (p. 183), indicating that content that might be seen as ‘repurposed’ for the online environment is in fact reconstructed for a different audience online. While ‘digital news’ is a more precise descriptor of the form of news found online, it is precisely because of what may seem like a clumsy divide established between online and offline practices that makes ‘online news’ a useful term in this instance. ‘Online news’ illuminates the tensions that arise around new forms of production, delivery and consumption that arise when news is made digital.

Thus the difference between ‘online news’ and ‘digital news’ is like that

\(^{22}\) I have not included news on mobile devices in my analysis because the news format is generally tailored to that particular platform, and quite different to the newspaper it relates to. For instance, The Age’s mobile site is a condensed version of the website, with far less access to stories than its regular online ‘version’. Further, while The Age first faced heavy criticism for realising a PDF version of its print newspaper as its iPad app, it has recently followed The Australian to tailor its app to the tablet environment, mimicking the print experience, complete with pages the user can ‘turn’. These iPad versions, while opening up space for future investigation, particularly into the way in which they extend print metaphors on-screen, are quite different to what I mean by ‘online news’.

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between ‘print news’ and ‘newspapers’. While ‘print news’ is a more accurate
description of the form of the news, ‘newspapers’ encompass their print nature
along with the cultural practices and assumptions that surround this form. Thus
I adopt the term ‘online news’ along with the associated term ‘online
journalism’ to cover the nature of news online, as well as the surrounding
culture and practices of its production, delivery and use. Boczkowski (2004a)
argues that the move from print to online news involves not only a technical
but also a cultural change, and this cultural change extends beyond the
material practices and infrastructure that surround news work to include the
nature of news work itself. He argues that while US print newspapers initially
tried to reproduce print practices online, “in doing this they have begun
constructing a kind of newspaper that although it bears connections to its print
predecessor, also differs qualitatively from it in its material infrastructure,
editorial practices, and production routines” (p. 187).

Having established my definitions for and approach to online news and
journalism, in the next chapter I begin the first of my four stages of analysis of
this shifting culture of news online by exploring the changing political role of
news. I outline the traditional and still dominant notion of journalism as a
‘fourth estate’ in a democracy, before demonstrating the way in which this
relationship is currently under threat. I argue that it is not only the altered
technological environment that is threatening this traditional relationship, but
also, and more specifically, the changing political and economic conditions of advanced liberalism that are reshaping contemporary journalism.
Chapter Three:

Journalism’s Changing Political Role
Introduction

In this chapter I outline the traditional relationship between journalism and democracy before considering how recent media developments have affected it. Arguments that arise in response to this changing relationship tend to fall into two broad categories: those that predict the demise of journalism’s democratic role in an increasingly digital environment and those that predict its renewal through new forms of engagement online. I use the example of Eric Beecher’s (2009b) argument for the preservation of what he calls “public trust journalism” – under threat from digital media and the migration of advertising dollars online – to demonstrate the latter. These two arguments sit at an impasse, speaking past each other of either the threats or opportunities that are found in a new media environment. In order to move beyond this stalemate, I present a range of arguments that suggest that the relationship between journalism and democracy has long been problematic and complex, and remains so as the digital medium develops.

For instance, I consider Michael Schudson’s (2008) argument that journalism does not automatically equate to democracy. Schudson questions the definition of democracy that this assumption of easy equivalence is based on, and warns against the adoption of populist concepts of democratic participation, making a case for the continuing importance of representative democracy. Terry Flew (2009) suggests that arguments that tout the renewal of democracy online are based on the speculative argument that people want or
expect more from democracy than is already available to them in existing democratic arrangements. I also consider John Keane’s (2009) argument that in the digital era of “communicative abundance” we do have a new form of democracy: monitory democracy. However, while taking an optimistic stance about this new breed of democracy, Keane is far from celebratory. Rather, he is ambivalent about some of the effects of “communicative abundance” on the practice of journalism, despite being optimistic about the overall consequences of monitory democracy.

Given the complex and often problematic nature of arguments about the relationship between journalism and democracy, in the latter part of this chapter I propose a different way to conceive of their entanglement. I argue that by moving beyond the notion of democracy and adopting a broader notion of politics and the concept of government, we can think of journalism as a technology of government, and more specifically of liberalism, and presently, advanced liberalism. With this repositioning, journalism’s relationship to democracy is no longer static or based on an ideal or lost ‘golden age’ that needs somehow to be recaptured, but rather can be grasped in relation to changing forms of liberal government. This allows for an understanding of the political role of journalism that extends beyond a fourth estate notion of the press to include other forms of journalism, on other mediums (including online), as well as the existence of journalism in non-democratic regimes. However, the transitions in the relationship between liberalism and journalism are not always
easy or comfortable. Returning to the example of Beecher’s call for the preservation of public trust journalism, I argue that his position embodies some of the tensions that arise around changing notions of democracy – or liberalism – and the associated changes in journalism. In comparison, I suggest that *The Age Online* demonstrates both tension and flexibility around these changes, suggesting it is better attuned to the demands of the changing political environment, but that its transition towards a changed form of journalism online will not necessarily be a smooth one.

**Journalism and democracy**

Journalism has, since the late nineteenth century, been associated with democracy, a relationship best embodied by the notion of the fourth estate. In this construction, news and the practice of journalism are seen to provide an additional ‘check’ to the democratic system of checks and balances in place between the legislature, judiciary, and the executive. Through a range of professional journalistic practices, such as objectivity and accountability, news is seen as fit to act as a ‘watchdog’ on the fair and just functioning of democracy. This sort of system also requires press freedom, which is often used as a diagnostic indicator of the health of democracies in developing nations.\(^{23}\) However, as outlined earlier, journalism’s numerous recent crises include a crisis of public confidence that has seen its democratic role threatened as its

\(^{23}\) This is typified by the Press Freedom Index of Reporters Without Borders which ranks nations according to the level of freedom afforded to their media in relation to a number of criteria, such as levels of censorship and other threats to journalists (Reporters Without Borders, 2010).
ability to operate in a fair and balanced way has been considered compromised.

This has been further challenged by the advent of digital media, which has paradoxically also been heralded in some quarters as the possible saviour of contemporary democracy and journalism. Indeed, the advent and development of digital news signalled a period of intense optimism about the new communication technology’s capacity to reinvigorate popular engagement in the public sphere (see, for example, Gillmor, 2004; Glaser, 2006; Lasica, 2003; Rosen, 2006). The nature of these arguments is that the internet would provide a space for more democratic participation both as a platform providing material for deliberation and in its potential to allow for more democratic forms of participation. These arguments are heightened as the boundary between producer and consumer is blurred in the process of content production online, particularly through the use of Web 2.0 applications. Schudson (2008) suggests that while discussions around journalism tend to focus on changes to its fourth estate role, these neglect the more positive changes that are occurring online:

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24 Web 2.0 has become a popular buzzword to periodise the latest era of the internet in comparison to the emerging web of the 1990s, and the accompanying technological, social, and economic developments. Matthew Allen (2008) argues that Web 2.0 encompasses a range of technological and social characteristics: the rise of web design that allows “the manipulation and presentation of data through the interaction of both human and computer agents”, enabling more interaction for users; a business model that more effectively targets audiences allowing the collection of more detailed audience data; the provision of services that enable a more active and participatory role for ‘users’; and an accompanying rhetoric of a more democratic web, internal to the activities of the web itself.
The public forum function of journalism has cracked wide open with the creation of the World Wide Web; the Internet opens up this journalistic function in the most wide-ranging and profound way. Its virtue is not individual but social, the virtue of interaction, of conversation, of an easy and agreeable democratic sociability. (p. 21)

Here, the process of democratisation is linked not to journalism’s fourth estate or watchdog role, but to the process of journalism becoming more transparent, to interaction between journalists and audiences, and the notion of news as a dialogue. Also occurring is the democratisation of the production of content, with platforms such as blogs and Twitter granting a far greater role to non-professionals in the generation and dissemination of news.

However, optimism about the web’s democratic potential has been matched by pessimism about its capacity to threaten the economic model that has allowed journalism to inhabit its fourth estate role. With the migration of advertising dollars online, the so-called ‘rivers of gold’ that traditionally funded journalism are drying up, placing print newspapers, the harbinger of fourth estate journalism, under enormous financial pressure, threatening their ability to fund the sort of long-term, investigative journalism that fulfils their democratic role. The migration of advertising dollars online has followed the flow of news audiences who are increasingly seeking their news online. But online advertising is no financial match for the behemoth of print classifieds,
leaving online news sites struggling to find a business model to adequately fund their activities as they did in print. While news producers and organisations continue to test various business models and structures, such as paywalls and subscriptions, a successful, one-size-fits-all recipe for financially viable news production online remains elusive. Thus journalism online, without the resources that fuelled its print counterparts, has not yet demonstrated its ability to match its journalistic and democratic scope.

An example of the complex problem facing journalism and democracy is embodied by Eric Beecher’s (2009b) concern about the threat to “public trust journalism” posed by digital news and its disruption of the traditional news business model. His definition of public trust journalism is that which:

… applies scrutiny, analysis and accountability to governments, parliaments, politicians, public servants, judges, police, councils, the military, NGOs, diplomats, business and community leaders and the recipients of public funding.

He argues that the existence of this sort of journalism is necessary to keep these various arms of democracy “open, honest and accountable”, but due to its costliness in terms of both time and financial resources, it is being challenged in the digital environment.
Beecher goes on to outline the operation of public trust journalism in Australia, explaining that it has traditionally been funded by both public broadcasters and privately owned newspapers – and specifically, the ABC, *The Australian*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age* and the *Financial Review*. With the migration of advertising dollars from print to online sources, these five media outlets are no longer equipped to offer the “public trust journalism” they once had, suggesting that at present there is no publication (and Beecher includes his own publications in this judgement) able to fill the gap created by this downturn. He argues, “there is no hint anywhere of an emerging commercial model for the large-scale ‘public trust’ journalism I have described” (Beecher, 2009b).

Beecher describes the funding of public trust journalism through public broadcasters and privately owned newspapers as an “accident of commerce and history”:

Most of this journalism has been funded by the profits from the highly lucrative classified advertising that appeared in the same newspapers that also undertook the ‘public trust’ journalism. And those newspapers and their owners loved it while it lasted: they got to make extortionate profits from the classified ads at the same time as they were basking in the power and glory of running ‘public trust’ journalism. Now, as classified advertising migrates from newspapers to the internet, that
funding source is disappearing.

Beecher’s suggested remedy to this scenario is to fund public journalism from public sources, such as governments and NGOs. He argues that just as public funding is made available for education and the arts for the enhancement of society, so too must funding be made available for public trust journalism, enabling it to fulfil its democratic role.

In support of this model, *Crikey* has suggested that Australia look to the French journalism funding model where there is already significant government subsidy of newspaper journalism, which has recently been increased as newspapers face growing threats to the basis of their operations:

The French president, Nicolas Sarkozy, makes no apology for increasing already significant government support for French newspapers by some 600 million Euros over the next three years. In part this is a mess with quite specific regional characteristics, but in greater measure the troubles of French newspapers are no different to the situation in the USA, Britain, and of course, Australia. ("Crikey says," 2009)

However, *Crikey* argues that when Beecher suggested a similar arrangement in Australia the year before the French move, “he was howled down”, his critics equating government assistance with government control:
It seems the French have a more sophisticated understanding of what
government subsidy to press and journalism might imply: rather than a
government tainted media, it might lead instead to a healthy national
discussion and a democracy refreshed by the free flow of news and ideas.
("Crikey says," 2009)

Beecher suggests that as a cultural pillar of democracy – like libraries,
universities or theatre companies – journalism should receive partial
government funding to ensure its survival but independence (E. Beecher,
personal communication, 13 March 2009).

Beecher’s argument and campaign is made within the circumstances
and challenges of the migration of news online. However, I want to
demonstrate that the relationship between news and democracy has long been
troublesome not just in the area of funding, before outlining an alternative way
to consider this relationship. I argue that Beecher demonstrates the discomfort
that news professionals face as journalism changes its guise alongside changing
guises of liberalism. The problem with Beecher’s argument, and those like it
which proliferate in and around the media, lies with the way in which
journalism is defined only in relation to Western liberal democracy and its
associated fourth estate role, rather than the more diverse political
arrangements in which it has operated and continues to operate. I suggest that
a more constructive way to think of democracy is a mechanism through which various forms of liberal government are achieved. As dominant forms of liberalism change, so too does journalism’s role in relation to liberal government. However, before outlining this argument in more detail, I will demonstrate some of the more general problems with the way in which the relationship between journalism and democracy is deployed.

**Journalism and democracy: a troubled relationship**

One problem that arises around arguments about the democratic role of journalism is the tendency to automatically equate the operation of journalism or a free press, with democracy. Schudson (2002) argues that the notion that “news media should serve society by informing the general population in ways that arm them for vigilant citizenship … [is] … not a very good approximation of the role that the news media have historically played – anywhere” (p. 263). He points out that democracy and journalism are not the same thing, demonstrating that democracy existed before and without journalism, and that journalism has demonstrated its ability to exist without democracy: in Franco’s Spain, in 1980s Chile, and in contemporary China (Schudson, 2008, p. 12). Schudson argues that the slippage between journalism and democracy often occurs due to the tendency to equate democracy with populism, thus assuming that the provision of information to ‘the public’ as a generalised sovereign body facilitates automatic democratic participation. Thus it is necessary to define democracy not simply in terms of popular sovereignty with journalism both
informing the people and speaking its name, and so representing the public interest, but as a specific combination of political mechanisms: “voting systems, types of representative assembly, forms of control of governmental agency, and regulative and constitutional-legal framework” (Hirst, 1986, pp. 110–111).

This definition of democracy treats journalism as an adjunct to, but does not make a necessary or automatic condition for, the existence of democracy. As Schudson (2008) argues, journalism can do certain things for democracy, such as informing the public and investigating the operation of power (particularly in government) – which can fulfil journalism’s fourth estate role. But it can also do other things for democracy, such as encourage social empathy in readers, provide a public forum for citizens and a range of views in society, and mobilising support for particular political programs. Not all of these things work towards similar goals, or even from a similar assumption. For instance, the task of mobilising the public is at odds with the objectivity and fairness assumed on the part of the journalist when providing information to the public. When these sorts of contradictions are considered, journalism’s apparently self-evident relationship with democracy becomes complicated and journalism becomes instead a site of multiple aims, of which fulfilling a fourth estate role is only one.

Similarly, Terry Flew (2009) argues that many discussions of journalism and democracy are hindered by the fact that they work from one of two
assumptions: either that we are moving away from a democratic golden age of
a Habermasian public sphere, or that citizens want any more from democracy
than they already have – that is, the opportunity to vote for a representative
government in multi-party elections. Flew argues that there is nothing to
indicate that citizens are demanding democratisation beyond the representative
vote in multi-party elections they now have. Dahlgren (2009) argues that there
are many concerning reasons for the fading vitality of democracy in Western
societies, including “economic insecurity, unemployment, low wages, declining
social services, growing class cleavages, and ecological threats” (p. 26).
However, he urges caution when attempting democratic deepening, pointing
out firstly that “low levels of participation are nothing new”, and secondly that
there is a tendency to measure participation against a normative “democratic
imaginary” that is rarely met in reality (p. 13).

Merrill (2000) argues that the relationship between democracy and the
press is a myth, and that rather than providing citizens with the necessary
information for engagement with political processes and decisions, it is
occupied by the tasks of entertaining and making a profit. Or, when it does
provide political coverage, Merrill argues that often it is “sketchy, superficial,
generally negative, and quite often unreliable” (p. 198). Curran (2005) takes a
similar position, suggesting that the connection between journalism and
democracy is antiquated and easily shattered in comparison to contemporary
reality: [m]any of the received ideas about the democratic role of the media
derive from a frock-coated world where the ‘media’ consisted principally of small-circulation, political publications and the state was still dominated by a landed elite (p. 122).

Curran argues that in traditional liberal theory the media’s watchdog role overrides all other functions, but that this is “quixotic”, particularly given the small amount of coverage most news sources allocate to public affairs reporting and the investigation of official wrongdoing. “In effect, the liberal orthodoxy defines the main democratic purpose and organizational principle of the media in terms of what they do not do most of the time” (Curran, 2005, p. 124; original emphasis). Further, Curran argues that this liberal conception of the press situates government as the seat of power, and hence the sole focus of press scrutiny. But this fails to take account of new forms of authority, such as the shareholder, that extend across public and private realms. Dahlgren (2009) argues that in the contemporary political environment25 “market forces and private enterprise have been given much greater rein to define the societal landscape, with a concomitant decline in democratic accountability of social power” (p. 18). In addition, the increasing conglomeration of various global branches of media business means that journalists are more likely to be constrained in their reporting by media, rather than political, influences.

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25 Specifically, Dahlgren is considering the challenges of civic engagement under neoliberal politics; but due to my later discussion (in this chapter) of this politics as advanced liberalism, I do not name this political rationality here, in order to avoid confusion.
Alongside the fourth estate rhetoric sits the rhetoric that the press is the ‘voice of the people’ – representing the opinions and demands of ‘the people’ to those in authority. While this claim is generally presented in a downsized form of the press speaking for the people, it is still false, argues Curran. Firstly, it is based on the notion that news responds to the demands of the audience who are positioned as consumers within a competitive free market, but this overlooks the fact that the influence of the consumer is reactive rather than proactive (p. 130). Further, the extent of audience power over the media is constrained by the amount of choice available to them as consumers, which, despite market expansion remains limited due to the increasing global conglomeration of media companies, resulting in “corporate oligopoly” (p. 132). Regardless of the commercial constraints upon the operation of the media as a ‘voice of the people’, politically “the ‘will of the people’ represented by the media tends to be defined by the ruling party” (p. 133). In addition, the pre-eminent contemporary mechanism for capturing the ‘voice of the people’ – the opinion poll – has also been found to be problematic. Public opinion has disappointed even its champions by demonstrating ignorance or wishful thinking on the part of ‘the people’, and fickleness (through the malleability of results) on the part of those conducting the polls (Tiffen, 1989). Public opinion is thus revealed “not as an autonomous force, but as itself socially fashioned, while the political role of the polls has been a counsel of conformity, to some extent directing debate towards the familiar and immediately acceptable” (p. 56).26

26 Bourdieu (1979) argues that public opinion is constructed, through the use of opinion polls, on the
George Boyce (1978) traces the emergence of the idea of the fourth estate model of journalism in Britain to the early to mid-nineteenth century, arguing that news producers invented a “political myth” in order to ensure the press’s financial survival (p. 21). Boyce describes the press of pre-1840, in which journalists were either regarded as hacks or demagogues – either in the pockets of politicians, or political agitators. But as it became increasingly common for the illegal ‘pauper’ press to attack governmental interference (in the period from 1816), it prompted the legitimate press to consider developing an independent press in order to stave off its illegal but increasingly popular competitors. This financial edge could only be achieved “if a newspaper could claim in some way to be independent, to represent public opinion, and to be able to give the public an authentic and reliable news service” (p. 20). Thus the press had to position itself as a middle ground between the revolutionary tones of the pauper press, and the subservience to government interests the legitimate press currently occupied. In order to achieve this the press devised a series of practical arguments about the social role of the press – and the notion of the fourth estate was born.

Schudson (2008) describes a similar history of the press in the United States where newspaper journalism was initially economically driven, highly localised, and decidedly partisan. But Schudson traces the move away from basis of three (incorrect) assumptions: one, that everyone is capable of forming an opinion; two, that all opinions have the same value; and three, that there is consensus about the nature of the problem and questions being asked.
partisanism and ‘boosterism’ and towards the notion of a neutral, objective, democratic press, alongside a range of other historical social shifts. One such shift was the Protestant Reformation of America in the late nineteenth century, which contributed to the wiping out of corrupt voting practices and throwing previously strong traditions of party loyalty into disrepute. This coincided with the 1896 introduction of the ‘Australian ballot system’, placing the preparation of the ballot and voting processes in the hands of the state, further distancing the voting process from the candidates so that “what had been an act of affiliation became an act of individual autonomy” (p. 31). This transformation of American political culture assisted the professionalisation of journalism, as “[r]eporters came increasingly to enjoy a culture of their own, independent of political parties. They developed their own mythologies (reveling in their intimacy with the urban underworld), their own clubs and watering holes, and their own professional practices” (p. 32).

Bratich (2008) follows Schudson to outline the way in which journalism was professionalised in response to “particular types of progressive-era news reporting” (p. 59), namely ‘yellow journalism’ and the practice of ‘muckraking’. Yellow journalism was the derisive term used to describe the sensational elements of the press, and muckraking, a separate but intertwined early form of investigative reporting, focused on ‘digging up dirt’ on governments and corporations. Importantly, it was against these sorts of practices that journalists defined themselves in relation to: “[p]rofessionalisation cannot be said to arise
on its own, with internally generated values. It emerges on the back of a
demonisation, or at least a polluted other” (p. 59). This speaks not only of the
origins of a professionalisation of journalism, which I address in more detail in
the following chapter, but also of the development of the liberal journalistic
practices that are associated with the liberal press model, such as interviewing,
and ideals, such as independence and objectivity. These ‘scientific’ methods
were seen to empirically counter the problems of the press, and were informed,
Bratich argues, by a “liberal political rationality, one whose freedom of thought
depended on a moderate scepticism” (p. 58). For the moment, however, the key
point is that these practices and ideals, and their associated political aims, are
understood as historically contingent. This provides a different point of view to
consider more recent journalistic practices, ideals or norms, and their political
consequences.

**Keane’s ‘monitory democracy’**

While the traditionally conceived relationship between journalism and
democracy is under threat from a number of fronts, Keane (2009) argues that
some of the conditions that have converged to compromise journalism’s
traditional fourth estate role have, surprisingly, worked to enhance broader
conditions of democracy. He argues that the current media landscape provides
the necessary conditions for what he describes as a post-Westminster form of
politics, to which he has given the name ‘monitory democracy’. Monitory
democracy is characterised by the proliferation of extra-parliamentary monitory bodies and power-scrutinising mechanisms, so that:

All fields of social and political life come to be scrutinised, not just by the standard machinery of representative democracy, but by a whole host of non-party, extra-parliamentary and often unelected bodies operating within and underneath and beyond the boundaries of territorial states.

(p. 5)

These monitory bodies come in a multitude of forms and on a range of levels, from local to global, and their concerns range across elected governments, workplaces, businesses, the individual and so on, prompting Keane to comment that “the vertical ‘depth’ and horizontal ‘reach’ of monitory institutions is striking” (p. 6). Some examples of monitory bodies include international criminal courts, experts’ councils, local community consultation schemes, consumer councils, websites that monitor the abuse of workplace power and self-selected opinion polls (pp. 4–5).

The formation of monitory democracy is linked firstly to the defence of democracy and human rights that arose in a post-World War II environment, and secondly to the growth of “multimedia-saturated societies”: “societies whose structures of power are continuously ‘bitten’ by monitory institutions operating within a new galaxy of media defined by the ethos of communicative
Communicative abundance describes the media environment in which access to the production and consumption of media has proliferated and infiltrated multiple and increasing areas of life. Keane argues that this media environment is best symbolised by the internet, but extends beyond it. Communicative abundance cuts across the liberal divisions of public and private. The contemporary media is at once increasingly interested in the private lives of public figures and in catapulting to publicity the private lives of previously private figures.

Keane argues that this change has been driven in part by journalism’s crisis of public confidence, and with it the decline of its commitment to objectivity and an increasing trend towards sensationalism that has arisen in an environment driven by web hits. But Keane argues that while elements of the ‘new journalism’ that come with communicative abundance may be unsavoury at times, its existence is necessary for the functioning of monitory bodies: “if the new galaxy of communicative abundance suddenly imploded, monitory democracy would not last long” (p. 16). This is because, firstly, despite journalism’s changing guise, it continues to seek out corruption and act as a mouthpiece for public objection to wrongdoing. Secondly, in the environment of communicative abundance, citizens are able to utilise a range of tools, such as mobile phones, bulletin boards, news groups, wikkis and blogs, in order to carry out monitoring of various institutions (p. 20).
Finally, the abundance of communication allows for the proliferation and circulation of information, and it is in this swirling galaxy of information that much monitoring is produced and distributed:

Private companies are grilled about their services and products, their investment plans, how they treat their employees, and the size of their impact upon the biosphere. Questions are raised about which SUVs are most likely to roll over, and which companies retail the worst fast food, and which are the biggest polluters. (p. 19)

However, Keane acknowledges that some problems arise from this state of communicative abundance. Pelted with information, citizens are not always engaged but also respond with cynicism, disaffection and inattention, or actively turn away from the ‘information overload’. But on balance, Keane argues that communicative abundance has positive consequences because it “nudges and broadens people’s horizons … tutors their sense of pluralism and prods them into taking greater responsibility for how, when and why they communicate” (p. 21).

Keane’s account of monitory democracy further consolidates my argument that a positive relationship between journalism and democracy is neither a constant in journalism’s varied history nor guaranteed in the future. The ambivalence that Keane expresses towards some elements of the state of
communicative abundance hints at the complexity of the relationship between journalism and broader political arrangements. Certainly, journalism is changing with the advent of digital media and the associated economic and social changes, but this change does not always bring about the negative social consequences that some commentators decry. Keane’s recognition that with changes to the operation of journalism come some distasteful journalistic practices, but also possible enhancements to our relationship with democracy, is far more useful than arguments that seek to return journalism to an unachievable golden age that Beecher argues occurred only through an “accident of history and commerce” that seems unlikely to be repeated.

Just as Schudson demonstrates that the provision of news is not equivalent to the securing of democracy, so Keane argues that some of what journalism might produce is not necessarily good for democracy. But that does not mean that it no longer exists in relation to democracy. For instance, in their study of the communicative frames used to present television news, Cottle and Rai (2006) demonstrate that journalism can be conflictual and consensual, promoting difference as well as consensus and deliberation. In the section that follows, I work to broaden the understanding of politics usually brought to bear on the consideration of journalism and news. This enables another way of thinking about journalism’s democratic role that allows for, rather than seeks to arrest or counter-act, changes that occur in the practice of journalism over time. I draw largely on the work of Dean (2010) and Nolan (2008) to
demonstrate the way in which the changing relationship between news and democracy can be accounted for in terms of the changing rationalities of liberal government, and what these changing rationalities have meant for the practices of journalism. This view allows us to move away from positions that essentialise notions of journalism’s social and political role, and from associated value judgements about particular journalistic practices, towards an account of journalism that is politically situated and allows for consideration of its changing operation and practices in relation to broader political arrangements and doctrines.

**Journalism as a technology of (advanced) liberal government**

There is another way in which we can conceive of journalism, and that is not as a tool of democracy, but rather as a technology of government. While government is traditionally conceived of as the preserve of parliaments and elected officials, the notion of governmentality (literally, govern-mentality) provides a way of thinking about government more broadly. This approach, building on the work of historian Michel Foucault, proposes that government “entails any attempt to shape our behaviour according to particular sets of norms and for a variety of ends” (Dean, 2010, p. 18). Thus the task of governing might involve the work of actual government agencies, but its sources can also be found in a diverse range of agencies and institutions: the school, the media, the prison, the church, the family, the workplace, and so on.
With this broader sense of government, considerations of politics are no longer concerned only with the state and its possession or otherwise, of power. Rather, power is seen to be something that is relational and negotiated between governor and governed. Government, also known as the ‘conduct of conduct’ (Foucault as cited in Dean, 2010, p. 17), is predicated on the ‘free and self-governing’ individual. The subject of government has the freedom to act in response to its governing; Foucault argues that once the subject no longer has the freedom to act, it is not power at work, but force (Foucault, 1981). Dean (2010) further outlines the relationship between government and the free human subject:

Government concerns the shaping of human conduct and acts on the governed as a locus of action and freedom. It therefore entails the possibility that the governed are to some extent capable of acting and thinking otherwise. (p. 23)

However, Dean explains that the free subject is paradoxically one whose “freedom is a condition of its subjection” (p. 193), so that freedom is what is acted upon in the task of government to produce certain dispositions, actions and subjectivities. The autonomous subject of government is central to the dominant art of government of the past three centuries: liberalism.
Liberalism is, primarily, a critique of excessive government (Dean, 2010). It is also a practical art of government founded on the freedom of its subjects that “seeks to shape the capacities of individuals and collectivities through disciplinary and bio-political means” (p. 267). While liberalism’s critical ethos is founded on the suspicion of excessive government, as an art of government it is concerned not only with limiting the sphere of government but in locating other sources of government outside that sphere. Barry, Osborne and Rose (1996) argue that in this way, liberalism has involved practical techniques and inventions which brought into being ways of governing areas of life which fall into the sphere of ‘civil society’ that become “both distinct from political intervention and yet potentially alignable with political aspirations” (p. 9).

As an art of government with a central ethos of critique, liberalism has the capacity for self-renewal. Thus there is not a singular form of liberalism but plural liberalisms, including “classic liberalism, economic liberalism, social liberalism, welfare liberalism, neo-liberalism (itself taking several versions)” (Dean, 2010, p. 65). Liberalism in its various guises is predicated on forms of specialist knowledges of the population and the economy that make the realm of government knowable and governable. These knowledges are productive of techniques of governing, and thus liberalism cannot be typified as an absence of government but rather the invention of new ways of knowing and governing. In the neo-liberal period, while this has involved the active critique of the state in
individual’s lives, nonetheless it has “provoked the invention and/or
deployment of a whole array of organizational forms and technical methods in
order to extend the field within which a certain kind of economic freedom
might be practiced in the form of personal autonomy, enterprise and choice”
(Rose as cited in Barry, Osborne & Rose, 1996, p. 10).

Rather than ascribing the current dominant political rationality a
singular label, suggestive of a unifying ethos, Dean (2010), following Rose
(1993), uses the term ‘advanced liberalism’ to encompass the various forms of
government of which neo-liberalism is the dominant ‘type’. However, other
mentalities or rationalities of advanced liberal government include neo-
conservativism and communitarianism, which define themselves in opposition
to neo-liberalism. Thus from these heterogeneous examples, advanced liberal
rule is recognisable not by its declared ‘ethos’ but by its central elements. These
include:

The contrivance of markets in areas of formerly public provision, the
employment of indirect means of regulation such as the calculative
technologies of auditing and accounting, the dispersion and
individualization of the management of risk, and the construction of
multiple forms of agency through which rule is accomplished. (Dean,
2010, p. 266)
These new forms of agency work to replace society as the realm in which populations are governed with a range of new spheres and quasi-markets in and through which governing occurs. As Miller and Rose (2008) argue, these new formations of sites of agency often take the form of community, but not always. Rather, the associations formed by the free subject of advanced liberalism are plural and mobile, according to the needs of government, and encompass the household, the family, the workplace, the shopping mall, and so on (Dean, 2010, pp. 193, 200). The resultant style of advanced liberal government, argues Dean, is a reflexive form of government in which there is a folding back of the objectives of government upon itself. If, in advanced liberal government, we are to turn to the market for guidance then this reflexivity arises through the creation of more markets for the provision of guidance.

In the art of liberal government, technologies are the tools employed to know and govern populations. Dean (2010) defines technologies of government as the “diverse and heterogeneous means, mechanisms and instruments through which governing is accomplished” (p. 269). Technologies of governing can take a diverse range of forms:

- Techniques of notation, computation and calculation; procedures of examination and assessment; the invention of devices such as surveys and presentational forms such as tables; the standardization of systems for training and the inculcation of habits; the inauguration of
professional specialisms and vocabularies; building design and architectural forms – the list is heterogeneous and is, in principle, unlimited. (Miller & Rose, 1990, p. 8)

Further, Meredyth, Ewing and Thomas (2003) outline the way in which what we consider new technologies (in that other sense of the word technology) have long been adopted for political aims and uses: “historically, the art of liberal government has involved the adaptation of technologies to shape citizens’ conduct, habits and aspirations” (p. 4).

As new communication technologies are adopted and adapted by governments, Meredyth et al. argue that they become ‘liberal machines’:

As new information technologies are modified and adapted to address the persistent problems of liberal government, it is possible to see public computer networks being reconstructed as ‘liberal machines’ … [which] refers to the ways in which technologies may become instruments for the continuing negotiation and regulation of limited freedoms. (p. 5)

For instance, the provision to citizens of more information online can equip and enable them to undertake more of their own governing, instantiating the way in which ICTs can be seen as liberal machines. Thus technologies are not distinct from politics, but through “complex relays and linkages … tie
techniques of conduct into specific relations with the concerns of the
government” (Barry, et al., 1996, p. 13). Such an approach to technologies is
valuable in this thesis’ investigation of both the technology of the internet and
the technology of journalism and the way they become bound up in
governmental programs.

However, in recognising the way that new technologies are co-opted for
government use, Barry et al. (1996) warn against dreaming of some sort of
technology-free alternative. However, within liberal rationalities of
government, diverse technologies are put to diverse ends, about which there is
debate, dispute and negotiation. The recognition of the multiple uses and aims
of technologies counters notions of a simple exit from the realities of a
technologised government. Considering the way in which liberal technologies
are fluid and mobile, Nolan (2008) posits that journalism is a technology of
liberalism, and that the contradictory demands of journalism’s democratic role
arise from its relation to not only shifting political structures and practices, but
also shifting models of democracy that are more broadly characteristic of
political culture in particular periods and settings. Nolan argues that
journalism’s ‘democratic role’ is “no more stable than the environment in
which it is negotiated, but is rather subject to the shifts in socially prevalent
models of liberal democracy” (p. 109).
When journalism operates in a liberal political, social and cultural environment, it is shaped up in relation to its changing dominant rationalities. In his discussion of the changing relationship between journalism and politics, Nolan traces the development of classic liberalism through social liberalism and to advanced liberalism, and concomitant shifts in journalism. He argues that classic liberalism’s focus on the moral individual saw the journalist as “a figure who lays claim to moral and (increasingly) technical authority” (p. 111). The moral position of journalism in this period meant adopting the language of natural rights and the public good, developing the position of journalism as the fourth estate, and legitimisation through the value of objectivity which allowed the journalist to act as a relay between sites of authority and ‘the people’. Specialised techniques, such as shorthand and the interview, allowed the journalist to fulfil this role of official recorder of information and communicator of knowledge to democracy’s public.

With the shift in the twentieth century towards a form of social liberalism in the UK, US and Australia, came a turn towards a greatly expanded role for the state in ensuring that society best caters for the citizen, who is no longer perceived of as the moral individual, but rather as “a subject of needs, attitudes and relationships” (Rose as cited in Nolan, 2008, p. 113) which are figured and governed within the realm of ‘the social’. The related changes in journalism included the setting up of public service broadcasting,

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27 This shift was not a natural or inevitable evolution, but involved battles and struggles over the particular formation of liberal democratic arrangements, as Parekh (2005) notes in his etymology of liberalism in *New Keywords*.
and an emphasis on the values of ‘quality, pluralism and diversity in the media’ (Nolan, 2008, p. 113). Similarly, journalism itself became less a site of moral authority and its social legitimacy ‘based more squarely on technical procedure’ (p. 113), such as again, objectivity, balance, a dependence on official sources as a site of authority, a separation of journalism’s news and business operations, codes of ethics, notions of standards, the use of opinion polls and various modes of journalism such as the human interest genre.

Just as social liberalism saw the refiguring of the moral subject of classic liberalism, so advanced liberalism sees the subject refigured again from one who in social liberalism is socially assembled, understood and governed in terms of their location in a myriad of social relations, to one who is individually assembled and understood as autonomous and able to freely choose the relations they enter into, and governed by a range of empowering new self-knowledges. Alongside these political shifts are cultural ones, which affect the configuration and practice of journalism, aligned with the doctrine of choice and the primacy of the free market, expressed as a new ‘sensitivity and responsiveness to the perspectives, demands and predilections of news audiences, known through quantitative measures’ (p. 115), an increased distrust of expert figures, an increased reliance on visual spectacle, a shift away from ‘public interest’ and towards those who may appeal to and ‘know’ their audiences – and with this the rise of the ‘star journalist’. It is also this distrust of
professional journalism as a field of expertise that makes way for the rise of citizen journalism.

Bratich (2008) outlines the way in which the ‘public journalism’ movement in the US embodies some of the cultural changes within the practice of journalism that Nolan details. Positioned as a response to the growing, multifaceted crisis in journalism, public journalism was presented by its advocates as able to grasp the new affordances of digital technology while maintaining a place for journalism’s professional expertise in order to ‘revive’ not only the failing institution of journalism, but institutions of civic participation as well. Public journalism was concerned with civic engagement by bringing citizens in relation with journalists as well as with each other, and “this meant not just reporting on the civic renewal campaigns, but actively participating in them. Journalism could contribute to this larger movement of reviving civil society by mobilising people again as citizens and community participants” (p. 71). Bratich outlines the way in which this movement can be seen as an expression of neoliberal rationalities of government, with their increased emphasis on government in and through ‘the community’. Miller and Rose (2008) argue that in advanced liberal rationalities of government, governing occurs across multiple ‘communities’ in which:

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28 While increasing numbers of scholars are using the governmental approach within the broader field of media and communication, few are applying this approach to studies of journalism, which is why Bratich’s perspective is so helpful here, but also why Nolan’s detailed contribution looms so large in this thesis.
The subject is addressed as a moral individual with bonds of obligation and responsibilities for conduct that are assembled in a new way – the individual in his or her community is both self-responsible and subject to certain emotional bonds of affinity to a circumscribed ‘network’ of other individuals unified by family ties, by locality, by moral commitment to environmental protection or animal welfare. (p. 91)

Through the activities of the public journalism movement, journalism is active in the governing of its populations through the communities it helps bring into being. As Bratich argues, “journalism, via its new civic form, would assist in bringing people together as a mode of good governance” (p. 72) – whether through forums, focus groups, the sponsorship of community gatherings, and so on.

Nolan argues that other cultural changes within the practice of journalism are more often ascribed to processes of ‘tabloidisation’, much like the less positive elements of Keane’s communicative abundance. Like Bratich’s analysis of public journalism, Nolan works to position these cultural changes alongside changing conditions of liberalism. As dominant forms of liberalism are reinvented anew, so the practices of journalism change in relation to them. We can see now how this changes the way we think about journalism’s fourth estate role. Drawing on Nolan’s argument we can see that journalism’s fourth estate is tied to the concepts and practices of classic liberalism, which are out of
synchrony with the conditions of today’s advanced liberalism. It is the expectation of a form of journalism that is incompatible with its political reality that creates tensions for those invested in older models. While professional journalists and others in the media industry – as typified by the example Beecher provides – cling to the moral ethos and practices of the journalist of classic liberalism, journalism as an institution is increasingly embodying the practices of advanced liberalism.

Arguments made in terms of a simple ‘turning back’ to reclaim and recapture journalism’s democratic role are made on shaky ground, oblivious as they often are to the instability of the political form within which that role is historically fabricated. Rather, the political capacities and possibilities of journalism need to be recast within a broader understanding of politics, and within an understanding of the conditions of advanced liberalism. It is with this understanding that Keane’s monitory democracy, with its recognition of the ambivalence and complexity of the changes wrought by the conditions of advanced liberalism and communicative abundance upon the practice of journalism, can be recognised as a far more constructive way of approaching journalism’s changing relationship to democracy.29

29 It is necessary to note that while Keane’s (2009) monitory democracy expands the field of political participation beyond formal mechanisms, he argues that “democracy is coming to mean more than elections, although nothing less” (p. 2; emphasis added), indicating that it provides a supplement, but not a replacement, for representative democratic arrangements.
Rather than get stuck between the two dominant modes of thinking about journalism and democracy in the digital age, which position journalism as either under great threat or facing great opportunity in a changing media environment, it is necessary to see journalism as a technology of dominant modes of liberal rule. This brings a grasp of the way in which journalism is used as a technology of government. It also allows for changes in journalism to be recast as neither threat nor opportunity, but in complex and close relation to the multifarious tasks of government in which, through monitory democracy, more opportunities are afforded for the scrutiny of power, but also through which journalism is part of the process in and through which populations are made knowable and governable.

When Beecher calls for the preservation of journalism’s fourth estate role, he is embodying some of the tension that arises when journalism changes, alongside changing modes of liberalism. Those who decry the loss of quality, serious or public journalism as the future of print becomes increasingly tenuous, are embodying the discomfort that arises for those attached to social liberalism around the transition towards advanced liberal modes of journalism. It is impossible to completely preserve journalism’s fourth estate role, but as Keane demonstrates, it is not impossible to maintain a democratic role for journalism. Using a governmental approach grasps journalism’s status as a technology of liberal government, and as always political. Thus rather than pondering journalism’s ability or inability to act as a watchdog for democracy, it is more
constructive to be attuned to the way in which journalism is being created anew as a tool for governing, and to consider the consequences of this. Rather than asking what is lost in the changes to journalism, it is better to ask what is gained. In what new ways is journalism bound up in new forms of governing, and what knowledges, techniques and subjectivities is it active in producing?

**Journalism as expertise**

For instance, if journalism is a technology of liberalism, then it is possible to see journalists as one group of experts in the work of governing. Expertise, of various kinds, is involved in the technologies, or sets of techniques and knowledges, used in the governing of populations – statistical, medical, educational, welfare expertise, and so on. Barry et al. (1996) argue that “expertise plays a part in translating society into an object of government” (p. 13), and in through their particular communicative expertise journalists play an active role in the government of populations. They are active in the training of populations, through addressing and educating them – on matters of health, finance, and of course, politics – on what it means to be part of their particular population. Through journalistic expertise in the sourcing, composing and relaying of stories about all manner of social activity, members of populations are brought into repeated connection with sets of norms and dispositions. But as Nolan (2008) and Dean (2010) assert, the rationality of advanced liberalism

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30 But not without resistance, as Beecher demonstrates. Foucault’s relational notion of power always entails the possibility for resistance.

31 This is not to suggest an uncritical celebratory position; rather, what is gained from using the governmental approach is the ability to more accurately describe the historical shaping of the ‘problem of journalism’. This is followed by critical evaluation of this historical problem and its broader political, economic, social and cultural implications.
brings a new distrust of experts and expert knowledges because of their “disempowering presumption to speak on behalf of a ‘collective interest’ and for contributing to various forms of social dependency” (Nolan, 2008, p. 114).

This is contributed to by a great populist distrust of experts, in which experts are seen as out-of-touch ‘elites’ whose knowledge is pitted against the more authentic mass knowledge of ‘the public’ or ‘ordinary citizens’.

As part of this wider differentiation of democracy from populism, Schudson (2008) makes a case for the role of experts, arguing that democracy requires experts – and their expertise – to function. He gives the example of juries, who might be seen to serve an otherwise populist purpose, who are guided by the expertise of judges in making their decisions. Or, indeed, even politicians who Schudson argues are the “most distinctive and important political ‘expert’ in a democracy” (p. 120). Schudson adds historians, lawyers, economists, demographers, and statisticians to his list of political experts, arguing that the problem facing democracies is not the use of expert knowledge, but rather ensuring the expert has enough autonomy but also enough accountability to preserve democracy.

I suggest that we add to this account of experts the category of the journalist. The journalist is a particular kind of expert, entrusted with filtering and recounting particular stories to its audience. The journalist is the relay between many other experts, such as politicians, academics, scientists and
economists, and their public. In this way we trust journalists to use their expertise to select, interpret and present to us these expert knowledges. But given our broader understanding of the relationship between journalism and democracy, we can also argue that journalists are experts in the sense that they play an active role in the governing of populations. Through their expertise, journalists are productive in shaping particular kinds of subjectivities.

This gives us a more constructive way to think about the political or democratic role of journalists than the fourth estate model. If journalists are active in governing populations – how, and to what ends? These become the more constructive and pressing questions to explore around journalism’s political role. This refiguring of journalist-as-expert accommodates the changes that take place in dominant forms of liberal government, without getting stuck on questions about journalism’s fourth estate or democratic role. Thus I suggest that a useful way to think about journalism is as a technology of liberal government, a technology that is exercised through the use of expertise, relaying information and knowledges to its audiences, and thus active in their formative government and in the shaping of particular types of subjectivities, forms of conduct, dispositions, and social relations. The types of subjectivities and the sorts of practices it used in this task of governing vary, according to changing forms of liberal government. Questions of democracy and the need for the press to act as a public watchdog are not dismissed but they become only one, albeit important, part of a wider governing regime.
The changing political role of journalism at The Age Online and Crikey

Beecher suggests that the most pressing matter for Australian journalism as it faces the range of challenges I have outlined is securing its fourth estate role. For Beecher, this is about preserving what he calls public trust journalism, in which journalism becomes – at least to some extent – state-funded, in recognition of its centrality to the political health of a society. This journalism is positioned by Beecher alongside other social institutions that are operationally independent but, in part, financially dependent on the state – such as theatre companies and universities. However, as I have outlined in this chapter, Beecher’s argument represents an appeal to a form of social liberalism that has in many ways been superseded and replaced by the changing political and economic conditions of advanced liberalism.

While it is necessary to recognise the dominance and persuasiveness of the liberal journalistic rhetoric about the continued pertinence of the fourth estate press model, I propose a more constructive and flexible way of making sense of the changes affecting this industry in crisis. As I have argued in this chapter, journalism is better understood not in the terms given to it by the ideology of liberalism, but rather as a technology of liberal government, flexible and adaptive to changing historical forms of governing. From this position it is possible to trace the changes to journalism since the nineteenth century – and
In the following three chapters I outline the different ways in which these political and economic changes have been navigated by the organisations in the two case studies and have shaped the development of news for two different outcomes. I outline the way in which Beecher’s – and by extension, *Crikey’s* – attachment to a form of classic liberal journalism has shaped the development of online news there, while *The Age Online* has not demonstrated similar attachment. For instance, in the next chapter, I outline *Crikey’s* campaign to assert its professional status as a legitimate source of news within the mainstream media. Extending the view of journalism as a technology of liberalism, I argue that the rhetoric and practice of professionalism is a means to authority, employed by journalists to shape their autonomy within a cultural technology in particular ways. However, I also outline the way in which *Crikey* is paradoxically positioned in relation to professional status. While it wants to be recognised as professional, it still seeks to be identified as somehow more authentic than the mainstream media due to its unique technological characteristics. In seeking to straddle this line between ‘professional’ and ‘authentic’ forms of journalism – and means to authority – *Crikey* undermines its own quest for mainstream recognition.
In comparison, *The Age Online* is increasingly less involved in discussions around journalism and its professional practice, particularly since the departure of media and communications editor, Matthew Ricketson. It is also navigating a problematic structural divide between the print and online arms of its newsroom. I demonstrate the way in which these factors have contributed to a changed professionalism for *The Age Online*, not based on the authenticity or traditional notions of professionalism sought at *Crikey*. Rather, *The Age Online* demonstrates more flexibility and attunement with the demands of the advanced liberal political environment, though this makes these changes no less concerning for those lamenting the loss of classic liberal forms of fourth estate journalism.

Similarly, in the following chapter I consider the changing news audience, and the way in which journalist-audience relations are being reshaped under the conditions of advanced liberalism. I begin by outlining the relationship between news and notions of time and space, exemplified by the newspaper. As a means to examine the extent to which these relationships are changing online, I consider the topic of interactivity – an issue that has attracted much excitement about the internet’s potential to democratically reform the processes of journalism. However, interactivity is held more often as an ideal than it is adopted in practice. I consider some of the reasons for this, and consider its adoption in the two case studies. While *Crikey* currently exhibits
more interactive options, I suggest that this might not always be the case, given *The Age Online’s* demonstrated flexibility around the changing demands on the contemporary media environment. I link this discussion with Thrift’s conceptualisation of the sped-up processes of production and consumption online in order to demonstrate that interactive options can have lasting consequences – for audiences and news producers.

Finally, in Chapter Six, I consider the economic imperatives that are driving the broader changes to journalism mapped out in the previous chapters. I begin by considering the example of Rupert Murdoch’s introduction of paywalls at his news sites and the media response in order to demonstrate the way in which, in economic discussions about journalism, the business model is upheld as an explanatory frame. That is, the possession of the correct business model is presented as the guarantee of the success of a news site just as its lack can spell its demise. However, I outline the way in which the business model is an insufficient explanatory frame for the way in which it often fails to take into account the demands of the range of business and social stakeholders – which can be diverse and in conflict with each other. For instance, the stakeholders of a news site could include its shareholders, whose economic demands might well be at odds with the demands of its audience who expect a particular style of journalism which requires high business costs to produce.
It is in this chapter that the various threads of analysis are drawn together in relation to the discussion of the economic development of news – dominant, given its foregrounding in the politics of advanced liberalism. Thus it is also a space to consider the way in which the development of news is economically driven, positioned and understood. While *The Age Online* has demonstrated flexibility and attunement with this economic politics, *Crikey* demonstrates more discomfort around the changed news environment and the overt discussion of its business model. However, although I argue that *The Age Online* is more flexible and adaptive to the current media environment, this does not mean its adaptation is necessarily to be welcomed. *Crikey*’s discomfort demonstrates that in historical shifts and political changes invariably certain things are lost. In the conclusion, I consider what the loss of public trust journalism could mean for populations in Australia and elsewhere, and where its social imperatives might be met elsewhere within a changed political, economic, cultural and technological environment.
Chapter Four:

From Rhetorics of Professionalism
to the Politics of Professional Status
Introduction

In this chapter I begin with a consideration of news production studies in order to demonstrate the different ways in which the production and development of news and journalism have been positioned. From this discussion of the political-economic, organisational and cultural elements that shape journalism, I hone in on one element of journalism in particular: the development and practice of news values, and outline the way in which news values operate to inform and structure a professional practice of journalism. In order to demonstrate the operation of professional rhetorics in practice, I outline *Crikey*’s battle for recognition as a trustworthy mainstream news source.

Considering a range of conceptualisations of journalistic professionalism, I present it as a means to authority, in which the autonomy of journalists is central to this claim for authority. Treating journalism as a cultural technology, this autonomy can be viewed as the means by which journalism helps to govern individuals for a range of outcomes. Forms of professionalism are changing in relation to changes in dominant political logics. I outline the way in which *Crikey* is actively engaging with discussions about journalistic professionalism in order to govern its own professional status, while *The Age Online* seeks to maintain its professional status by distancing itself from such debates. Returning to my concern with the elements that shape the development of journalism, I outline the way at *The Age Online* that professional identities have
been shaped by cultural factors, including a structural divide between the print and online newsrooms.

**The field of news production**

The study of news and the processes of its production have traditionally occurred across three main areas of sociological inquiry: first, political economy, in which news organisations are examined in relation to their private ownership and the state; second, the social organisation of news work; and third, from a cultural perspective (Schudson, 2002). These approaches are not employed discretely, but often intersect. For instance, Simon Cottle (2003) argues that the cultural output of the media makes them unique as industries:

> In late-modern societies the symbolic forms of media output are implicated in the constitution of society: in its routines and rhythms of daily life, in the representation of social relations and in the conduct of politics, as well as in the affirmation (or challenge to) wider cultural values, traditions and identities. (p. 4)

However, he also contends that while political economy and cultural studies both provide valuable perspectives on media work, more work is needed to bridge the two fields – and this is the preserve of news production studies. He stresses the need for an “understanding of today’s news ecology, its organisations, cultural forms and associated practices” (p. 6). Outlining the way
such a project would unfold, Cottle presents us with two (traditionally) competing frameworks for media analysis: political economy and cultural studies. In political economy it is the marketplace that shapes culture and its relation to audiences, while in cultural studies production is displaced in favour of consumption, which becomes a site of production of meaning and pleasures for active audiences. While this is a simplification of these two complex areas of debate and scholarship, nonetheless Cottle presents them as in unremitting conflict: “these theoretical differences of approach, based within different ideas of social ontology, epistemology, methodology and politics, cannot be theoretically wished away nor simply accommodated in a new theoretical synthesis” (p. 11). What Cottle proposes instead is the “relatively underexplored and theoretically underdeveloped ‘middle ground’ of media organisation and production” (p. 4) – it is here, he argues, that real, empirical work can be done to counter the generalising or deterministic tendencies of the political economy or the “problem of inference” (p. 5) that begins with the text, in cultural studies.

Schudson’s recent work around the history of journalism traces his changing thoughts around the factors that influence the production of journalism. Initially, he argues that the cultural elements of journalism are of central importance, but not at the cost of an attention to the political, economic, or organisational factors:
News is a form of culture. It is a structured genre or set of genres of public meaning-making. But this is not to suggest that it floats in a symbolic ether. It is a material product and there are political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions to understanding its production, distribution, and appropriation by audiences. (Schudson, 2002, p. 251)

Schudson’s investment in arguments about the cultural element of news work is clear when he argues that journalists play a part in the construction of reality, but he qualifies this statement so that it does not place total emphasis on the role of the journalist:

Journalists not only report reality but create it. To say that journalists construct reality in producing the news is not to say they do so without constraints. In this case, after all, the crimes the papers reported really took place. To say that journalists construct the world is not to say they conjure the world. Journalists normally work with materials that real people and real events provide. But by selecting, highlighting, framing, shading, and shaping in reportage, they create an impression that real people – readers and viewers – then take to be real and to which they respond in their lives. (Schudson, 2003, p. 2)
In later work, Schudson (2005) focuses on the way in which journalism cultures are shaped by empirical realities, instead of pressing the point about the cultural role of journalism:

Is the fact that the press normally operates on a daily basis structural or cultural? Is there some basic primacy to the daily cycle of the press, of business, of government, of sleeping and waking, that makes the institutions of journalism inescapably human and person-centred in scale? (p. 188)

In this period he questions his own previous position that the combination of a range of social factors could be said to account for the production of news. He now argues that “it is simply not true that social, cultural, political and economic factors separately or together can explain why news is the way it is” (p. 172). While he previously had argued that journalists were involved with the task of ‘producing the news’, Schudson now qualifies these claims with the acknowledgement that journalists do not produce all events – and nor is all news structured by these social, cultural, economic and political forces. Journalists and social forces “do not produce news out of nothing. They act on something in the world. The ‘something’ they work on are events, happenings, occurrences in the world” (pp. 172–173).
But while Schudson displaces the former centrality of the organisational approach to news, with its focus on the relationship between journalists and official government sources, he does not discount it entirely. With an historical focus that places organisational structures as contingent, this line of enquiry is still relevant. In the following section I consider one of the most prominent and durable forms of organisational structures – news values. News values provide the link that exists between the culture of journalism and those ‘real world’ occurrences that Schudson argues shape the news in unpredictable ways. News values respond to external realities by framing them within cultural practices. This discussion of news values will be of considerable importance when we turn to close scrutiny of the way in which online news sites govern their own professional status.

**News values**

One of the most dominant organisational routines structuring the news is its temporal cycles. These cycles of hourly, daily or weekly production and distribution, structure not only the patterns of news making and its associated divisions of labour, but also the sorts of stories that are produced. Schlesinger (1978) found that where temporal demands – such as the need to fill the bulletin (or the column) – are one of the main routines that structures news production, the nature of news is reactive. That is, it responds to events rather than seeks them out. Similarly, Tiffen (1989) suggests that two of the key factors in the production of news are the deadline and the news hole, both of which
put the spatial or temporal demands of the routines of news production before
the availability of any given news: “whether it is a heavy or light news day,
news is essentially produced according to set times (deadlines) and to a format
of pre-determined size (the news hole)” (p. 15). Schlesinger outlines a number of
other ways that news is routinely produced and structured through work
practices – such as the daily editorial meeting, the discussion of “angles”, the
combination of staff and skills to write and sub-edit stories, and so on. The
result of these institutionalised routines is a familiar and, Schlesinger argues,
homogenous style of news that is limited by the planning and organisational
structures to produce particular kinds of news. This news is homogenous, and
tends not to be investigative, Schlesinger argues, because of the way it responds
to these structuring elements, rather than the available news of the day itself
shaping the routines and structures.

Boczkoswski (2004a) also argues that newspapers are homogenous and
predictable – but this is what maintains their ubiquitous position in society.
This ubiquity is achieved through a range of practices that work together to
ensure standardisation across a range of news(paper) products:

The ubiquity of newspapers is tied to their significant standardization …
This standardization results from a relatively stable ensemble of
technical, communication, and organizational practices. Such a stable
ensemble ensures that input consisting of information about often
heterogenous and unpredictable events is turned into a relatively homogenous and predictable daily product. (p. 6)

One of the most significant professional practices that enables the standardisation of news production is the adoption, operation and adherence to news values. Tiffen (1989) argues that news values are embedded in the journalist’s consciousness to the extent that they are perpetually aware of their existence, a seemingly naturally-attained set of values: “individual journalists talk as if there were some force of newsworthiness, independent of them and over which they have no control, which constrains and guides their work” (p. 66). The appeal to journalists of this construction of news values is that they are able to invoke them in order to “transform difficult decisions into routine choices” (p. 66) and “minimise the role of individual attitudes, so that news judgments transcend the preferences of the individuals producing it” (p. 67).

Despite many protestations within the literature about the enigmatic nature of news values, many work to define them. Sally White (1996) assembles a list of elements of news which fall under her two broader categories of news – matters of consequence (that which is in the public interest), and matters that captivate the imagination (that which is of interest to the public). Her values are: impact or relevance, timeliness, proximity, prominence, conflict, currency and the unusual or novel (pp. 11–20). Galtung and Ruge (1965) provided the most influential and cited list of news values in their 1965 study of foreign
events and the factors that influence their development into news stories. Their resultant list of values included: frequency, threshold, unambiguity, meaningfulness, consonance, unexpectedness, continuity, composition, reference to elite nations, reference to elite people, reference to persons, reference to something negative. Harcup and O’Neill (2001) revisited the Galtung and Ruge study, extending their earlier list and proposing a contemporary set of news values. These were: the power elite, celebrity, entertainment, surprise, bad news, good news, magnitude, relevance, follow-up, and newspaper agenda.

Also working from the vantage point of the 21st century, Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007) set out in their research to uncover the elements that constitute journalism as a profession. Following a series of interviews with a range of US-based news professionals, they came up with 10 elements of journalism that they claim are, first, agreed upon by journalists, second, have stood the test of time, and third, are adaptable. These defining elements are: that journalism’s first obligation is to the truth; that its first loyalty is to its citizens; that its essence is a discipline of verification; that its practitioners must maintain an independence from those they cover; that it must serve as an independent monitor of power; that it must provide a forum for public criticism and compromise; that it must strive to make the significant interesting and relevant; that it must keep the news comprehensive and in proportion; that its practitioners have an obligation to exercise their personal conscience; and that
citizens, too, have rights and responsibilities when it comes to the news (pp. 5–6). Kovach and Rosenstiel argue that ‘traditional’ news values have little relevance to today’s journalist. Noting the absence of familiar terms such as “balance and fairness” in their list of elements, they argue that a number of the values often cited by journalists and journalism scholars were “too vague to rise to the level of essential elements of the profession” (p. 6), suggesting that what are often assumed to be durable values central to the practice of professional journalism are in fact only regarded symbolically as ideals.

Indeed, compiling news values into an authoritative list is impossible, argues Tiffen (1989), given the very nature of their operation. News values are largely reactive, adaptable, and relational, according to the nature and context of the production of the news in question. It is somewhat easier to define what news values are not: they are not necessarily universal, nor are they universally held or adhered to, they are not necessarily consistent, they are not necessarily reliable, but rather, are adaptable according to a range of tensions and demands that may exist at once (Tiffen, 1989, p. 68). News values are better understood as responses to some of the pressures of the newsroom – largely commercial – than as an imaginary list of characteristics. Rather than relying on the term “values”, Tiffen instead directs us to the concept of the “format”.

Formats are, according to Tiffen, the structures that shape the news, in style, presentation, and content, but which are usually rendered invisible by
their familiarity, making them the tools that achieve the standardisation across newspapers perceived by Bozckowski:

Formats … are structures into which content is organised. All types of institutionalised communication develop formats which shape expectations for both senders and receivers and which define rules of relevance, procedure, style and standards. (Tiffen, 1989, pp. 62–63)

Formats navigate audiences in their consumption of media, clearly signalling what they are going to consume. Formats operate on a broad level – for example, the total mix of programs on offer – but also on a much smaller level. For example, the notion of a ‘story’ is a format in operation, and one that has implications for producers and consumers of news, about what qualities that product will possess, the way in which the information will be structured and so on. Formats guide and inform audiences, and enable them to feel comfortable and knowledgeable as consumers about what they are going to consume, as well as providing them with common patterns and structures.

Similarly, Hartley (1989) argues that news values are an “informal paradigm” (p. 76) used by journalists as part of the selection process in news production – but they can equally be invoked as a means of hiding the underlying “ideological determinants of a story” (p. 80). The truth often obscured by the invocation of news values is that they lack the very objectivity
they claim to aspire to. News values, says Hartley, carry the assumptions and values of those who formulate and promulgate them – “white, middle-class men, generation upon generation of them, forming opinions, imposing them, learning them and passing them on as Holy Writ. We have inherited a hierarchy of news values” (Coote as cited in Hartley, 1989, p. 80). The result is the familiar news formats and standardisation that shape the news product that we consume day after day: “What are the major stories of the day? The economy, industry, politics … foreign affairs, and so on, down the scale” (Coote as cited in Hartley, 1989, pp. 80–81). The journalist, even when aware of the ideological relations implicit in news values seems “unable to escape their institutionalised force (presented as the right way of doing journalism)” (Hartley, 1989, p. 81). In fact, according to Hartley, news-makers use the structures of news to make sense out of life, in a routine manner. That is, news shapes society as much as society shapes the news. The sort of social world that it shapes is fragmented into distinct spheres, such as sports and politics, composed of individual persons in control of their destiny, hierarchical and consensual by nature.

Echoing Kovach and Rosenstiel’s findings that many news values operate more commonly in theory than in practice, Schultz (1998) argues that objectivity persists as a professional value, even though most journalists recognise it as impossible to achieve in practice (p. 43). Further, she outlines the
commercial underpinning of the notion of objectivity, which runs counter to the idea that it is an important part in securing journalism’s independence:

Objectivity had its origins, in part, in the commercialisation of the press – in order to reach the widest possible audience publishers avoided one-sidedness in reporting – but it has outlived this early rationale to be reinterpreted as fairness, and remains an underpinning ethic. (pp. 43–44)

Nonetheless, Australian journalists have demonstrated a commitment, at least in theory, to adhere to news values: Australian journalists who subscribe to the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (the industry’s union) commit themselves to practise honesty, fairness, independence, and respect for the rights of others ("Journalists code of ethics," 2010). Despite the numerous problems with the definition and historical operation of news values, they remain central to the journalists’ processes of self-definition, and one of the ways in which they govern their own professional behaviour and status. As I demonstrate in the next section, *Crikey* has worked to establish its professional status in the Australian media by actively taking part in discussions around professional values and practices.
News values online: Crikey’s battle for professional recognition

In this section I outline the way in which Crikey has fought vigorously to be seen as a professional and independent alternative to the Australian mainstream media, and particularly the Murdoch and Fairfax presses. I outline in some detail an ongoing ‘war of words’ between Crikey and the Murdoch-owned broadsheet The Australian, and consider the effect this has had on Crikey’s relationship to professional standards in its maintenance of its public image. I use this to move into a discussion of professionalism, demonstrating the way in which the rhetoric of professionalism is used in order to gain authority over the particular jurisdiction of journalism. Considering discussions of journalistic professionalism, I demonstrate the limitation of the way in which many of these discussions are framed, and work to reframe professionalism within journalism as a cultural technology, established in Chapter Three.

Crikey publisher Eric Beecher has described the publication as “aggressively independent” (Money, 2010), arguing that “a close analysis of Crikey’s content would absolutely confirm its independence based on publishing a wide range of views, reporting and editorial commentary from all perspectives, ranging from anti-‘left’ to anti-‘right’ to pro and anti everything in between”. Elsewhere, Beecher has boasted that the publication has not faced a single writ in the five years to 201032 and that Crikey takes its approach to

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32 I outline more of Crikey’s history in Chapter Five as I discuss its changing negotiation of interactive options for its audience, but at this stage it is necessary to provide some brief historical detail. Crikey was established in 2000 by ‘shareholder activist’ Stephen Mayne, who developed a media profile during his campaign for the parliamentary seat held by Victorian Premier Jeff Kennett, when his campaign website, Jeffed.com, gained widespread media attention. Mayne initially ran the weekly email
accuracy and defamation “very seriously” (Jackson & Elliott, 2010). This has since changed with *Daily Telegraph* columnist and blogger Tim Blair signalling his intention to sue the publication for defamation in March 2010 over a blog post on *Crikey’s* website that suggested he was pseudonymously commenting on his own blog posts to gain extra comments (Nicholls & Mahar, 2010).

Nonetheless, *Crikey’s* recent track record remains significant, given the publication’s reputation for inaccuracy after facing three defamation writs – all of which were settled out of court – in its first five-and-a-half years of publication under owner-editor Stephen Mayne (Mayne, 2006). *Crikey’s* perception of the need to work hard to maintain their reputation is, in recent years, fuelled by their editorial ‘battle’ with *The Australian* newspaper over *Crikey’s* legitimacy and position in the Australian media landscape. While *Crikey* is openly critical of *The Australian* and the Murdoch press more generally, it is even more critical of the Fairfax press, and more importantly, has explicitly positioned itself as a critical and independent voice in the Australian media landscape. *The Australian’s* response has been to wage a ‘war’ with *Crikey* in its editorial pages – never, it must be noted, unprovoked, always in response to a story or statement from *Crikey* or one of its contributors – apparently seeking to
strip it of its legitimacy and draw attention to what it sees as its editorial bias against the Murdoch media.

This ‘war of words’ has employed the column space of the daily editorial in *The Australian*, as well as prominent columnist Mark Day as weapons, launching attacks in response to what it sees as hostility in the daily *Crikey* email, website, and the network of its contributors. One such attack took place in an *Australian* editorial published on 3 July 2009, following an address to the National Press Club of Australia by News Limited Chief Executive Officer John Hartigan on Wednesday 1 July 2009 (Hartigan, 2009), in which he challenges the assumption that newspapers are unanimously facing a global crisis, arguing that the Australian newspaper industry has a bright future. He also criticises *Crikey* and sites like it (The Huffington Post, Newser and the Daily Beast in the US, and Mumbrella in Australia) for their lack of original content and dependence on wire sources and mainstream mastheads. During the speech, which was broadcast live on ABC Television, *Crikey* political reporter Bernard Keane provided a running commentary via his Twitter account. This was followed by an article in *Crikey* (Keane, 2009) on the same day, describing the address as “a savage attack on online media” that over-emphasised News Limited’s recent changes and position in the global media landscape.33

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33 The sorts of changes Hartigan was referring to included utilising the News Corporation global network of journalists in the development and production of stories, diversifying into other online sites, such as the Australian recipe repository, taste.com.au, and moving towards increased newsroom integration.
Two days later, *The Australian* published an editorial, ‘Old Media, By Crikey’, in response to Keane’s Twitter commentary (and not, interestingly, his piece in *Crikey*) describing the series of 140-character messages as “light on for facts and awash with anger that Mr Hartigan, CEO of the company that publishes *The Australian*, dared to predict a positive future for the print media” ("Old Media, By Crikey,” 2009). According to the paper, Keane’s response demonstrated why “newspapers will survive while parasitical publications like *Crikey* will come and go”. Repeating the message of Hartigan’s speech, the editorial argues that *Crikey* is dependent on newspapers for survival, and light on original content, demonstrating the publication’s inadequacy as a major player in the media landscape. The editorial places these online news sources in direct contrast to traditional newspapers, such as *The Australian*, in order to demonstrate their comparative inferiority:

"Crikey, and its many peers in the US and Britain, are not newspapers. Rather, they are the work of small groups of passionate people with big barrows to push. In contrast, great newspapers, and their websites, are professional products staffed by men and women who combine deep knowledge of specific subjects with a talent for finding and reporting facts." ("Old Media, By Crikey," 2009)

The editorial seeks to demonstrate the continued legitimacy of newspapers in the face of a changing media landscape by describing the things that
newspapers are capable of that *Crikey* is not – such as breaking big stories, maintaining foreign bureaux, and providing detailed policy analysis. This is something that *Crikey* publisher Eric Beecher has himself acknowledged in maintaining the necessity of quality journalism. But *The Australian* argues that “*Crikey* sells itself as the future of quality journalism, but it isn’t”. Rather, in order to position itself as synonymous with progress and the ‘future of journalism’, the paper undermines *Crikey*’s position as a (technologically) progressive publication, arguing instead that “*Crikey* is what newspapers were in the 18th century, a small-circulation propaganda sheet, read by people less interested in news and debate than having their prejudices confirmed”. This editorial is symptomatic of the general tone and content of the form of criticism levelled at *Crikey* from *The Australian* in this ‘war of words’. A leading voice in this war is Mark Day.

Day is a columnist and media writer at *The Australian*, and long-time employee of News Limited. One of Day’s attacks on *Crikey* originated in response to *Crikey*’s denouncement of Australian avenues for media regulation in one of their editorials (“Can't we just turn them off?”, 2009). Specifically, *Crikey* was responding to the “timid and toothless” response of the Australian Press Council to their complaint over the publication of what turned out to be fake nude photographs of Australian politician Pauline Hanson in the News Limited-owned *Sunday Telegraph*, as well as the latest gaffe by shock jock Kyle Sandilands (in this case, he suggested that actress Magda Szubanski would lose
weight more successfully in a concentration camp than on her public campaign with Jenny Craig). In response, Day announced that the editorial betrays _Crikey_’s status as a “deliberate meddler in the processes that establish media regulatory boundaries” (Day, 2009). He argues that “_Crikey_ has become a bore; a daily platform for fixated characters who appear to share an obsession with little more than the goings-on at _The Australian_ and within the global media business of the Murdoch family.” The criticism that _Crikey_ is little more than a tool to express its publishers’ anti-Murdoch obsession runs throughout the papers’ many attacks. Specifically, Day’s contempt is directed towards _Crikey_ under its Private Media ownership. He forgives it its past sins due to its demonstrated strength of character, suggesting that under the direction of Eric Beecher, it has lost its original charm:

_Crikey_ used to be a media gadfly with a kind of insouciant charm. It traded off the same need, deeply embedded in society, which sustains Sandilands – we all love to hate a bad boy. It is now a crushing, insufferable bore.

In contrast, former owner and editor Stephen Mayne is forgiven his ‘bad boy’ behaviour while at the helm:

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34 That is, Day’s criticisms are directed at _Crikey_ once it was purchased by the company owned by Eric Beecher, Diana Gribble and Chong Weng Ho. Beecher is the public face of Private Media, and significantly, a former News Limited employee who ‘defected’ to work at Fairfax, before moving to publishing at Text Media, and then _Crikey_.
Mayne admitted he was too busy as a one-man-band to bother with small niceties such as checking his facts, but boasted he was never wrong for long. As soon as he was told he was wrong, he put up a correction.

Now, Day suggests, Beecher is using Crikey to drive a campaign against The Australian, using its position as an online publication to criticise mainstream media and further his own business interests. Michael Wolff (2008) argues that this sort of distrust of defectors – Beecher was formerly (and briefly) editor of the Murdoch-owned Herald and Weekly Times – is common among Murdoch staff, who cultivate a feudal and fiercely loyal outlook.

Day launched a similar attack after Crikey published an article by regular contributor Margaret Simons under the headline “Did the Herald Sun kill Carl Williams?” (Simons, 2010b). In her piece, Simons suggested that the publication by the Murdoch-owned Herald Sun of the revelation that Victoria Police was paying the school fees of the underworld figure Carl Williams’ daughter might have contributed to his subsequent murder. Simons argues that the implication of the story was clear: “the Herald Sun effectively announced on its front page that Williams had done a deal with the police”. Hours later, Williams was brutally bashed to death in prison. Simons suggests the paper could have been unwittingly used as a tool by sources who would have benefited from the information becoming public – this, she suggests was “not so
much conspiracy, as opportunism”. She criticises the paper for publishing without adequately considering the possible consequences:

   It would be nice to think that the *Hun*s senior editorial team thought about the rights and wrongs of publishing in this context. But we all know that, particularly under the paper’s current gung-ho leadership, it is far more likely that they looked no further than the scoops on offer. Publish, and let the cards fall where they may. (Simons, 2010b)

The following week, Day (2010a) responded with a vigorous defence and attack on *Crikey’s* position within the local media landscape. He begins with a response to Simons’ suggestion that the *Herald Sun* was wrong for publishing and letting the ‘cards fall where they may’. That, argues Day, is precisely the job of journalism:

   If it is legally possible to tell the truth without issues of public concern then it must be told. To suggest that editors actively engaged in a plot to engineer the assassination of a criminal in jail is absurd. To suggest reporters and editors conspired or were used in committing criminal activity is outlandish and defamatory. (Day, 2010a)

He goes on to attack *Crikey* more specifically, and in particular, its place in the Australian media landscape, working to discredit it as a serious or mainstream news source:
Crikey’s position in the media world is left of centre, anti-establishment because it has nowhere else to go. If it were not a gadfly, a pricker of pomp and pretension, it would be nothing. It breaks virtually no news; it relies on controversial comment for its existence and carefully crafts this formula to keep the subscriptions rolling in. (Day, 2010a)

Again, as with his earlier attack on Crikey, he suggests that the problem lies with its more recent owners: “Crikey publisher Eric Beecher is a former News editor with an axe to grind”. The suggestion is that when Crikey was a powerless pest under the leadership of incorrigible ‘bad boy’ Stephen Mayne, its critical position was indulged and tolerated. It had a narrow readership, and posed little threat to the media heavyweights at News Limited. But under the authority of a “former News editor” Crikey is something else entirely – a source of genuine disturbance to the likes of Day that must be firmly put, and kept, in its place.

In response, Crikey has not restrained itself when it comes to criticising The Australian or the Murdoch media empire. Most notably, Beecher has accused the paper of being self-obsessed, demonstrating a “narcissism of the kind that can’t be found in any other substantial English-language newspaper” (Beecher, 2010e). However, Crikey is equally critical, if not more so of Fairfax newspapers, as well as the independently owned West Australian newspaper (see Beecher, 2008a; Beecher, 2008b; Simons, 2007a), and the ABC (Beecher,
2009g), and more importantly, has sought to position itself as overwhelmingly critical in general, as an independent voice in the Australian media. Indeed, *Crikey* publisher Eric Beecher has spoken out in praise of *The Australian* despite its stance towards *Crikey*, saying it is “the originator of Australia’s liveliest ideas and commentary” (Beecher, 2009f, p. xv). He argues that while it may represent a conservative position on certain political issues, it has demonstrated a continued commitment to political commentary and the resources necessary to carry it out.

Similarly, *The Australian* has shown its willingness to work with *Crikey* when it has interests in common. For instance, the paper ran a story on Beecher’s objection to the ABC’s commentary site *The Drum*, which he suggests “seriously and dangerously compromises the ABC’s editorial integrity” (Sinclair, 2010). He also says, “I can now fully understand why the BBC has limited its online activities, especially in the commentary arena” (Sinclair, 2010), which is significantly in keeping with News Corporation’s stance on public service broadcasters, the extent of their remit in a changing media environment, and their potential to stifle competition, particularly in the online arena. For example, Chairman and Chief Executive of News Corporation’s Asian and European operations, James Murdoch, attacked the BBC’s online expansion in his MacTaggart lecture for the Edinburgh International Television Festival in 2009. He suggests that the extent of the BBC’s reach,
particularly online where it offers high quality news for no cost, is threatening the future of other commercial news providers in that medium:

Dumping free, state-sponsored news on the market makes it incredibly difficult for journalism to flourish on the internet. Yet it is essential for the future of independent digital journalism that a fair price can be charged for news to people who value it. We seem to have decided as a society to let independence and plurality wither. To let the BBC throttle the news market and then get bigger to compensate. (Murdoch, 2009)

Thus when the Murdoch press sees *Crikey*, or at least its publisher, as an ally, it is able to bury the hatchet. The same article described *Crikey* under Beecher’s leadership as “a forum for more measured commentary in recent times” (Sinclair, 2010), rather than the dull and irrelevant product deprived of Stephen Mayne’s trademark ‘charm’. Even Mark Day seemed to have softened his stance. In a column published on the same day as Sinclair’s piece, he suggested that *Crikey* “has evolved into a more considered, even ponderous, vehicle for soft-left political punditry and media commentary” (Day, 2010d) – a far cry from his usual position on the publication under its Private Media ownership.

However, it is because of campaigns like the one waged in the editorial pages of *The Australian*, as well as events like its exclusion from the annual
budget lock-in (Barns, 2007), that *Crikey* has worked hard to position itself as a serious source of journalism. This has cultivated a form of defensiveness within *Crikey*, centred on its adherence to professional standards. As discussed in the previous chapter, Beecher has positioned himself as a spokesperson for the cause of quality journalism in Australia. When asked about the key strategies that have shaped *Crikey’s* development, Beecher is quick to shift the emphasis from factors such as technology and the business model to professional values, arguing that it is the editorial position the publication inhabits that has most influenced its direction and success:

I think the overwhelming thing has nothing to do with the technology, or marketing or whatever, all of which are important. But the overwhelming thing is editorial priority – that we see editorial content of a particular kind, and continuing to invest in that to the extent that we can – as being 1, 2, 3, and 4. (E. Beecher, personal communication, 13 March 2009)

Similarly, Beecher is quick to dismiss the idea that *Crikey’s* success is driven by the fact it is an online news source – and one with a successful business model – at a time when traditional news is floundering. Rather, he suggests that it is the professional journalism and its values that inform it, which have shaped *Crikey*:
You can have the best technology, and the best marketing in the world, and if we don’t have the content that appeals to people, and that’s not just, you know, analysing it story by story, it’s tone, it’s the editorial culture that we create, it’s the irreverence. It’s also making it more and more accurate all the time – so, you know, *Crikey’s* still not the most accurate media outlet in the world, but it’s no longer, you know, one of the least accurate – so that’s really important to us. (E. Beecher, personal communication, 13 March 2009)

Beecher is defending the legitimacy of *Crikey* against criticism from those within the mainstream media whose legitimacy is not in question. What is at stake for Beecher and for *Crikey* is their journalistic authority, the basis on which journalistic professionalism is measured.

**Notions of professionalism and journalistic authority**

Studies of journalistic professionalism have often turned to the sociology of professions, or what Schudson and Anderson (2009) refer to as “trait studies”, against which they measure the extent to which journalism is, or is not, a profession. Larson (as cited in Schudson and Anderson, 2009) argues that “ideal typical constructions do not tell us what a profession is, only what it pretends to be” (p. 89). Nonetheless, discussions that measure journalism against an ideal type remain dominant, and are exhibited in Day’s critique of *Crikey’s* standards, and Beecher’s defence. Schultz (1994) suggests that
discussions of journalism framed around the possession, or lack of measures of professionalism, are inherently limited. She argues that the paradox of professionalism for journalism can be found in the deep ambivalence that surrounds the adoption of professional standards. For instance, Schultz found that Australian journalists have a strong commitment to the idea of the media as the fourth estate, the independent watchdog of power, rather than seeing it “as just another business” (p. 44). This, despite the fact that while in a 1992 study of 247 Australian journalists, 90 per cent of those surveyed were personally committed to the idea of the press of the fourth estate, but nearly half believed that “in reality, it was just another business” (p. 44). Similarly, while journalism has met many of the benchmarks of a profession – such as autonomy, and the adherence to ethical codes – “there is limited evidence that the media have become substantially more credible or reliable” (p. 38). The problem with professionalism for journalists, Schultz argues, is that the autonomy it affords them as a profession can also serve to lead them to become insular, inward looking, and arrogant.

Schultz argues that the professionalisation[^35] of journalism is incomplete, and that journalists resist some of its common processes, such as the statutory registration that applies to other professions because of a commitment to the media as the fourth estate (p. 37). In fact, Schultz outlines that as journalists

[^35]: ‘Professionalisation’ here indicates that journalism’s recognition as a profession has been a historical process, as outlined in the previous chapter’s discussion of the development of ‘scientific’ practices and values, such as objectivity, to set professional journalism against the highly partisan and economically-driven practices of the pauper press in the UK and yellow journalism in the US.
have asserted their professionalism – which has occurred slowly since the turn of the last century – the public has come to trust journalists less (p. 39). In return, journalists see this situation as inevitable, and newspapers have a poor record at acknowledging or correcting mistakes. They view their poor reputation as originating in sensationalism and inaccurate reporting – which in turn they see as the result of trying to satisfy the demands of their audience within the constraints of time and resources. This produces a kind of gridlock in which journalists and their audiences become isolated from each other, each seeing the other as a necessary evil, each inhibiting in some way the production of quality journalism. Professionalism, then, operates as rhetoric around the practice of journalism. It works to indicate journalism’s progression and development away from its partisan and commercial history, and towards a more objective and trustworthy form of journalism. Rhetorics of professionalism thus work to bring into view an ideal type of journalism – historically, the model of journalism as a fourth estate. The remainder of this chapter is concerned with demonstrating the way in which this professionalism depends on journalistic autonomy and authority through which journalism is active in governing its professional status.

Schudson and Anderson (2009) argue that struggles for professionalism in journalism are about establishing an area of jurisdiction in which journalists can exercise their authority. Following the work of Abbott, they define jurisdiction as “the day-to-day manner in which a profession both concretizes
and displays its base of ‘abstract knowledge’ or, in the peculiar case of journalism, knowledge real and expert but by no means abstract” (Schudson & Anderson, 2009, p. 89). Abbott (as cited in Schudson & Anderson, 2009) argues that journalism (in the US at least) has claimed jurisdiction over “the collection and distribution of qualitative, current information about general events” (p. 96). In the collection and distribution of this information, the method of objective reporting is what gives journalism its “unique jurisdictional focus by claiming to possess a certain form of expertise or intellectual discipline” (Abott as cited in Schudson & Anderson, 2009, p. 96). Schudson (2001) argues that the objectivity norm is central to the practice of journalism in the US, and it operates in order to maintain the social cohesion, control and identity of journalists as a group, for historically contingent reasons, so that “journalists work in Germany or China or Cuba or Argentina with norms that differ from the objectivity norm” (p. 17).

Armed with this particular account of objectivity as a key if contingent element in establishing jurisdiction, we can revisit Beecher’s efforts. In his work around quality journalism, Beecher is trying to establish a norm or set of norms that grants jurisdictional authority to a particular type of journalism. That is, in response to journalism facing challenges from technological, economic and social pressures, Beecher is trying to secure the jurisdictional authority of what he labels ‘quality journalism’ in a field riddled with different or lesser examples.
For *Crikey*, this means asserting a particular type of professionalism, which, as I outline below, exhibits paradoxical elements.

**Crikey’s paradoxical professionalism**

While professionalism can operate as a means to journalistic authority, conversely, it is the rejection of this means of authority through which some alternative forms of journalism establish their own form of authenticity:

Forms of “alternative” and “citizen” journalism are premised precisely on a principled refusal of professional identity and associated forms of practice that, simultaneously, claim to represent a more radical and authentic embodiment of such journalistic ideals as representing the public, speaking truth to power, and operating as a means through which members of the public can both gain access to knowledge that supports an informed exercise of citizenship and engage in collective debate. (Nolan, 2009, p. 660)

This kind of plea to authenticity is found in an opinion piece by former *Crikey* editor Jonathon Green, published in *The Australian* – clearly during a peaceful period in relations between the two publications. Green’s piece is a defence of *Crikey*, arguing that the publication could be measured against traditional journalistic values, and not found wanting:
People won’t let it go. How credible is Crikey, they ask? It’s online, isn’t it? Is that real journalism? And this is what I say: that after working through a media epoch that has reduced the majority of Australian newspapers to journalistic zombies – some selling, some not, but all driven by ideology, populism or commercial desperation – the stuff we do at Crikey is a return to something simple, wholesome and traditional. (Green, 2009)

In this piece Green is, paradoxically, making a claim for Crikey’s professionalism by mainstream measures, but then also rejecting these measures by suggesting that Crikey offers something more authentic than the mainstream press. Green suggests that Crikey offers adherence to journalistic principles that have been abandoned by most within the current Australian media landscape, representing a “breath of fresh and journalistically earnest air” compared to its mainstream competitors. While most publications have become driven by the economic imperatives of their board, Green argues that Crikey “is as close as I’ve been in decades to a journalistic product that pursues and presents the story in simple, unambiguous terms”. Here, Green’s paradoxical position embodies the difficult territory that Crikey navigates. On the one hand, it is keen to exploit its position as a new media product offering something alternative, authentic and thoroughly different to the mainstream media. On the other, if it is to be positioned as a real competitor to this media, it must gain its journalistic authority not by rejecting the norms that grant broader journalistic jurisdiction,
but by adopting these. Thus *Crikey* finds itself in the strange position of being both critic and bedfellow of *The Australian* and the mainstream media in general. It is defined both by and against the professional standards exhibited by the mainstream media. *Crikey* gains its authority by demonstrating the short fallings of these mainstream offerings, but at the same time must acknowledge their centrality to its existence and necessity in the overall media landscape – as Beecher (2009c) does.

The complexity of the position inhabited by consciously ‘alternative’ online news offerings is also detected by Bruns (2004), who argues that the labelling of independent online news sites of *Crikey*’s ilk as sources of alternative journalism can be misleading:

While they are able to exploit the web’s low news production and delivery costs to set up their own operation and gain nationwide notoriety, journalistic practices on these sites – except for their deliberately confrontational, no-holds-barred approach to news coverage – is not much different from that in traditional news organizations. (p. 179)

Bruns specifically critiques these sorts of sites for their lack of innovation, particularly in the area of editorial processes where, contrary to what many see as the underpinning amateur-oriented nature of online content production,
they still “leave their staff journalists well in control of news content” (p. 174).

What Bruns is railing against is a perceived lack of authenticity in the rejection of the mainstream values central to the positioning of these sites, but which cannot be maintained if they also want to seek authority within the jurisdiction of traditional journalism. Rather, it is the extent to which online news sites seek and value this authority that determines the extent to which they are bound by its rules (including perceived professional standards). For Crikey, establishing and maintaining its authority within the jurisdiction of traditional, mainstream journalism takes precedence – particularly under its Private Media ownership – over maintaining its position as an alternative source. Under the previous direction of Stephen Mayne, Crikey was positioned less as a mainstream, more as an alternative news source, and was thus governed by a range of different professional norms. It is this change in direction, from a rejection to an acceptance of professional journalistic norms and to a position of authority within the jurisdiction of journalism that has prompted, in part, Crikey’s vigorous defence of its professional status and The Australian’s efforts to challenge or destabilise Crikey’s move into its professional territory. For other publications, professional authority is less important than other forms of authority, as I argue later with evidence of The Age Online being less bound by the norms of journalistic professionalism, but through a cultural disconnect, is governed more by financial concerns.
The politics of professional status

Given the ambiguities that surround the notion of professionalism, it is more constructive to define it as a means of authority, and following Nolan’s (2009) governmental reworking of the concept, one that produces a range of diverse and sometimes contradictory outcomes. Working through a critique of the concept, Nolan argues that debates about journalistic professionalism are too often idealistic or used to cloak the myriad social factors that constitute the practice of journalism. He is similarly critical of discussions that move from journalism as a profession to journalism culture – for instance, Zelizer’s (1992) work that positions journalists as “interpretive communities”, within which journalistic authority is established and negotiated. While Schudson and Anderson (2009) critique Zelizer’s work for overemphasising the rhetorical dimension of journalism and overlooking the social structures that inform it, Nolan questions the definition of culture upon which this sort of approach is based. Rather than positioning culture as an interpretive framework, abstracted from the economic, social and political practices that inform its production, Nolan argues for the adoption of a governmental approach to culture.

Within such an approach, and as discussed in detail in Chapter Three, journalism can be understood as a cultural technology, shaped by a range of specific social, economic and political conditions and practices. This changes the way in which journalistic autonomy, a means by which journalism gains authority, is understood. Within rhetorics of professionalism, journalistic
autonomy – from the state, capital and management – is central to claims for journalistic authority. Journalism’s claim to independence allows it to fulfil its objectivity norm and thus to demonstrate authority over its jurisdiction. However, as Nolan outlines, Schudson has demonstrated that journalistic autonomy is “not resistant to forms of state authority” (Nolan, 2009, p. 665) but rather journalism relies on state and commercial sources to provide information, structure and narrative to news. While still treating journalistic autonomy as a central means of journalistic authority, adoption of a governmental approach changes the way in which this is conceptualised. Autonomy can now be grasped as the means through which journalism can be acted upon from a range of agencies and institutions, in its operation as a cultural technology:

Practices of governmental power seek to target, shape and work through, rather than undermine, forms of autonomy to achieve particular ends … “autonomy” is not something that stands opposed to power, but [is] its concrete realization through processes of subjectification that seek, in Nikolas Rose’s perspicacious phrase, to act upon subjects’ particular “powers of freedom”. (Nolan, 2009, p. 666)

Thus autonomy remains the means through which journalists exercise their authority, but the way in which this authority or power operates is significantly different under the two different approaches.
While rhetorics of professionalism position journalistic autonomy as what separates journalism from the economic and political conditions in which it is practised, a governmental perspective demonstrates that these conditions are what shape the “powers of freedom” available to journalists in the exercise of their autonomy and authority. Indeed, their autonomy is the very way in which journalists not only exercise their authority, but through which they are also acted upon, constituting particular kinds of journalistic cultures of professional norms, standards and practices. This is not to say that journalistic autonomy and authority, and indeed journalistic professionalism, is a “sham”, as Nolan is careful to point out. But, rather, a governmental approach to journalism includes within its purview the examination of the way in which rhetorics of journalistic authority are deployed, for what means, and within what constraints. It allows consideration of the way in which journalism is being shaped as a cultural technology under changing conditions of liberalism, and how this includes changing notions of journalistic authority and professionalism in both broad and specific ways.

As already discussed, for *Crikey* this has entailed a complex and at times paradoxical shaping of its professional identity, allowing it to inhabit the space it has marked out as an independent, online, but professional news source. It must straddle the twin identities of alternative and professional, navigating the complexities this entails for its identity, beset from challenges from those who
seek to question its legitimacy in both spheres. Specifically, in its engagement with media deliberations around its adherence to particular professional standards, *Crikey* is involved in the self-government of its own professional status despite the fact that this maintains its contradictory position between professionalism and authenticity. For *The Age Online* it has signalled the introduction of a changing form of professionalism, which challenges and is in tension with the authority of its print version, brought about by cultural differences and a structural disconnect between the print and online newsrooms. However, despite perceptions that *The Age Online* represents a rejection of the professional values embodied by its print predecessor, I argue that this demonstrates not a disavowal of professionalism, but rather a reshaping of professionalism online. I also suggest that this is brought about by the jurisdiction through which *The Age Online* seeks to claim its authority. While the print *Age* gains its authority in the jurisdiction of traditional journalism through the adherence to professional norms and standards, *The Age Online* seeks a different form of professional authority that is more attuned to financial imperatives.

**Professionalism at The Age Online**

Indeed, it has been suggested that *The Age* has all but disavowed its professional status – which once saw it as one of the best regarded media outlets in the Australian media landscape – thanks to a range of financial decisions made by its management and board (Beecher, 2008d). There is evidence that
could suggest that this observation is correct. For instance, while *Crikey* has been actively involved in public debates about the preservation of quality journalism in Australia, Fairfax has responded with apparent silence. Beecher has commented on this very matter, arguing that “there’s an intense debate about the future of journalism and newspapers vibrating across the Australian media – except in the media owned by the company which ignited the debate in the first place” (Beecher, 2008e). Beecher is referring to the 2008 move by Fairfax to cut 550 members of staff across its operations, as I discuss in more detail in relation to the economic factors that influence the development of online news, in Chapter Six. The sackings were what sparked Beecher’s vocal stance on the need to protect quality journalism in Australia, and he notes “a distinct odour of internal censorship” within Fairfax itself when it comes to reflecting on the impact of the management decision on its editorial practices.

As an outside observer with little access to the internal workings of Fairfax, and specifically, *The Age Online*, it is difficult to assess the mood and approach to the changing media landscape. However, what can be noted is a failure to engage with current debates surrounding the future of journalism in Australia. Further, it may be possible to detect in this silence an unwillingness to do so. *The Age* journalist interviewed for this research suggested that while the silence from their quarters could be partly blamed on the journalists’ characteristically large workload, as well as their reticence to answer questions – “despite calling other people for a living many [journalists] are, ironically,
unwilling to do the same (or even correspond) for anyone else if there is no obvious benefit for them” – it was also likely that it was driven by a “reluctance to stick their head up at a time where job security is far from what it once was” (J. Hogan, personal communication, 10 August 2009). This is not to say that *The Age* (online and in print) has failed to engage in debating broader media changes and trends per se. Thanks to the presence of Media and Communications editor Matthew Ricketson from 2006 to 2009, the paper was attentive to a range of issues facing the Australian and global media.

Ricketson’s columns covered a diverse range of media issues, including reflection on journalistic practice, consideration of ethical issues, and discussion of current and future trends. For example, columns reflecting on journalistic practice covered such issues as journalists’ experiences reporting Victoria’s Black Saturday bush fires (Ricketson, 2009), news that ABC’s Radio National was cutting specialist programs in order to fund more digital projects (Ricketson, 2008b), and coverage of the departure of US veteran television news anchor Dan Rather from CBS after 24 years (Ricketson, 2006). Columns around issues of media ethics included the discussion of the injunction against Channel Seven’s use of information gained from football players’ private medical records (Ricketson, 2007b), and debates around the changing perceptions and trust of journalists in the shifting media landscape (Ricketson, 2008a). Ricketson was perceptive of and engaged with debates about the implications of the rise of digital communication technologies on the future of
news and newspapers (Ricketson, 2007a). While Ricketson did demonstrate a tendency to highlight the necessity and durability of newspapers, particularly in a number of reports during 2008, this angle often emerged through the headline, and so is not necessarily of Ricketson’s doing but an editorial concern (Ricketson, 2008e, 2008f).

But regardless of any perceived positioning, these issues were covered with insight and analysis. With Ricketson’s departure, this seemed to cease. While a media and marketing section remains in the business pages, with media business ‘guru’ Harold Mitchell a regular columnist, it covers a wide range of media news with a more specific focus on advertising, and lacking the reflection on media practice that Ricketson’s columns provided. So while *Crikey* has consciously and publicly engaged with these issues as part of its claim for journalistic authority, *The Age*, both online and in print, appears to have disengaged with these sorts of discussions with the departure of its Media and Communications editor. Rather, differing notions of professionalism and journalistic authority highlight a pre-existing structural divide between the print and online newsrooms at *The Age*. A journalist who has worked for both print and online at *The Age* outlines the way in which this divide manifests around the professional positioning of each part of the paper:

I think probably these days the biggest issue between print and online is the difference in tone sometimes between what is in the paper and what
is in the website in terms of the prominence given to stories. I'd say that these days that’s probably the biggest source of angst between online staff and print staff. (J. Hogan, personal communication, 10 August 2009)

The journalist then goes on to outline the way in which this professional divide is underpinned by a structural divide between the two newsrooms:

Online has a more salacious, tawdry approach than the paper, I mean it’s quite common to have your three main stories during the day all sort of showbiz related and giving prominence to stuff that in the paper, mightn’t get in there at all. But … that’s really an issue because the print side and the website are actually controlled by different parts of the company, so while it’s the same website, the guy, even the editor in chief of the newspaper, while he can suggest what goes in the website, in the end that’s not his call. (J. Hogan, personal communication, 10 August 2009)

Because despite Fairfax Media’s claim to be a “fully integrated media company” ("Fairfax Media," 2009), the company is split in two, with Fairfax Digital governing its online operations and the parent company remaining in charge of print. Despite the company’s claims of media convergence (Australian Press Council, 2007), the two arms of the company remain
operationally separate. Rather, what has taken place has been architectural convergence – with a new headquarters in Melbourne housing the operations of *The Age* newspaper, 3AW Radio, Fairfax Digital and the Melbourne bureaux of the *Australian Financial Review* and *Business Review Weekly* ("In-depth focus," 2010) – and the convergence of management of the online versions of the two metropolitan mastheads – *The Age Online* and *The SMH Online* – both of which are under the leadership of Online editor-in-chief Mike van Niekerk (Beer, 2006).

As mentioned above, this structural divide between the two newsrooms creates a gulf between the perception of the print and online versions of the paper. Importantly, this divide is seen to be financially-driven, so that while the print newspaper is working on an ‘old’ business model based on the sale of advertising tied to the quality of the print content, and thus the economic demographics of its audience, the online version is driven by the need for a higher volume of page views and clicks less dependent on a particular ‘class’ of reader. This results in the prominence of material on the front page of the online paper that is designed to attract more readers and clicks. Given the different nature of reading and engagement online, this material is not often the sort given similar prominence in the print newspaper. Visual evidence of the evolution of *The Age Online* supports this perceived growing disconnect between the tone and style of the two versions of *The Age*. For instance, Image 1 shows a 2007 version of *The Age Online* before a redesign later that year that saw it take
the shape that remains, more or less, today. To the right of the main content is a flash box where a story on Hollywood actress Angelina Jolie is one of the rotating options. Below the top stories is a ‘Time Out’ section, featuring a number of lighter pieces. Image 2 shows the front page of The Age newspaper of the same day. There is an obvious difference between the two versions, but the prominence of celebrity news, gossip, and lighter stories in The Age Online is less marked than the difference between the treatment of top news stories. It is evident that The Age Online has made breaking news far more prominent than the top stories from the day’s paper. In comparison, Image 3 demonstrates the redesign that occurred in 2007, in which celebrity-oriented news became far more prominent. Image 4 is a 2010 version of The Age Online, which demonstrates that celebrity-oriented news has remained prominent in the three years since the 2007 version shown in Image 3. Image 4 shows the cover of The Age on the same day as Image 3, demonstrating that while The Age Online has remained consistent since its redesign, so the print Age has remained consistent in its difference to its online counterpart.
The Age Online 2007 (a)

US twisters kill 19

School building torn down in devastated town as tornadoes rip across southern US states.

Jail for 'devious' hair thief

Airline baggage worker who stole women's hair to satisfy a fetish imprisoned for at least two years.

Driver fury at Tulla chaos

Motorists vent their anger at Citilink after runway accident causes major delays.

Aussies to crew historic Airbus flight

Qantas to play a major role in the first test flight in the US of the world's largest passenger plane.

**Soldier 'did drugs deal in uniform'**

**Burke shows Rodd's green, says Howard**

**Vic prepared to win sole on Murray deal**

**Hicks charged at last**

- Dentist double homicide
- More defend Hicks
- Hiccups alleged

**Archibald verdict is black and white**

Australia's most prestigious portrait prize awarded to John Beard for his monochrome painting.

**WHAT'S ON**

- A tick for Tiki

- What's On This Week

**Classifieds**

- Cars
- Jobs
- Real Estate

**Weather**

- Forecast

**Adjoining Advert**

- Buy a 2006 Toyota
- Before March 31
- and save

**SPORT**

- ASX
- Cricket
- Tennis
- Motorsport
- Golf
- Soccer
- Basketball
- Horse Racing
- NRL
- Rugby

**NEWS**

- News
- Sport
- Features
- Business
- Life & Style
- Sport

**CLASSIFIEDS**

- Cars
- Jobs
- Real Estate

**SECTIONS**

- Classifieds
- Jobs
- Real Estate

**BetterDeal.com.au**

- Offers you want

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175
WA scandal ends Rudd's dream run

'Honeymoon is over, says Labor camp

Chilling record of a gangland I murder

`How I suffered': Hicks' grim tale of abuse in bid for British passport

Melbourne Cup horse jailed in HK

Inside eg
Cops back pay action
12:09pm | Melbourne police will refuse to issue speeding fines as they fight for 5 per cent pay rise.

Priest stabbed in head
DIYLAN McLEOD 11:55am | Bloody scene confronts police after Sydney priest's throat slashed.

Jobs market tighter still
11:57am | Almost 22,000 jobs added to labour market in July, backing RBA decision to lift interest rates.

Labor candidate pulls out
10:37am | Controversial Tasmanian Labor candidate, union official Kevin Hackett, stands aside.

Dog impaled on fence
10:54am | Rescue cut critically injured Labrador free after roof attack in Bendigo.

- Australia wins team tennis cup
- World Cup: Australia to play England in final
- Spurs offered £50m for Liverpool's Kuyt
- World No 1 as tennis returns to Brisbane

Breaking news
12:39am | Five men charged over huge online scam
12:39am | Five men charged over huge online scam
12:39am | Five men charged over huge online scam
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12:39am | Five men charged over huge online scam
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12:39am | Five men charged over huge online scam
12:39am | Five men charged over huge online scam
12:39am | Five men charged over huge online scam
The Age Online 2010

Williams death: 'Let dead dogs lie'

Williams death: 'Let dead dogs lie'

Other news
Bulldog beer-tosser: Ferv asked for it (n)
Police release 'mob-story conwoman'
Whole lots gifted over $13 million prize
Home invasion heroine 'in shock'
Dumped at Hazelwood, he died of OD
Stabbing accused 'killed day after release'
Melbourne, Sydney lead home prices
Tiger Airways to fly out of Avalon
The Age Newspaper 2010

Back for Rudd on health
Premiers gather in Canberra

Travel chaos as volcano casts pall over Anzac Day plans

Curtin reopened for detention
Raunch culture puts sex pressure on Gen Y girls

The rewards you want, more often.
Fairfax
Through these images I wish to suggest that it is both a divided newsroom and a different treatment of news content that shape the development and practice of journalism at The Age Online. Attention to professionalism allows for an examination of both structural and cultural factors as it encompasses the ideas that shape journalistic culture as well as its practical manifestation. As I have demonstrated, the development of online news at Crikey is shaped largely by the need for adherence to and promotion of notions of professionalism. In the case of Crikey, both the culture of professionalism and its demands on journalistic practice have shaped the development of the publication and its broader public identity. In comparison, at The Age, the culture of professionalism is used as a measure of the difference between online and print operations. Differences in culture emerge in the editorial tone and approach, and the selection and placement of stories. However, this cultural tension is also influenced by structural factors. In the case of The Age Online, its separate editorial identity, facilitated by split print and online newsrooms, is what creates this cultural difference and resulting tension. Thus in the development of online news in the two cases, both cultural and structural factors, focused around notions of professionalism, play a part.

While it could be argued that the structural divide between The Age and its online counterpart, and the associated disconnect between the featured content at each represents an abandonment of the sort of professional standards embodied by the print Age, such as a commitment to the sort of investigative
journalism and political news that is part of the ‘fourth estate’ ideal, I suggest that this represents the development of a different sort of professionalism online. Indeed, Nolan (2009) argues that while the conditions for the practice of a sort of ‘public interest’ (or ‘quality’) journalism as represented by the traditional image of *The Age* newspaper have been undermined, this does not result in an associated demise of professionalism. Rather, while aspects of an older professionalism once embodied by *The Age* have been displaced, they have also been “replaced by alternative discourses and practices of journalistic professionalism” (Nolan, 2009, p. 666). As I outlined in the previous chapter, Nolan (2008) traces the development of journalism as a cultural technology under the changing conditions of liberalism. He argues that under the current conditions of advanced liberalism a different form of professionalism is emerging, embodying a range of different journalistic values:

These have frequently involved an appeal to more quantitative techniques for knowing, and claiming to represent, a measured public. Here, we may include increasingly sophisticated audience and demographic surveys, ratings and circulation measurement, practices of public opinion polling and various forms of feedback and accountability mechanisms that seek to demonstrate, and act upon, a more detailed knowledge of ‘actual’ publics … Such transformations, are, however, not best understood as an abandonment of professional concerns to represent the public. (Nolan, 2009, pp. 666–667)
Rather, these professional concerns now draw on new forms of marketing expertise, allowing claims of greater responsiveness than ever to ‘what the public wants’ and a corresponding ability to represent it. The case being made here is that these different forms of professionalism can account for the gulf that exists between *The Age* in its print form and *The Age Online*.

Thus *The Age* newspaper and *The Age Online* find themselves working to different measures of professionalism. This is heightened by a structural divide between the two newsrooms, which ensures that the practice of journalism in each case is governed by a clearly distinct set of norms and practices. Further, it means that each is seeking to claim their authority over different areas of journalistic jurisdiction. The print version of *The Age* is seeking its authority via the jurisdiction of traditional journalism and its public service remit, while *The Age Online* is seeking its authority via the jurisdiction of a new sort of professionalism online, one that is more attuned to market populism brought about by the changing political-economic environment, as I evidence in the following chapter. The resulting difference in the content found in each version leads to tensions between the two newsrooms and concerns over the future of ‘quality’ journalism, given the downturn facing the print product and the growing online audience.
A return to an older version of professionalism does not represent an easy way forward for a news product such as *The Age*. While *Crikey* has demonstrated its ability to navigate this field, it has also come up against the inherent complexity of this position. Whether it proves sustainable or not remains to be seen. However, with an eventual merging of the print and online newsrooms likely at *The Age*, it is more probable that the print *Age* will be increasingly governed by the new standards of professionalism that govern its online arm. A disavowal of these values would be feasible if *The Age* were to move to present itself as a less ‘professional’ but more authentic form of news, as found in some examples of public or civic journalism in the US (Bratich, 2008). However, *Crikey* has demonstrated the reluctance with which even an independent publication is able to dissociate itself with notions of professionalism. In the following chapter I outline the way in which *The Age Online* is reshaping its relationship with its audience in ways that are suggestive of its changing professional status – one that is more attuned to market populism than to older notions of a fourth estate.

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36 The implementation of an integration strategy was among former Fairfax Media CEO Brian McCarthy’s recommendations in the strategic plan he released shortly before his resignation (presumably a result of an “underwhelming” ‘vision’ for the company’s future) (Bartholomeusz, 2010b).
Chapter Five:

The Changing News Audience
Introduction

I begin this chapter by outlining some of the more recent shifts in the way in which the relationship between audiences and media has been understood, before considering in more detail the relationship between media and temporal and spatial identities. In particular, I outline the significant work of Benedict Anderson (1991) in mapping out the way in which media, and particularly newspapers, have constituted for audiences a sense of shared ‘nation-ness’, as part of an ‘imagined community’. With changes in media come changes in the organisation of audiences around temporal demands and routines. But what remains the same is that media routinely organise audiences. They also assemble audiences, to bring into being particular subjectivities according to particular (and diverse) political objectives. I draw on the work of Paul Langley (2008) and Melissa Gregg (2008) to demonstrate the way in which various (often mundane) media work as cultural technologies, productive of specific subjectivities. Through the analysis of an advertisement for The Age Online, I demonstrate the way in which this publication works to assemble its audience in order to produce a particular subjectivity, amenable to the demands of the online environment and the conditions of the ‘information economy’.

One expectation in the online environment is for increased interactivity between producers and consumers of news (and other) content. However, in the case of many online news publications, interactivity is held more as an ideal
than an accepted practice. I argue that it is an attachment to journalism’s
traditional liberal role that inhibits the adoption of interactive options in
general and in the two case studies – and particularly at *Crikey* – where this
attachment is most ardently demonstrated. However, a consideration of
interactivity as a break with ‘traditional’ journalistic practices limits the analysis
of its historical operation. Ramon Lobato, Julian Thomas and Dan Hunter
(2010) provide a more constructive way of considering interactivity, by
positioning ‘user generated practices’ – a term that encompasses many of the
practices that fall within the definition of ‘interactivity’ – within the field of the
informal economy. Considering interactive activities as part of the informal
economy places them on a (historically changing) spectrum between the formal
and informal economies, shaped by a range of social, political and economic
factors.

This conceptualisation of changing producer-consumer relations also
encourages attention to the changing social and economic conditions in which
they operate. Nigel Thrift (2005, 2006) argues that in the current economic
environment, the relationship between producers and consumers is being
reconfigured by a sped-up temporality, a “fine-grained approximation of time”
(2005, p. 131) and the production of ‘fast subjects’ that can perform – creatively
– within this temporal environment. I argue that this new producer-consumer
relationship can be demonstrated by the incident that saw *Age* columnist
Catherine Deveny sacked after a flood of negative readers’ comments in
response to her comments on social networking site Twitter. This incident also brings to the fore the prominence of market populism in all areas of business – including the practice of journalism. I draw on the work of Thomas Frank (2001) to demonstrate the way in which market populist rhetoric is transforming the practice of journalism, making it more responsive to the demands of the audience, as the Deveny example so clearly illustrates.

A form of market populism also informs the operation of ‘social network markets’ – the feature that separates the ‘creative’ from other industries, according to creative industries scholars (Potts, et al., 2008). Thus in the final section of the chapter, I take what might at first appear a considerable detour through the landscape of the creative industries scholarship and debates, because beyond the description it provides of the industries within which journalism (and its practices and education and training) sits, it is also performative, in the sense that its arguments help to constitute and bring into being the ‘creative industries’ – and thus the kind of creative intellectual work of future styles of journalism – that it seeks to map. I finish this chapter by making some comments about what the creative industries research and policy agenda might mean for the continuing development of journalism – and in particular, its relationship to citizenship.
Conceptualising ‘the audience’

The interaction between various media and their audience(s) has long been a concern in media, cultural and communication studies. Indeed, the term ‘audience’ has itself become contested in the era of digital media, in which audiences are enabled to engage in more active ways with both texts and producers. Leah A. Lievrouw and Sonia Livingstone (2006) reject the term ‘audience’ and its increasingly common alternative ‘users’ to describe the people who engage with the internet, preferring that unembellished word itself – ‘people’. They argue that ‘audience’ is too limited a term to describe the wide range of activities that people engage in online, while the term ‘users’ is too broad and instrumental, and opens up the unhelpful contrasting category of ‘nonusers’. Rather, they favour the neutral term ‘people’ for the way in which it addresses audiences as both individuals and members of a collective group, and “puts people’s agency and action at the centre of new media studies, rather than the labels or categories we apply to them or the devices they use” (p. 8).

Pertti Alasuutari (1999) traces the way in which audience studies have shifted their focus from concerns with the ‘message’ of the media text to an ethnographic concern with the interpretive practices of audiences themselves, and more recently, to a concern with the way in which audiences are constructed. This more recent constructionist turn signals that audiences are not homogenous masses waiting to be known and measured, but are formed through a range of constitutive practices. For instance, Schudson (2003) argues
that audiences are not pre-existing entities but are produced in part by the institutional practices of the media: “the media organize not just information, but audiences. They legitimize not just events and the sources that report them, but also readers and viewers” (p. 31).

Similarly, Antoine Hennion and Cecile Meadel (1986) outline the way in which media and their audiences “reciprocally construct one another” (p. 281). In their study of music programming at French radio station RTL in the mid-1980s, Hennion and Meadel illustrate the way in which, through processes of music selection, scheduling, and technologies for ‘knowing’ the audience, the radio station and its audience are mutually constructed. They demonstrate that the RTL audience is brought into being through a range of specific techniques and processes, such as a “series of mediators, representatives, systems of measurement and witnesses by means of which the professionals, in reality, make the audience appear and respond” (p. 298). This does not mean that the audience is an entity that can be mysteriously conjured into existence, but rather, that it is only knowable through quite specific interventions and mediations: “the public doesn’t exist anywhere except in that series of reciprocal and recurrent mediations which make it appear at specific places, in specific forms, through authorized representatives and negotiated representations” (p. 300).
**Time, space, place and news**

One particularly notable way in which media socially organise audiences is in relation to spatial and temporal identities. The work of Anderson (1991) has been seminal in illustrating the constitutive relationship between communication artefacts and notions of time and space. In his study of the constitution of nations as ‘imagined communities’, Anderson outlines the way in which the newspaper and the novel work as cultural technologies, constituting for their readers a sense of ‘nation-ness’, enabling them to feel a shared national identity with an anonymous, geographically dispersed but territorially bounded population. This came about, firstly, through a changed conception of time, allowing for the first time an understanding of the idea of simultaneity. With this it becomes possible to grasp the concept of ‘meanwhile’ – a narrative technique that shapes the organisation of time within the novel and the newspaper. This transformed conception of temporality makes possible a changed spatiality, allowing the nation to be brought into being. Anderson suggests that “the idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogenous, empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which is also conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history” (p. 26).

These changed notions of time and space inform the conventions of the novel and the newspaper, which in turn constitute for their readers particular spatial and temporal relationships and identities. Anderson describes the
“essential literary convention of the newspaper” (p. 33) as the physical juxtaposition of otherwise unconnected events, so that a story about Soviet dissidents is positioned alongside an account of a coup in Iraq on the same page of the newspaper. Benedict argues that, for the reader, their linkage is imagined, achievable through the use of two specific techniques. First, the “calendrical coincidence” that sees the otherwise unrelated stories appearing under the newspaper masthead on the same day, grouped together by a sense of universal time (p. 33). In this way, “the date at the top of the newspaper, the single most important emblem on it, provides the essential connection – the steady onward clocking of homogenous, empty time. Within this time, ‘the world’ ambles steadily ahead” (p. 33).

Second, it is the newspaper’s mirroring of the novel, and its success on a mass scale – its “ephemeral popularity” – that allows for the “extraordinary mass ceremony: the almost precisely simultaneous consumption (‘imagining’) of the newspaper-as-fiction” (p. 35). This ‘ceremony’ allows for a sense of shared experience between otherwise anonymous members of the nation-space, brought into relation through the act of consuming the news. Thus “the newspaper reader, observing exact replicas of his own paper being consumed by his subway, barbershop, or residential neighbours, is continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life” (pp. 35–36). Along with the horizontal anonymity of ‘nation-ness’, Michael Schudson (2003)
argues that newspapers give readers a sense of democratic participation, due to
the sense of public inclusion that imbues the practice of shared reading:

That you and I read the same front page or see the same television news
as do the president of the United States and the chairperson of IBM is
empowering; the impression it promotes of equality and commonality,
illusion though it is, sustains a hope of democratic life. (pp. 31–32)

As Schudson demonstrates, the spatial and temporal organisation of
anonymous, dispersed, but geographically bounded individuals as an audience
can bring about their social organisation in other ways. The nation thus
becomes a space that can be organised and shaped into being around a range
of changing objectives across time, through such communication technologies
as the newspaper.

Colin Mercer (1992) draws on Anderson’s work to examine the role of
the newspaper as *habitus* during the 1988 Australian bicentenary. Mercer argues
that newspapers “know about the quotidian” (p. 26). They are concerned with
the “banal and prosaic qualities which, as any traveller knows, are just those
that define this culture rather than that” (p. 26). They tell us about a place, a
nation. But more than that they are a “mannering technology”, a site of the
“rituals, daily practices, techniques, institutions, manners and customs which
enable the nation to be thinkable, inhabitable, communicable and thereby
governable” (p. 27). The newspaper is a “technology of affiliation” operating as a site of national learning, “a daily regular form of reading and training in knowing where you are and how to best do things there” (p. 31). A variety of techniques on the part of both the producers and the consumers of the newspaper achieve this work of “affiliation”. Journalistic practices such as the use of ‘snapshots’ of places at particular times, the representation of different groups of people, the correspondent as a figure who can “lay claim to certain powers of ethico-moral reconciliation and persuasion designed to be exemplary for publics and populations” (p. 35), and similarly, the coverage of lifestyle issues, work together with techniques of reading and imagining on the part of the reader to create in the newspaper a relationship between time – the daily – and space – the bounded territory – to constitute a sense of nation-ness to its readers.

The connection between news and time predates many of the things we associate with news today – written language, print technology, the newspaper, and the understanding of measured, clocked time. In fact, for as long as there has been such a thing that could be identified – even retrospectively – as news, it has been linked, somehow, to time. In his work on the history of news, Mitchell Stephens (2007) demonstrates that even for pre-literate cultures the value of news has long rested in its timeliness – not in the sense of contemporary news values, but in relation to ideas of physical proximity, impending threats, and natural temporal cycles such as the seasons. He writes
of the Rwala Bedouins who sought news of fertile grazing grounds, and so would send a scout to collect a patch of grass from surrounding fields, its colour and vigour speaking of the fertility of local pastures. This patch of grass – the object itself – is what constituted the news for the Bedouins; it was the newspaper of its time. But it was not only the ‘news product’ (the grass), but also the time of the telling that was important: “had those Bedouin scouts brought back clumps of brown grass to show that a pasture had been fertile a month ago, it would not have been newsworthy – timeliness was all important” (p. 26).

While time for the Rwala Bedouins may have been measured in the colour of grass or the passage of the sun, the invention and use of the clock revolutionised the extent to which people were able to ‘know’ the time. The widespread adoption of a standard, clocked, measured time meant that knowing the time – exactly – became not only a matter for people of power, but also a personal standard, a matter for the self. Graeme Davison (1993) argues that it was through the knowledge of and ability to measure time across the personal, domestic, local and national spheres that time became something to be kept, saved, and adhered to. The clock and its rhythms permeated the social and industrial lives of Australians, “as personal habits of time-thrift became the standard of public life” (p. 3). Time, as something to be managed, has since informed the temporal organisation of media and its audiences. For instance, Lesley Johnson (1981) outlines the way in which radio broadcasters
developed regularity in their programming, and “set out to establish a corresponding regularity of listening habits in their audiences” (p. 169). In this way, radio programs were developed in relation to the routines and schedules of a woman’s daily life inside the home, while at the same time attempting to regulate these very routines around the new patterns of the radio schedule.

Similarly, John Ellis (1991) writes that broadcast television is a “profoundly domestic phenomenon” (p. 113), and its temporal organisation is made to work within this domestic setting. Organisational techniques such as the use of segments, particular forms of narration, the series and serial format, and the use of regular, repetitive scheduling organise television in relation to viewer’s lives, but also allow audiences to organise themselves in relation to television.

In light of contemporary developments in communication technologies and the consumption of news, Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel (2007) argue that “the internet has begun to disassociate journalism from geography” (p. 29). Indeed, it is important to ask whether something happens to the “mass ceremony” of newspaper consumption when the newspaper can be read online, at any time and in any number of places around the world, rather than at the breakfast table or on the morning train. Certainly our consumption of news is changing, and it follows that this will affect our spatial and temporal relationships and identities. But David Morley (2003) suggests that, contrary to claims that the internet is breaking down barriers of time and space, there is a “continuing desire to reterritorialize the uncertainty of location inherent in
online worlds” (p. 440). This is perhaps best illustrated by the persistence of the question, ‘Where are you?’ – whether addressed to strangers in internet chat rooms or to family members in mobile phone conversations. Beyond the geographical located-ness of media use, Morley reminds us that media cannot be removed from the materiality of its development and operation:

For all their wonders, these technologies are only as good as the material, social and institutional structures in which they are embedded, from the reliability of the local phone lines to the electricity supply, to the efficiency of the relevant bureaucracy. (p. 441)

Thus rather than removing the constraints of temporality and spatiality, new media are just as linked to physical and material bounds as their older counterparts. Moreover, the way in which we use space online can tend to mirror our use of physical spaces. While ‘virtual’ space is often thought of as open and unbounded, Morley suggests that in reality it often becomes a space of “withdrawal into closed communities of the ‘like-minded’” (p. 441).

But while new technologies remain anchored by the materiality of their development and operation, they are still able to shape our temporal and spatial relationships and experiences in new ways. Tracing the way in which the television became a domesticated technology – moving from a stranger in the home to gaining admission to the more intimate domestic spaces of the
kitchen and bedroom – Morley suggests that a similar pattern can be traced in
the domestication of digital media technologies. However, in the case of
personal and miniaturised forms of technology, such as smartphones, netbooks
and tablet devices, these “might more properly be conceptualized as ‘body
parts’” (p. 444). These devices become extensions of the body, highly
personalised, and in the case of mobile phones, the virtual address of its owner,
as the use of landlines is increasingly phased out. Now, Morley suggests, family
relationships are increasingly mediated by technology, with “busy, middle-class
‘dual career’ families” using email and mobile phones to negotiate parenting,
while these “multiscreen household[s]” are increasingly fragmented (pp. 447–
448). What this signifies, suggests Morley, is not a domestication of these new
technologies, but rather the remaking of domestic spaces around technology so
that “the technologies are no longer merely supplementary to, but constitutive
of, what the home itself now is” (p. 450).

Media and audiences then are bound up in a complex relationship of
mutual construction and constitution. Media can constitute for their audiences
a range of temporal and spatial identities, as well as, as Morely suggests,
affective relationships and identities. In the following section I extend upon the
approach outlined here to demonstrate the way in which audiences are not just
organised, but assembled in order to produce particular subjectivities for specific
political objectives. To illustrate, I consider Paul Langley’s (2008) work on the
way in which audiences of a particular demographic in the US are assembled
as investors, as well as Melissa Gregg’s (2008) study of the way in which female professionals are assembled as flexible workers in the new economy. I build upon these examples through the analysis of an advertisement for *The Age Online*, to demonstrate the way in which this particular audience has been assembled in order to instil a particular subjectivity.

**Assembling the audience**

Langley (2008) outlines the way in which a range of communicative artefacts and techniques has worked to assemble a particular mode of subjectivity in the contemporary US: the ‘everyday investor’. Langley describes the way in which these artefacts, such as brochures, websites, seminars and ‘how to’ books on financial products and decisions, work to inculcate a changed and specific form of financial sensibility among ‘ordinary’ US citizens. Langley traces these changes alongside a transformed perception of Wall Street – once a site of deep suspicion for those who inhabited the rhetorically juxtaposed ‘Main Street’ of the ‘ordinary citizen’ – to a site of emancipation, the source of the ‘democratization of finance’ and the ‘shareholder nation’. While many have positioned these changes as occurring at the level of global finance, Langley seeks their origin at the level of changes in the everyday savings and borrowing practices of ‘everyday’ Americans.
Langley argues that these changes have been wrought by a range of governmental programs concerned with “the making of everyday investor subjects” (p. 90) in the US. What is of interest here is the way in which Langley describes the production of this changed subjectivity as the result of a process of assembly:

The processes of change that feed the predominance of investment as a form of everyday saving also entail the assembly of a neo-liberal subjectivity, the calling up subjects who make sense of investment in relation to their own security and freedom. (p. 90 – emphasis added)

Thus the changed subjects of everyday finance are assembled through a complex and sophisticated combination of governmental objectives, expressed through a range of often mundane communicative artefacts and techniques, such as the educational government pension guide produced by the US Department of Labor, exhorting its subjects to save and invest responsibly for a comfortable and secure future. Here, I want to compare Langley’s illustration of the assembly of the investor subject to Gregg’s (2008) discussion of the

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37 Langley is using the broad, Foucauldian sense of government here, as outlined in Chapter Three.

38 While the terms ‘governmental programs’ and ‘governmental objectives’ can suggest unified objectives and action in the more traditional sense of the term ‘government’, Langley indicates that this is not often the case. Government, in the broad Foucauldian sense used here, can entail the production of contradictory subjectivities and can be met with resistance. As Langley outlines, “the assembly of everyday investor subjects is proceeding in a highly problematic and contradictory manner” (p. 103) – in part because of the way in which the practices of investment are at odds with the practices required of consumer-subjects, “who express and communicate their freedom, aspirations and individuality through commodity ownership and acts of consumer choice” (p. 110), and further, because of the way in which the risky practices investor-subjects are required to engage with in order to attain a ‘stable’ future are in no way guaranteed to produce the promised outcome. Thus such government is only ever piecemeal and fragmented, and often contradictory in the behaviours and aspirations it demands of its subjects.
production of a particular type of neoliberal subjectivity in Australian female workers through the representation of ‘flexibility’ in advertisements for the digital products that typify the information economy⁴. I consider these two examples in some detail in order to demonstrate the way in which advertisements can be seen as part of the broader project of subject assembly.

Gregg outlines the way in which advertisements for ICT hardware and software work to normalise a particular female subjectivity, one in which women’s preference for flexible (‘creative’⁴) work is positioned as natural, based on their assumed position as the primary family caregiver. The advertisements Gregg analyses represent professional women in positions suggestive of flexible labour practices, so as to suggest that a preference for these conditions is natural and desirable. For instance, in an advertisement for a Sony Vaio wireless laptop, Gregg describes an attractive female worker defiantly holding a laptop while wearing a bikini she has apparently fashioned out of her pinstriped suit, the remnants of which are scattered on the floor around her. Gregg argues that the slogan, “work where you want”, underscores the sort of prescribed flexibility normalised by the demands of the neoliberal information economy, in which the choice becomes not whether to work, but rather, where and when you work:

³⁹ This example resonates also with the way in which I will outline the politics of the creative industries later in this chapter.
In light of previous (failed) visions of labour solidarity, the worker is asked to recognise and accept his or her mobility as the only form of freedom now possible or desirable. The freedom to work anywhere is the trade-off for constant contactability and the ever-present possibility, if not the outright expectation, of work … In all these examples, the dominant utopian image is no longer freedom from work but freedom to work, albeit at times and in locations that are personally convenient.

(Gregg, 2008, p. 290)

Through her analysis of advertisements, Gregg is illustrating the assembly of a particular form of female subjectivity in which such advertisements are just one communicative element of a much broader governmental program to normalise particular types of choices around (female) work practices. Like the advertisements Gregg considers, Langley’s pension brochures contribute to the assembly of a particular but different form of individual subjectivity. What I want to suggest is that communicative artefacts, and specifically advertisements, are among a range of techniques that work to assemble particular subjectivities in relation to specific political objectives. From this position it is possible to consider the way in which online news – and The Age Online in particular – assembles a particular sort of subjectivity through one of its advertisements.

In one advertisement (see Image 6) for The Age Online, an attractive young woman sits at her desk in an ambiguous urban building. It could be an
inner-city office, given the scene of urban buildings outside her window. But equally, it could be an inner-city residence, where she is working from home, or alternatively at leisure. The woman’s desk is sparse, housing only a stylish table lamp – and a laptop computer – which, significantly, is the distinctive tool of ‘creative’ workers, the Apple Mac40. Across her desk, in miniature form, play out a number of dramatic scenes, making literal the campaign’s tagline: “news straight to your desktop”. A figurine of a man stands head in hands next to an upturned car; nearby a number of figures are fleeing from the scene; a helicopter hovers above, and in the background is a police car and a number of figures clustered together, one seemingly under arrest. Behind this tableau sits the young woman, impeccably groomed, hair flowing over her shoulders, and in a fitted dress with a plunging neckline. The woman’s gaze is not directed at the scene playing out on her desk, but rather, directly at the camera and thus at the audience. Her expression is blank, almost provocatively so.

40 While the laptop’s logo is not shown in the print version, the advertisement runs in conjunction with a MacBook Pro laptop giveaway.
The Age Online Advertisement

The advertisement can be read as an address to a young, professional, and predominantly female audience who are increasingly the focus of advertising and marketing efforts across a range of media forms. While it was the business man who was traditionally the primary audience of the print newspaper, it is the female consumer, who, as Gregg demonstrates, is increasingly found in work, family and leisure environments that demands flexibility – the type that is illustrated in this example by the prospect of ‘catching up on the news’ from the work (or home) desk. This woman, like the ones in Gregg’s analyses, occupies a space made intentionally ambiguous – is it home, or office, or home office? – her appearance representing her ability to
move with ease between the spaces and demands of work and leisure. The woman in the advertisement is not dressed in traditional work attire, and her level of grooming indicates that her attendance to her professional life has not detracted from her ability to maintain her physical appearance. Notably, the woman in this advertisement sits calmly and at ease. For her, the task of consuming the news is not a chore. It is not work – but nor is it leisure. Rather, it is integrated seamlessly into her ‘everyday life’ – as much a part of her work routine as it is those leisure activities for which we can assume her attractive outfit is for.

For the woman in this advertisement, time spent consuming online news does not impinge upon her professional and social personae. Rather, this task heightens her ability to perform these social roles. It is the consumption of this news upon which the woman’s professional status and desirable social life – marked out by her clothing and appearance – rests. Further, there are no paper products on the woman’s desk, only a laptop – the symbol of her fully digital (work) life. The absence of papers – newspapers included – signifies that her consumption of news online is an entirely separate task to the consumption of print news. The occasion of the advertisement’s appearance – both within the pages of The Age itself, as well as on inner-city billboards and bus stops – suggests that it is targeted at a highly mobile, urban audience for whom The Age Online offers a solution to their particular digital knowledge requirements. While the print newspaper might remain a product for the home, before work, or over
coffee on a Saturday morning, the online version is a product for creative professionals updating their knowledge throughout the day, whether from the comfort of their desk, at home, or while in transit – providing the sort of convenience they have become accustomed to in their largely digital lives and providing them with the sort of knowledge they require to adequately perform as informed workers and (highly social) members of society.

From this advertisement it is possible to infer some of the ways in which The Age Online assembles its audience. The audience addressed by this advertisement is a creative knowledge worker, with a need to remain constantly informed. They may already be a newspaper reader, but one for whom the digital medium offers heightened convenience and relevance. They are, or desire to be, Mac-users – or indeed, The Age Online intends them to be so, by attaching this ad to a competition to win one of the laptops it features. Further, the audience identifies with this woman – either because they too are young, attractive, professional females, or because they (whether for reasons of identification or attraction) find her alluring. The likely and intended audience is increasingly female professionals who, for the reasons outlined by Gregg, require flexibility, and for whom reading the news is a part of their professional and social identity, one which can now be ‘squeezed’ into their day through the convenience of the digital product.
What this advertisement also communicates is the notion that digital readership does not eliminate the need for print readership, but rather that it can provide a supplement, creating a new need for a vigilant yet passive attention to the news throughout the day rather than at daily intervals.

However, the passivity of the woman in this advertisement is also problematic because it is at odds with the expectations of many audiences in the digital realm for whom some level of interaction with news content and producers – if not the news-making process itself – is becoming the norm. As I outline in the following section, it is also at odds with the way in which *The Age Online* is shaping its digital product in relation to these audience demands and expectations. In the following section I outline some key issues in discussions of interactivity – in general, and as it relates to news – before outlining the way in which, despite its persistence as a rhetoric, is rarely adopted in practice at online news sites.

**Interactivity: in theory and in practice**

In their seminal discussion at the time of the internet’s emergence as a ‘serious’ field of study, Newhagen and Rafaeli (1996) name interactivity as a defining characteristic of the medium, inherent in its architecture, central to human communication more generally, and the property that could set the internet apart from traditional media. This is symptomatic of the way in which interactivity is discussed as a defining characteristic of the internet, yet it is difficult to find a uniform definition of the term. Pavlik and McIntosh (2004)
present a three-part definition of interactivity as: first, a dialogue that occurs between a human and a computer program; second, this dialogue occurs simultaneously or close to it; and third, the audience has some measure of control over the media they see and the order they see it – whether via a personalisation or a hyperlink. These themes of control and personalisation recur in many discussions of the topic. For instance, Downes and McMillan (2000) define interactivity as a “multi-dimensional construct” which enables more active and flexible communication and a greater sense of control, responsiveness and exchange for the user (pp. 172–173). The authors also note the prominence of the idea of ‘feedback’ – or the extent to which the roles of sender and receiver become interchangeable – which is gaining new resonance with the rise of Web 2.0 applications. Similarly, Massey and Levy (1999) outline their markers of interactivity, which include the range and diversity of content available to the reader; the potential for user responsiveness; the ease with which the user can add information to the system; the extent to which the site offers itself as a digital conduit for synchronous one-to-one interpersonal communication between readers; and the immediacy of content – that is, the speed with which the online newspaper can report on events.

For Deuze (2003), “interactivity can be seen as a broadly defined concept with many implications for mediated communication of all kinds, and for journalism in particular” (p. 214), recognising that interactive communication is not exclusive to the internet. However, Deuze is
differentiating his definition of interactivity in this context from pre-web forms to encompass “a different mode of addressing the news audience: as active instead of passive media consumers” (Pavlik as cited in Deuze, 2003, p. 213). He follows Massey and Levy’s definition of interactivity outlined above, translating their elements of interactivity into his own definition particular to online news. Thus he outlines three types of interactivity: the first is navigational interactivity, for example, the ability to scroll on a web page, and the use of back buttons; the second is functional interactivity, which allows some user participation through email links and comment sections; and the third is adaptive interactivity, in which “every action of the user has consequences for the content of the site” – and the site is fully adaptable and customisable by the user (p. 214). Deuze argues that mainstream news sites, like The Age Online, with their focus on content and their history of hierarchical relations with audiences, generally offer only navigational interactivity, while interactivity increases as more emphasis is placed on the role of the user – generally at news sites outside of the mainstream, where Crikey is often positioned.

Leopoldina Fortunati (2009) has developed an index of features, including: reachability, or the ability to easily ‘reach’ journalists by a range of contact methods; interaction with users, whether through letters, comments, or forums; the discussion of articles, whether in the form of polls, requests to comment, or the possibility for email response; interactivity of content, that is,
the ability for user personalisation; multimediality in articles through audio, video and images; and finally, the use of hyperlinks (p. 73). Or, to characterise these as features, interactivity may take the form of polls, links, comments, forums, emails, live chat, and personalisable options.

Boczkowski (2004b) defines interactivity as “the use of many-to-many and one-to-one communication spaces such as forums, chat rooms, and user-authored sites, in addition to the one-to-many mode of traditional media” (p. 199) – indicating the sorts of spaces and features that news sites might incorporate in order to heighten interaction between users and producers. More simply, Lievrouw and Livingstone (2006) define interactivity as “the selectivity and reach that media technologies afford users in their choices of information sources and interactions with other people” (p. 7), a definition which is useful for the way in which it positions interactivity as an affordance, but not necessarily an affordance that will be adopted (at least not to its fullest). Indeed, Fortunati (2009) argues that of all the traditional media, the newspaper is the least endowed with interactive capabilities, so it is not surprising that its migration online has been slow to make use of its interactive potential. Further, she echoes Lievrouw and Livingstone to argue that “it does not happen that people use an invention because it exists” (p. 81), challenging the technologically determinist notion that because a medium has a range of interactive possibilities, they should necessarily be exploited to their fullest. In this way, the print newspaper has never been as interactive as radio and
television, particularly since the use of telephony, and now digital media, to further engage audiences. This is not to say that newspapers themselves are lacking interactive potential. For instance, Fortunati cites the example of a 1990 Italian publication, *La Pubblicazione*, which was written entirely by ‘users’, but which only lasted a few months. It is not the technical existence of interactivity that is central to an understanding of online news then, but the distinction between interactive potential and actual interactivity.

Sophia Kaitatzi-Whitlock (2008) makes a similar distinction in developing her typology of interaction. She outlines three levels of interaction that coincide with the European Convention on Human Rights’ principle of Freedom of Information, as well as the extension of communicative abilities through the development of Web 2.0 potentials. She divides her typology into three levels: first, the right and ability to search and retrieve information from all available sources; second, the right and ability to send, circulate and transmit information. She notes that with the extension of Web 2.0 technology to increasing numbers of people, “for the first time in history, all communication rights are technically operable, as they are enabled by this new integrated network” (p. 4). The third and most advanced level of interactivity comes with the increasing ability for people to interact globally, enabling “forms of empowerment and of emancipation from the bounds of place” (p. 4). Kaitatzi-Whitlock argues that the web has the potential to enable great forms of interactivity because it allows for continual feedback cycles, as can be seen in
forms of open-source environments, like those of Wikipedia or software development.

Kaitatzi-Whitlock further develops her typology through the use of oppositional couplets (p. 5) to demonstrate the ways in which the internet offers a deeper and richer form of interactivity than traditional media. The table below demonstrates these couplets:

Table 2
Kaitatzi-Whitlock’s oppositional couplets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditional media</th>
<th>Networked media</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-mediated</td>
<td>Mediated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolic</td>
<td>Practical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bi-directional</td>
<td>Multi-directional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymmetric</td>
<td>Symmetric/partly symmetric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple</td>
<td>Complex [hybrid, fluidly dynamic]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrinsic [to the medium]</td>
<td>Extrinsic [adjunct to the medium]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From this we can gather that interactivity online in a Web 2.0 environment is: always mediated by technology; practical, and material, “achieving concrete practical results: telework and material transactions, rather than, just exchange of immaterial symbolic contents” (p. 5); multi-directional, with possibilities for sharing and collaboration, rather than bi-directional; more symmetrical than in
traditional media, insofar as technical and socio-economic constraints will allow; complex in the way in which collaboration and sharing, or open feedback loops allow for hybrid and dynamic use and re-use of information; and extrinsic in that it occurs outside of the infrastructure of the communicative system itself, and is rather facilitated by external networks enabled by telecommunications and so on.

But Kaitatzi-Whitlock bases her typology of interactivity on a set of binary opposites, at odds with her earlier recognition of the varying levels of interaction that can be adopted in the current technological environment. Thus her couplets are better understood as existing on a continuum of interactive features that may or may not be adopted in practice. While digital media might offer more potential by way of its affordances for interactivity, this is no guarantee that it will necessarily offer an interactive experience. Interactivity certainly requires the dialogue between the audience and a computer program that Pavlik and McIntosh put forward, but in the intervening years has developed to also include the audience talking to the producer as well as the audience talking to the audience, and extending to encompass the audience *becoming* the producer through actual and open feedback loops. Interactivity includes the navigational, functional and adaptive characteristics Deuze outlines, and encompasses the hyperlinks, comment functions, forums, and polls that are outlined by Boczkowksi and Fortunati. But Kaitatzi-Whitlock’s oppositional couplets demonstrate the way in which interactivity in digital
networked media exists in relation to traditional media, and in this way it is best assessed as part of a historical spectrum rather than by set characteristics that may soon be superseded and reformulated as technology progresses. Because, despite exhibiting the affordances for many interactive tools, empirical research often finds these to be absent from actual examples of online news. Fortunati reminds us that the affordance for a particular feature does not automatically equate to its existence; in the following sections I consider what sorts of factors might operate as constraints on the adoption of interactive features at online news sites.

Domingo (2008) argues that interactivity has always been “at the epicenter of online journalism myths” (p. 286). But why might news sites not always utilise the interactive affordances of the web environment? Newhagen and Rafaeli (1996) argue that the affordances of internet communication technologies are often hidden from the user, which can account for the tendency to “dump text into a computer network and call it an ‘electronic newspaper’”, obscuring the ways in which this content might be made more interactive, and presenting a site as ‘closed’ in its possibilities. Massey and Levy (1999) argue that online newspapers are only as interactive as the level of funding will allow, suggesting that some more fruitful indicators of interactive online journalism may be found in such cultural and political measures as freedom of the press, speech, or assembly, the size and technical skill of the newspaper’s staff, and the willingness of the owner to invest in interactive
features. Similarly, Chung (2007) found that the lack of interactivity on mainstream news sites may be linked to the number of readers, and that at smaller independent sites, interactivity was more likely to be defined in terms of exchange with the audience – because the smaller number of users made such interactivity more manageable. Issues of funding, readership, resources and independence can all be brought to bear on the adoption of interactive features at online news sites, and these will be considered through the case studies below. However, they are not the only factors that come into play.

Boczkowski (2004b) found that the ways in which interactive and multimedial options are adopted at online news sites were shaped by approaches to production within the newsroom, such as organisational structures, assumptions about the users, and work practices. So, for example, an online newsroom positioned closely alongside its print counterpart, perceived its users as possessing a limited level of technical skill. It thus maintained the gate-keeping role of traditional journalism as being central to the online news context by producing a site with low multimedia and low interactivity. On the other hand, a site with far less alignment with its print counterpart and a perception of its users as technologically savvy, produced a site with high levels of multimediality but low levels of interactivity because it was still attached to the gate-keeping role of journalism. While the newsroom that perceived of its users as possessing limited technological skills, but had very little attachment to its print counterpart, and was reconfiguring newsroom tasks
around alternatives to gatekeeping, produced a site with low levels of multimedia and high levels of interactivity. Thus in considering *The Age Online* and *Crikey*, the way in which each site positions itself in relation to the institution of journalism may prove influential in shaping the approach to interactive options in each case.

Sometimes the gap between perception and reality regarding the theoretical and practical adoption of interactivity can be found in the meaning attached to the terms used. Chung (2007) found that there is a tendency for journalists to conflate interactivity with the concepts of technological convergence or immediacy. In the words of the editor of OpinionJournal.com (in an interview with Chung): “The main thing about interactivity is immediacy … However, [interactivity] is not a word that I think of that much” (p. 51). The difference here is the way in which these two features work within existing professional practices in journalism. While immediacy (or the speed of news online) sits comfortably alongside pre-existing news values to do with timeliness, interactivity does not. Interactivity clashes with the norms and values of professional journalistic culture, and particularly, the traditional relationship between news producers and audiences. The adoption of interactivity would require for the journalist a “complete redefinition of working routines” (Domingo, 2008, p. 692). Despite this, the rhetoric of interactivity remains, which Domingo argues is a symptom of the high expectation of social change in the profession of journalism that came with the adoption of internet
technology. With the initial transition of news online, optimists envisaged the web as a space in which journalism could be realised anew without the problems that it was facing in its traditional forms. Positioned against the realities of a profession facing dwindling audiences, industrial pressures and renewed questions about its ethics, it was an appealing myth. But in practice, the facilitation of interactive features online is often seen as a distraction and hindrance to the actual practices of news making, and a “problem to be managed” (p. 698).

MacGregor (2007) made a similar finding in his study on the use of tracking data in the newsroom. While journalists keenly follow the success of stories as well as related geographical data about readers, they are unlikely to use this data to make immediate changes to their published work. Echoing the findings of Domingo, MacGregor argues that a key reason for a resistance to such data, which provides the potential for deep interaction between the audience and the journalist, is the deeply entrenched professional practice of news values. Tracking statistics is seen as less trustworthy than the abstract ‘feeling’ for news values that professional journalists earn and cultivate:

... to be perfectly frank, if I just wanted to chase what people on the internet wanted to click on, I would do stories about soft porn and football and nothing else. We are a news site so we have to be treated as
news and we have to cover stories which do not always have mass appeal.

(CNN journalist as cited in MacGregor, 2007, p. 291)

The professional prominence of news values in shaping responses to interactive opportunities resonates with Boczkowski’s claim that it is the way that a newsroom positions itself in relation to journalism and its associated practices that holds more sway than the ‘newness’ of the technology involved. It also reminds us that the cultural shifts within journalism that occur alongside broader political changes do not always entail a comfortable transition. The journalist’s rejection of the marketing expertise through which it is now possible to know the audience in new ways also operates as a form of political resistance. In this case, it represents a resistance to a new form of professionalism, increasingly positioned in relation to financial objectives that do not sit comfortably with older professional practices and knowledges. My task now is to consider the actual adoption of interactivity at The Age Online and Crikey in order to outline the extent to which these sorts of factors are impacting on the level of interactivity offered in the local online news environment.

**Interactivity at The Age Online and Crikey**

Interactivity has always been central to *Crikey*’s operation. Established in 2000 by ‘shareholder activist’ Stephen Mayne, the first weekly edition contained just six stories (Mayne, 2010). Since its establishment, *Crikey*, which now operates as both a substantial daily subscriber email and a website, has run
a combination of items by full-time staff, regular contributors, anonymous tip-offs, and longer contributions from interested or qualified readers. Thus the publication has always thrived on a lively and active relationship with its audience, and has cultivated a readership that is keenly interested and able to comment as amateur experts – or, in fact, often as legitimate experts in their field. While its tenuous financial situation – whether from legal threats or the shaky dot com market at the time of its inception – placed its owners in financial jeopardy a number of times (Day, 2001, 2010), it also enabled the growth of a strong ‘insider’ culture among its readers, allowing it to occupy a critical position much like the ABC television program Media Watch, which critiques and analyses the Australian media from within, with *Crikey* readers contributing tip-offs and articles about issues from the media, finance, politics and the arts.

With the sale of *Crikey* to Private Media Partners in 2005, which saw former Editor-in-Chief of *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Eric Beecher, take the helm as publisher, anonymous articles were no longer published, and *Crikey* began to build its status as a mainstream news source and align itself more clearly with traditional journalistic values (Hogan, 2005). Nonetheless, the strong relationship with the audience has remained. For example, a more classic letters section has remained throughout *Crikey*’s history – originally as a weekly section called ‘Yoursay’, now a daily section of the subscriber email known as ‘Comments, corrections, clarifications and c*ckups’ (Josey, 2010). While today
Crikey employs far more full-time staff and paid contributors than ever before, it still relies on its dynamic relationship with its readers to provide tip-offs and act as occasional contributors on expert or niche issues as they arise. It is this intimacy and responsiveness between readers and journalists as well as its ability to find contributors and sources among its readership outside of the domain of traditional journalism that has been part of Crikey’s success.

Eleven years since its inception, Crikey is now interactive in different ways. Key members of the Crikey staff are notably active on microblogging service Twitter. The (ten, or so) Crikey-affiliated Twitter accounts (see Brown, 2009 for a compilation of these) are used for a range of activities, from linking to daily stories, advertising competitions and exclusives, holding informal reader polls, drawing readers to the website, linking to interesting media content from outside sources, and largely, as a form of interaction with their readers and followers. Each story on the website is also accompanied by links to enable instant sharing through a range of Web 2.0 platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook, Digg, del.icio.us, Reddit and StumbleUpon, encouraging reader interaction with content beyond the bounds of the immediate experience of consumption.

41 Today, Crikey employs two full-time journalists, one Canberra correspondent, one investigative journalist, one cartoonist, two website journalists, one editor, one deputy editor, one production manager, one roving correspondent, one part-time sub-editor, one media writer, one TV writer, and about 30 semi-regular contributors, as well as fielding unsolicited material (S. Black, personal communication, 7 March 2011).
In May 2009, *Crikey* relaunched its website as a media portal, in addition to its usual function as an anchor for *Crikey* archives and point of entry for new subscribers. The newly configured website was described as “*Crikey, but now with extra source*”, positioning *Crikey* as more than a news producer, but also as “a point of view, a filter, a perspective, a way of seeing the world” ("The new *Crikey," 2009). It also signalled a move away from *Crikey* as a solely text-based medium, introducing a new focus on video and podcasts. The relaunch was successful in attracting a new, younger audience, but not in bringing in more revenue – which it makes from a combination of paid subscriptions and advertising across the site and daily email – and so with a new editor, Sophie Black, appointed in late 2009, the focus has shifted again to further building links from the website to the email (Simons, 2009c), where interaction is more limited.

*The Age Online* has a very different provenance to *Crikey*. While the latter is a web-only publication, *The Age Online* is the online version of print newspaper *The Age*, Melbourne’s only local broadsheet, traditionally positioned to the left of the Murdoch-owned *Herald Sun* tabloid. While *The Age Online* began with few more features than the ability to navigate via hyperlinks, it has recently relaunched its website with heightened interactive features. These include: greater prominence for comments on stories alongside encouragement to ‘join the conversation’, though not all stories are open for comment; a counter showing how many users are reading a particular story at a given time; links to
enable instant sharing on Twitter and Facebook; links to related coverage; the compilation of top stories within each news category; and a heightened video presence throughout the website. Online Editor-in-Chief Mike Van Niekerk wrote that the site had been reorganised to “give [readers] more choice and to present the big stories and features more quickly and effectively” (Van Niekerk, 2010).

However, beyond stories that are open to readers’ comments, interactivity is limited. Unlike *Crikey*, readers at *The Age* are not encouraged to become part of the news-making process if they have a tip-off or are interested in making a contribution in areas of their expertise. While *Crikey* fosters and thrives on such interaction, *The Age Online* only reaches out to readers in cases of dramatic breaking news, usually running readers’ photos as part of a compilation the next day (for an example, see "Heavy rain strikes Melbourne," 2010). Readers wanting to send feedback to *The Age Online* must fill in an anonymous comment box and hope for a reply. On the other hand, *The Age* Online has made use of Twitter, with a number of ‘official’ accounts linking back to the website to top stories and breaking news. While the official *Age* account ([http://twitter.com/TheAge](http://twitter.com/TheAge)) does not demonstrate interactivity per se, simply directing followers to stories in a one-way fashion, the accounts of some individual journalists demonstrate far more interaction with followers and
content online. But overall, *The Age Online* presents itself as a closed journalistic product, produced beyond the readers’ reach, with limited, internally controlled areas for audience interaction.

*The Age Online* and *Crikey* embody different histories and positions in the Australian media landscape. Simons argues that *Crikey* is significant “not only because it is Australia’s first commercial internet-only journalism service”, but also because it demonstrates the successful mix of paid and free content that other online news sources are keen to replicate (Simons, 2009b). In comparison, *The Age Online* (in combination with its print counterpart), represents an important alternative to the conservative Murdoch-owned press, and particularly the News Limited-owned, daily national broadsheet *The Australian*, which in recent years has “consciously positioned itself as the site for thought leadership in conservative politics in Australia” (Flew, 2008, p. 9).

However, in light of recent staff cuts and internal reshuffles at *The Age Online*’s parent company, Fairfax Media, *Crikey* has begun to position itself as the independent alternative to *The Age Online* – and mainstream news media more generally. In particular, *Crikey* publisher Eric Beecher argues that Fairfax is no longer interested in providing public-oriented journalism in Australia (“The axe

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42 See, for example, Jesse Hogan’s account ([http://twitter.com/jesse_hogan](http://twitter.com/jesse_hogan)), which he reports has been successful in facilitating exchanges with his audience (J. Hogan, personal communication, 10 August 2009).

43 While this comment is made by Simons in an article for *Crikey* itself, it is also underpinned by her standing as the convenor of journalism at Swinburne University of Technology and chair of the University’s Public Interest Journalism Foundation. These positions endow her with the credibility to comment on *Crikey* with neutrality, despite her ongoing connection with them (for example, her blog is housed on their site).
falls," 2008), the implication being that *Crikey* is interested, and offers a robust, independent and committed alternative.

With the increasing role of the audience and the decreasing prominence of the journalist as the site of knowledge and expertise in advanced liberal incarnations of journalistic culture, ‘traditional’ (liberal) journalism is left in an uncomfortable position. While *Crikey* is open to audience participation and contribution in a range of ways, *The Age Online* sets out clearly defined spaces for interaction within an otherwise closed system. While *The Age Online* has embodied the struggles of a large media organisation responding to the challenges of a changing media and business landscape by consolidating its operations and cutting journalists’ jobs, *Crikey* has moved beyond early financial pressure to position itself as the independent champion for the cause of quality journalism in Australia. But despite their different positions in the local media landscape, and their different responses to interactivity, both publications only allow audience interaction within clearly demarcated boundaries. However, while this analysis demonstrates that *Crikey* currently possesses more avenues for reader-journalist interactivity, I suggest that this might not always be the case.

Despite its unique characteristics, *Crikey* is more outwardly attached to liberal notions of journalism’s social role as its investment in current debates about the future of ‘public trust’ journalism in Australia demonstrates, and this investment could work to limit further development of interactivity. *The Age*
Online might not find itself so constrained, as evidenced by its recent heightened attendance to audience demands, as I outline in a latter section of this chapter through discussing the example of Catherine Deveny’s dismissal as an Age columnist in response to readers’ online comments. In instances such as this, interactivity is central to the contemporary development of online news because of its resonance with the economic politics of the times, and specifically, with forms of market populism that are taking on an increasingly widespread cultural significance. Is an attachment to journalism’s traditional liberal role more conceptually palatable if it means a rejection of market populism?

Ensuring a future for some of journalism’s ‘traditional’ characteristics is not as simple as proposing a return to the past as I argue in the conclusion of this chapter. So Crikey might find itself embracing more interactive options in the future in order to form a compatibility with the dominant contemporary, market-oriented, political-economic logic. The ability to encompass interactive options within a liberal conception of journalism is further problematised by definitions of interactivity that represent it as a decisive break from the past. In the following section I explain why Lobato et al.’s (2010) positioning of ‘user-generated content’ (UGC) as part of the informal economy provides a more constructive historical perspective for considering the changes occurring around interactive practices.
**Interactive practices as part of the informal economy**

Lobato et al. (2010) argue that UGC, a term that encompasses the audience activities of interactivity, as well as the implications for producers, is best understood not as a challenge to traditional economic activity, but rather as part of the informal economy. They argue that informal economic activity – “that which escapes the regulatory gaze of the state, occurring outside conventional forms of measurement, governance, and taxation” (p. 3) – is a constituent part of all but particularly advanced liberal economies. Rather than positioning informal economic activity, such as amateur content production in opposition to the formal economy, the authors suggest that these activities occur on a spectrum that ranges from the formal to the informal:

At one end of the spectrum are the consolidated and regulated media industries scrutinised in political-economic and media policy and analysis: entertainment conglomerates, satellite networks, publishing houses, public-service media, and so on. At the other end are innumerable small-scale, unmeasured and unevenly regulated media circuits which are barely captured in the statistics on industry output and trade and which rarely figure in media industry analysis. (pp. 3–4)

UGC can then appear at different points on this spectrum at different times of its history. This approach problematises accounts that position UGC as ‘disruptive’ to professional content production practices, but also allows for a
consideration of the relations between the formal and informal sectors of the economy.

For instance, Lobato et al. provide the example of domestic photography that has occupied different points on the formality spectrum across its history. Around the time of its development, photography was an expensive and specialised media form, usually taking place in the studio and thus within the formal economy. But with the introduction of personal cameras, photography became increasingly personal and also less formal, and continues to move in this direction with the proliferation of affordable digital cameras and camera phones, as well as the ability to cheaply and easily share images on the internet. However, the intersection of photography and the internet has also sparked a movement back towards formality: “websites such as Flickr and Picasa are making a previously private form of expression rather more public, and entangling the informality of amateur digital photography with the formality of corporate media in hitherto unprecedented ways” (p. 8).

Another example Lobato et al. provide, of a form of UGC that represents the interrelation of the formal and informal sectors of the economy, is the ‘letters to the editor’ section of the newspaper. They argue that despite their ‘amateur’ origins, letters to the editor must go through a formal, professional filter in order to be made ready for publication. The types of interactivity that have been discussed so far are in many cases extensions of this
sort of UGC. Interaction at *The Age Online* and at *Crikey* include letters to the editor, but also a more instant version in the form of readers’ comments, and at *Crikey*, readers’ incorporation into news production processes through the submission of occasional stories. Rather than being read as a threat to the traditional practices of journalism, the informality model of UGC outlined by Lobato et al. allows us to consider these interactive features as: firstly, occupying an historically changing position on a spectrum between the formal and informal economies; and secondly, particularly in the contemporary political-economic landscape, as increasingly being coopted into the formal economy. In the section below, I outline the way in which a range of recent economic and social changes is making this cooption more prevalent. In my later discussion of the creative industries framework, I also outline the way in which these interactive options can be positioned as measures of value in social network markets.

**Interactivity and changing producer-consumer relations**

Thrift (2006) argues that an increasing prevalence of UGC, and particularly, greater interactivity between consumers and producers, is linked to a number of precise political-economic and social changes. He argues that consumers and producers are increasingly being brought together in new configurations of time and space within sped-up processes of innovation. Thrift links interactivity to broader changes occurring within the field of business, in which, given a recent crisis of profits in Western capitalism, there is a new
emphasis on innovation and invention – and “this cultural model of economic change is, not surprisingly, based on the continuous interactivity of the media” (p. 282). It has also involved the “mobilization of the resource of forethought”; (p. 282 – original emphasis) in which non-cognitive processes are encouraged, adopted and integrated into the processes of innovation and commodity development, in order to produce “a certain anticipatory readiness about the world” (p. 286).

Thrift argues that central to these changed and intensified processes of capitalism is the reworking of production and consumption, “questioning both categories in the process, so leading to the perception of the commodity as consisting of an iterative process of experiment” (p. 288). In this reworking of innovation, the “locus of experimentation” is shifted onto the customers, so that their own capacity for innovation becomes integrated into the processes of design and creation (pp. 288–289). In order to maximise the opportunity for such exchanges, spaces are created to encourage the formation of user communities. While not all communities become innovators, Thrift argues that many become involved in ‘invention’ – in which the use of a product becomes “superseded by the pleasure of the activity itself” (p. 290), allowing consumers to become active in the process of creating value for the company:

Consumers have become involved in the production of communities around particular commodities which themselves generate value, by
fostering allegiance, by offering instant feedback and by providing active interventions in the commodity itself. (p. 290)

An example of one such community is the iPhone App Store, where a range of producers with only a “minimum of programming skills” is able to design applications for sale to a mass audience (Kortuem & Kawsar, 2010). The achievement of these sorts of communities of innovators is largely enabled by “large doses of information technology”, which, in combination bring about these sped-up processes of innovation and changing relationships between producer and consumer: first, an enormously increased amount of information available almost instantly to consumers; second, greater access to information by consumers about products, and by companies about products; third, “linkages and associations are automatically generated for the consumer” (p. 291); fourth, there is increased transparency, allowing consumers to learn more about products; and finally, the “process of acquisition of information becomes, in principle at least, continuous” (p. 291). Thrift argues that, taken together, these features constitute a “spatial extension of intelligence” (p. 291).

Examples of these changed processes of innovation occur across a range of industries. The App Store is one example, but another is open source

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44 The App Store is exemplary of Thrift’s notion of user innovation, not just because it provides a space for a productive community to form around product development, but also because Apple has demonstrated that it takes the feedback of its ‘users’ (in this case the third party developers of applications for sale on Apple devices through the iTunes stores) seriously, by integrating their advice to streamline and enhance innovation processes. In September 2010, Apple announced that it was opening up its App Store to third party development tools, and making its review guidelines and processes more transparent, in order to “help our developers create even more successful apps for the App Store” (Apple, 2010).
software; another, the use of advertising campaigns seeking audience involvement in product developments, usually attached to competitions (‘invent a new flavour to win!’). But communities of innovators are also forming around online news. *Crikey* provides an example through its integration of its audience-as-experts in the production of everyday (but out of the ordinary) content.

However, I want to suggest that the reconfiguring of producer-consumer relations that Thrift outlines is also occurring at *The Age Online*. Thrift provides a necessary corollary to the many accounts which focus on the technological and the democratic potential of ubiquitous computing and interactivity, while largely ignoring the pervasive business culture – perhaps only noting headline corporatisation events rather than the arguably more important minutiae. An example of the reach of this business culture into the practice of journalism is best illustrated at *The Age Online* through the example of Catherine Deveny’s dismissal. As I outline this event in the following section, I want to suggest that this is indicative of the way in which producers and consumers of news are brought into closer and faster relations within the business climate. In the subsequent section I will also outline the way in which this incident represents a triumph of market populism in the management and practice of journalism, before arguing that it is also representative of the social network markets that have become a key marker of the creative industries.
Catherine Deveny and *The Age*

Catherine Deveny is a comedian and former columnist for *The Age* newspaper – as well as for its online version. Deveny, who began at the *The Age* writing a humorous column about parenthood in the 1990s, until May 2010 published a weekly column that was often provocative and inflammatory around controversial social issues such as feminism, religion and class divides. Digital media scholar and regular commentator on Australian media debates, Jason Wilson (2009), argues that Deveny was not so much a classic columnist with the expertise and skill traditionally expected from such figures, but rather what he calls a ‘trollumnist’, named after ‘trolls’, the colloquial term for internet users who post deliberately inflammatory comments on internet forums, chat rooms and blogs in order to provoke anger, outrage and disruption with their incendiary comments. In the online news environment, Wilson argues that trollumnists are used to create cheap but valuable content by driving up hits with their deliberately provocative work:

Whereas a true columnist might make controversial arguments or challenge common sense, trollumnists merely provoke outrage in order to sell papers, draw links and capture increasingly scarce reader attention. The beauty of it all is that it doesn’t take much training to do it, and as media content goes, it’s cheap as chips. Any fool can offend people given a reasonably prominent platform.
Wilson argues that there are a number of ‘trollumnists’ in the Australian media landscape, including Janet Albrechtson and David Burchell at *The Australian*, Miranda Devine at *The Sydney Morning Herald*, and Catherine Deveny:

Deveny’s schtick is to leverage her own allegedly humble origins to put shit on “bogans” for the entertainment of *The Age*’s middle class audience … mocking the sensibilities of anyone with the bad sense to live beyond the extent of the tram lines. Last week she went to Chadstone [shopping centre] and poured scorn on suburban people, without basis except that their habits of leisure and consumption are distasteful to her. Her work is intellectually, morally and politically barren, but importantly, it gets a reaction, with social media and blogs pointing traffic in her direction with each lazy, offensive column she issues forth.

But while Deveny’s columns served the purpose of garnering readers, links and comments, it was her comments beyond the reach of her column that resulted in her sacking from *The Age*.

Officially, Deveny was sacked following a series of tweets – short posts of 140 characters sent from micro-blogging platform Twitter to her followers – that were sent from the columnist and humourist’s personal account during the Australian television industry’s awards night, The Logies. Deveny was forced to defend her tweets after they sparked public outrage because of their
controversial nature. She tweeted about the sexualisation of Bindi Irwin – Australian icon Steve Irwin’s daughter, who is now the star of her own television show and enterprise – saying, “I do so hope Bindi Irwin gets laid”. She also tweeted about Australian television personality, Rove McManus, who had recently remarried actress Tasma Walton after the death of his first wife from breast cancer: “Rove and Tasma look so cute … hope she doesn’t die, too”. Deveny defended her tweets, saying they were the equivalent of “passing notes in class”, and had been taken out of context in their reporting in the wider media (Hunter, 2010).

However, the following day The Age announced that Deveny had been “dropped” as a columnist as a result of the tweets but, more significantly, the hundreds of readers’ comments that had been posted at The Age Online in response to the article about her defence. The Age cited the comments as a driving factor in their move to ‘drop’ Deveny:

Her response did not sit well with readers – many of whom launched scathing attacks of their own on Twitter and in the online story’s comments section. More than 200 comments had been published by 6.30 pm yesterday. (Sankey, 2010)

They then cited some of the reader’s comments – for and against Deveny – as evidence of the need to act decisively. The Age’s Editor-in-Chief Paul Ramadge explained the sacking:
We are appreciative of the columns Catherine has written for *The Age* over several years but the views she has expressed recently on Twitter are not in keeping with the standards we set at *The Age*. (Sankey, 2010)

A reader’s poll at the bottom of the article announcing her sacking asked, “Were Catherine Deveny’s Logies Tweets out of line?” – with 55 per cent of readers agreeing, “Yes, she picked on a little girl” and 45 per cent disagreeing – “No, that’s her style of humour”.

But Jeremy Sear, in the *Crikey*-hosted blog, *Pure Poison*, argues that it was not Deveny’s original tweets, but the “storm of controversy” that erupted over them that prompted her sacking (Sear, 2010). He argues that *The Age Online* “milked” the controversy by posting the report of the incident as its top story for hours, and only made the move to sack the columnist after the glut of negative comments it received:

Yes, *The Age* – supposedly a fearless member of the Fourth Estate, on whom we can rely to stand up to the powerful on our behalf – apparently got spooked by all the negative comments. ON AN ONLINE STORY! Negative comments!

Thus Sear positions the move by *The Age* as contrary to their fourth estate role. The problem is one of professional values: “Never let it be said that Fairfax
can’t see which way the wind is blowing, and won’t lie down in whatever direction that is. Regardless of what that means to their own writers.”

Media Watch host Jonathon Holmes, writing on the ABC’s online opinion site The Drum, argues that Deveny was being “disingenuous” in claiming that using Twitter is like passing notes in class when she has more than 4,000 followers and her tweets were tagged, enabling them to be viewed in the public stream of Logies-related tweets (Holmes, 2010a). However, Deveny’s Twitter account was her own, and not affiliated with The Age – who, Holmes states, given Deveny’s status as a contributor is not her employer. Similarly, Margaret Simons, writing in Crikey, argues that “it is not immediately clear why The Age should regard itself as part of the relationship between Deveny and her Twitter followers” (Simons, 2010c). The problem is, according to Simons, that The Age has no social media policy for employees so it is hard to measure exactly where Deveny transgressed, particularly as she was hired “because she was edgy and offensive”. As Wilson suggests, Deveny was hired for her ability to provoke – and was fired for the very same reason.

An interesting case of the protocols, practices and norms involved in governing “content makers”45 (Simons, 2007b) in itself, this event can also be

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45 While Deveny is a regular contributor to The Age, she identifies herself as a columnist and humorist – and not as a professional journalist.
read as indicative of some of the new relations entailed in online news. It signals, for instance, the way in which interactivity brings producers and consumers of content into closer relation, as suggested by Thrift. Here, the sped-up temporality he describes can be seen in the timeline of events: the entire event, from tweet to dismissal, took less than a week. But the event also illustrates the power of the market, the interactive audience poll running under the story of Deveny’s sacking indicative of the populism that informed the decision. While opinion polls are, themselves, populist tools, this incident speaks of a particular type of market populism that has infiltrated increasing areas of cultural life as the market logic of advanced liberalism takes greater hold across greater areas of life.

**Market populism and audience interactivity**

Thomas Frank (2001) outlines the way in which, in the US, a turn towards ‘public journalism’ represents the admission of market populism, increasingly prevalent in other areas of life, into the journalistic sphere. He argues that a crisis of American (political) culture, originating in the 1990s, was mistakenly identified as a crisis of journalism. Journalism, argued its detractors, was too adversarial, too cynical, and too critical. Journalism was

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46 As I outline in Chapter Two, populist rhetorics of ‘the public’ and the ‘voice of the people’ have for a long time infused the perception and practice of journalism. Opinion polls are one specific technique to constitute ‘popular’ or ‘public’ opinion. But Bourdieu (1979) argues that public opinion is constructed through the use of opinion polls on the basis of three (incorrect) assumptions: one, that everyone is capable of forming an opinion; two, that all opinions have the same value; and three, that there is consensus about the nature of the problem and questions being asked.

47 Frank positions this cultural change as the result of the embrace of market forces, as I outline in the remainder of this section. But he also positions it alongside a growing suspicion of journalists and ‘liberal elites’ in general, as well as the increasingly widespread conspiracy theories about the powers of the ‘New Class’ (“a mysterious fraternity whose aims and deeds were the subject of excited speculation in even the most respectable conservative journals”) (p. 309).
charged with leading a range of broader social changes and “the problem wasn’t the galloping influence of a newly unrestrained market; the problem was attitude. Newspapers didn’t need to somehow counterbalance or question market forces; they needed to stop criticizing” (p. 311 – original emphasis). The real cause, Frank argues, was an unmitigated embrace of the market that was in turn affecting the changes in journalism its detractors described:

What actually underlay many of the big changes in American journalism – and hence precipitated much of the public anger – was the deterioration of the few checks that had once constrained the business aspect of the news media. The “New Class” didn’t transform most cities into one-newspaper towns; market forces did. TV news didn’t get dumber and dumber and dumber because liberals wanted it that way, but because advertisers did. (p. 309)

But just as Frank identifies the rhetoric of the market at the root of these problems, so he finds it in the suggested solution – public journalism.

This style of journalism, less concerned with the investigations and opinions of the ‘elite liberal media’ and more in touch with the concerns of ‘the people’ would, its proponents argued, smooth over the social differences created by adversarial journalism and make way for social harmony. If journalism was the problem – the source of social conflict, cynicism, and criticism – then it was also the source of the solution. Public journalism would remove the tendency for adversarialism in American life by listening to ‘people’
and ‘communities’, and solving their problems. In the US, public journalism projects proliferated. Journalism scholar and blogger Jay Rosen was a key advocate; the Pew Foundation developed its Center for Civic Journalism. These projects were targeted at the figure of ‘the public’, but their government of this group was through market mechanisms:

By putting its seal of approval on the trademark innovations of chain journalism – polls, demographic surveys, focus groups, “town meetings” – public journalism essentially embraced the market as an inherently democratic arrangement. The key to solving journalism’s problems, its leaders maintained, was to understand editing as a customer service. (Frank, 2001, p. 318 – emphasis added)

The populist appeal of public journalism intersected with the corporatisation of the news, and while both projects had quite different original aims, their paths were remarkably similar. The techniques of public journalism were integrated into an increasingly corporate media, allowing the meshing of populist sentiment and market logic:

Newspapers would have to ‘listen’ more to their audiences, preferably through the standard marketing devices of polls and focus groups. Newspapers would have to redefine their coverage by demographic and excise the odd voices of those with funny (usually anticorporate) ideas they had come up with on their own. (p. 319)
The market logic that Frank describes is evidenced in the events that culminated in the dismissal of Catherine Deveny. The decision to terminate her involvement with *The Age* was taken not on moral grounds, nor as Simons points out because she was in contravention of any in-house social media policy, but as a result of ‘public’ outrage given voice through the provision of interactive options to *The Age Online* audience. Deveny typifies one of “the odd voices … with funny (usually anticorporate) ideas” that Frank suggests are increasingly being excised from newspapers in their attention to the demands of their demographic (p. 319). Deveny was swiftly removed by the power of market logic expressed by technologies for capturing popular sentiment, in this case, the audience comment box. Deveny’s removal is even more significant given her own self-conscious positioning somewhere between the ‘ordinary Australian’ and the ‘elites’. As Wilson (2009) notes, she traded on her position as an elite to gather material for her columns, openly critical of shopping centres and the suburbs – the heartland of the ‘ordinary Australian’ – while still trying to trade on her own status as a ‘bogan’. It is her complex and self-conscious positioning as “willfully profane and unapologetically elite left, while remaining a vocally self-hating bogan” that undermined her wider popular appeal (Tijs, 2008).

This incident demonstrates the way in which market populism has become a part of the management of news, journalists and other ‘content makers’ like Deveny. As Thrift suggests, interactivity has brought producers and consumers of news content into closer relations within intensified
conditions of capitalism. These capitalist conditions are routinely expressed through the populist logic of the market. The way in which these markets are organised though is changing. Increasingly, the creative industries – in which news industries are located – are organised around social networks where they gain their value, as well as their difference, from other industries. In the following section I take some time to map the terrain of the creative industries framework and surrounding arguments. I consider the way in which news and journalism are shaped by these rhetorics as well as what their existence means for the future development of journalism.

The creative industries

As journalists increasingly find themselves in changing relations with audiences and content, so their education and training has been adapted to these changed conditions. Deuze’s (2011) edited volume, Managing Media Work, which synthesises recent scholarship on media management, production and policy, is intended as a preparatory handbook for the skilled media worker. In her chapter on ‘Journalism in a Network’, Jane Singer provides advice for the trainee journalist. She argues that today’s journalist must be flexible, able to work across a range of media and roles, and adept at navigating constantly changing technologies and working conditions: “new storytelling platforms, new tools and formats, new collaborations, and new responsibilities for user contributions all come on top of the newswork expected of earlier generations of journalists” (p. 105). Singer’s journalist, attuned to conditions of constant change, instantiates Thrift’s (2005) notion of a new kind of ‘fast’ subjectivity,
governed by a range of new management practices (including the sped-up processes of innovation outlined earlier in this chapter), in which the possession of resources of knowledge and creativity becomes central. These ‘fast subjects’ must be “calculating subjects able to withstand the exigencies of faster and faster return. Yet, at precisely the same time, they must be subjects who can be creative” (p. 133).

In this environment the cultivation of creativity becomes a central task of education not only for future knowledge workers, but for all citizens across all levels of their education. Education, policy and training is infused with the rhetoric of the creative industries, as Nick Stevenson (2010) notes in the British context:

The modern knowledge economy requires the reproduction of workers who are flexible and mobile, but above all with good linguistic, affective and communication skills. It is in this context that we should view the rapid expansion of higher education, the extension of the school leaving age and the increasing involvement of business within education. (p. 346)

Because of its widespread diffusion across all levels of education, as well as its particular pertinence to the framing of the education, training and production of news content, it is necessary to delve into the field of the creative industries
framework. In this section I trace its development as a research and policy agenda, some of its major arguments, and its implications for the development of journalism.

The concept of the creative industries is, at its most broad, about the linking of “culture and creativity with economy and industry” (Flew, 2003, p. 89), and has had many definitional incarnations. The term first rose to prominence in the UK under the New Labour leadership of Tony Blair, with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport developing a Creative Industries Taskforce and releasing a Creative Industries Mapping Document in 1998, in which the creative industries were defined as: “those industries which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property” (DCMS, 2001, p. 5). The Mapping Document itself became a successful export product, particularly in surrounding Europe, as well as Latin America and the Far East (O'Connor, 2007) and also marked the shift in nomenclature from cultural to creative industries – a concern I explore in more detail in the following section. However, it is its persistence as a theme for government and academic exploration that is of immediate relevance – for the rhetoric of the creative industries has become pervasive across a range of diverse and disparate fields (see Flew, 2003) throughout the 21st century to date.
A key voice in popularising the study of the creative industries (though he didn’t employ that term himself), was Richard Florida, whose book *The Rise of the Creative Class* (2004) is described by Flew (2003) as the “academic blockbuster of the new creativity movement” (p. 90). In it, Florida presents his vision of a creative class of “scientists, engineers, university professors, poets and novelists, artists, entertainers, actors, designers and architects, as well as the thought leadership of modern society” (p. 69) living in urban creative enclaves and contributing to the growing creative economy. Within the academy, the creative industries have been most prominently and effectively deployed as both a research direction and policy alignment at Australia’s Queensland University of Technology (QUT), which replaced its Faculty of Arts with the Creative Industries Faculty in 2001, and in 2005 established its Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation (CCI). Across the two institutional branches of QUT’s creative industries specialisation, Stuart Cunningham, John Hartley and Terry Flew, among others, are key voices in the development of scholarship in the field.

In the introduction to his edited collection on the creative industries, John Hartley (2005) maps out the historical development of the concept from the creative arts of civic humanism, the emergence of the twin figures of the citizen and consumer, the concept of the culture industries, and finally, the emergence of the creative industries from the technological, economic and
policy landscape of the late 20th to early 21st century. Defining the concept, Hartley writes:

The idea of the creative industries seeks to describe the conceptual and practical convergence of the creative arts (individual talent) with Cultural Industries (mass scale), in the context of new media technologies (ICTs) within a new knowledge economy, for the use of newly interactive citizen-consumers (p. 5).

Conceptually, as Hartley’s definition demonstrates, the creative industries intersect with ideas, such as the ‘knowledge economy’ and Manuel Castell’s (2000) vision of the ‘network society’, but extends them to combine the social, cultural and economic domains. The creative industries make what was formerly ‘merely’ cultural, and largely government-funded, also count within the economic sphere while rejecting elitist conceptions of culture and broadening access to entrepreneurial activity (Hartley, 2005, p. 3). Creative industries typically involve micro-businesses and small and medium enterprises, but also encompass some of the world’s largest brands. They often take the form of public-private partnerships – places like Silicon Valley are sites where the economic and research concerns of government, academic and private enterprises converge to develop these hubs of creative economic activity, as is QUT’s Creative Industries Precinct. Hartley outlines that within the creative industries, creative workers increasingly work across roles and industry sectors...
as part of their varied and flexible ‘portfolio career’, with learning increasingly becoming a “distributed system” extending beyond formal institutions and across many life stages, aiming to develop not specific skills but a range of capabilities that can be developed and applied across the various strands of the ‘portfolio career’.

The CCI has further refined its definition of and approach to the creative industries in order to develop a more precise methodology known as the Creative Trident, so-named because of its three-pronged approach. The Creative Trident focuses more precisely the study of the creative industries on the following three groups of creative workers:

‘Specialist’ artists, professionals or creative individuals working in creative industries; ‘support’ staff in those industries providing management, secretarial, administrative or accountancy back-up; and creative individuals ‘embedded’ in other industries not defined as ‘creative’. Collectively, they are the ‘creative workforce’. (Higgs, Cunningham, & Bakhshi, 2008, p. 3)

The authors argue that this approach is better for studying the creative industries, particularly for policy makers, because it focuses more closely on actual creative activities and allows for a more precise understanding of the economic value of creative activity through the use of accurate census data.
However, Higgs et al. found in their UK study that “creative employment occurs disproportionately outside the creative industries themselves” – with some 35 per cent of the creative workforce employed in non-creative sectors (p. 6). This form of ‘embedded’ creative labour is reconceptualised in the more recent consideration of the creative industries from Potts, Cunningham, Hartley and Ormerod (2008), who reconfigure their definition in relationship to social network markets.

Potts et al. question the traditional industrial definition of the creative industries, whereby they are defined and measured in the manner that most industries are – in terms of their material inputs and outputs – or in the case of the creative industries, by their creative inputs and intellectual property outputs (Potts, et al., 2008, p. 167). The authors argue instead for a market-oriented definition that recognises the centrality of social networks in the differentiation of the creative industries to other industrial sectors:

The economics of the creative industries … is not the same as the economics of the agricultural or industrial economy, as is implicitly represented in neoclassical economics. The central economic concern, we argue, is not with the nature of inputs or outputs in production or consumption per se, or even with competitive structures, but with the nature of the markets that coordinate this industry. We think they are both complex and social, and that this offers a useful analytic foundation
as in creative industries markets complex social networks play at least as significant a coordination role as price signals (p. 169).

Thus Potts et al. suggest that the creative industries are best understood as complex social network markets because of their distinctive reliance on “word of mouth, taste, cultures, and popularity, such that individual choices are dominated by information feedback over social networks rather than innate preferences and price signals” (pp. 169–170), such as in other industries. Their revised definition of the creative industries makes central the role of social networks in mediating market value:

The creative industries are the set of economic activities that involve the creation and maintenance of social networks and the generation of value through production and consumption of network-valorized choices in these networks. (p. 174)

In this reconception of the creative industries it is not the creative inputs or outputs that are central, but rather the social networks that organise the economic agent and their resulting enterprise in relation to the market.

This allows Potts et al. to distinguish between a range of services that might involve various levels of creativity – some of which are more engaged in social networks than others. In defining the creative industries, then, social
networks rather than creativity become central (and what counts as a creative industry is thus constantly shifting in relation to the choices exercised within these social networks):

All professional services involve specific skills and capabilities and thus creativity, but not all of these are creative in the social network sense. Neurosurgery, firefighting and nursing, for example, are all creative occupations, in that they involve critical decision making and adaptive response. However, they are not essentially defined by social networks, even though certain aspects of them will be … (Potts, et al., 2008, pp. 173–174).

Here we see that what Higgs et al. identified as ‘embedded’ creativity can be more clearly accounted for by the measure of social networks, rather than open-ended definitions of creativity that seemingly allow any enterprise to be categorised as creative. This centrality of social networks does not displace creativity entirely, but rather re-imagines it as a form of innovation, shaped by individual choice within complex social network markets.

The social network market understanding of creative industries reinterprets them as part of “the innovation system of the economy rather than just another industrial sector” (Potts, et al., 2008, p. 174). The very innovation they are concerned with is industrial, but not in the way that the traditional
definition suggested – that is, as creativity *within* industries. Rather, as Potts et al. explain:

> The creative industries are, to coin a phrase, about the ‘creation of industries’ through social network market dynamics and institutional emergence rather than about creativity in industries, which may often be routine and functionally absorbed (p. 176).

They argue that social network markets include the systems that *build and maintain social networks*, such as advertising, architecture and media, as well as the systems that *create value* on these social networks through content, such as film, TV, music, design, and so on.

> From this definition, media websites, and online news sites, in particular, can be seen as one of the systems for creating social networks. Journalism, as well as other types of content production, can be understood as one of the systems that add value to these networks. Online journalism, then, is situated within social network markets that mediate its value. The event that resulted in the dismissal of Catherine Deveny, I want to suggest, can be read as an expression of value within a social network market. *The Age Online* audience was acting as a social network, mediating the value of Catherine Deveny’s columns as a form of content. Through features that allow for a new prominence of audience expressions around market mechanisms, Catherine Deveny was
removed from *The Age Online* when it decided that she no longer brought value to the social network she was bound up in. This may appear mercenary and it is certainly at odds with the ‘fourth estate’ notion of the press, in which the journalist knew best what the audience wanted. But, as Potts et al. argue, there are political implications to this shift towards social network markets, as the “social welfare theoretic basis of the standard definition [of the creative industries] is replaced by an innovation system”, reoriented around the market, so that the “domain of policy is radically shifted from a top-down recompensatory model to a bottom-up model of experimental facilitation and innovation” (p. 180).

**Creative vs cultural industries**

It is the politics of the creative industries framework, and particularly the latter definitions framed around social network markets, that has provoked some scholars from the fields of communication, media and cultural studies to argue that the concept is inadequate for making sense of the intersection of what were once understood as purely cultural (and often government-funded) pursuits with the market. To demonstrate, consider this comment by Deuze (2007), who argues that the circumspect adoption of the creative industries framework can be useful for considering the way in which meaning is made and shared through and across producer and audience experiences, but in doing so, demonstrates a common slippage between the terms ‘creative’ and ‘cultural’ in the discussion of media work:
The creative industries approach to sites of cultural production also focuses our attention on the seminal role (the management and organization of) that *creativity* plays in any consideration of media work” (p. 250 – original emphasis).

Deuze mentions “cultural production”, but the QUT School is emphatic that the creative industries extend beyond what have traditionally been known as ‘cultural’ pursuits and into fields that have not traditionally been considered creative at all. Cunningham (2002) critiques approaches that equate the creative industries solely with ‘the arts’. His approach, and that taken by fellow QUT researchers, encompasses the traditional ‘arts’ sectors, but stresses applications of creativity that lead to wealth creation:

This approach places strategic but not exclusive stress on those applications of creativity which have a realistic enterprise growth potential, without confining that to digital content alone. Aboriginal arts and crafts, along with analogue fashion outputs (which, when I last looked, were what we used to call clothes) are proven wealth creators (p. 56).

Behind this changed conception of what were once known as the ‘cultural industries’ is a changed politics and corresponding changed ideas about the role
for the nation state in the realm of culture and enterprise. In the creative industries approach, the relationship between (mass) ‘culture’ and ‘government’ has been refigured as a relationship between (individual) ‘creativity’ and ‘the market’. This refigured relationship shifts the focus towards wealth creation (rather than public enrichment), encompasses (but is not limited to) the attributes of the ‘new economy’, is increasingly networked and less centralised, and less national and more global or regional (p. 59).

Researchers informed by political economy or Marxist approaches to culture have been critical of the creative industries framework, arguing for a narrower definition of culture and a critical consideration of the effects of its coupling with Schumpetarian economics. For instance, David Hesmondhalgh (2007) maintains that the concept of the cultural industries is of more analytical utility than the creative industries. Hesmondhalgh’s cultural industries begin with a narrower conception of culture than the broader understanding of it as a “whole way of life” (see Williams, 1976). Rather, he focuses on the production of symbolic meaning within a culture, beginning with Williams’ definition of culture as “the signifying system through which necessarily (though among other means) a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced and explored” (Williams as cited in Hesmondhalgh, 2007, p. 12 – original emphasis). Thus his definition of the cultural industries is: “Those institutions (mainly profit-making companies, but also state organisations and non-profit organisations) that are most directly involved in the production of social meaning”
(p. 12; original emphasis). Included in Hesmondhalgh’s list of core cultural industries are: broadcasting, film (in a range of formats), the content aspects of the internet industry (but not those aspects which fall under the computer or telecommunications industries), music (both recorded and live), and print and electronic publishing. This definition is far narrower than that of the creative industries, and extends to include state and non-profit organisations, at odds with the QUT definition that is based on wealth creation and market relations shaped by social networks. But Hesmondhalgh suggests that such definitions are too broad, encompassing industries that are not really creative, or that are not part of the ‘new economy’ they represent, allowing their users to claim a rhetorical victory without any real empirical evidence of a change.

The very concept of the creative industries has been shaped by a neoliberal politics since its inception, and this political underpinning has been met with argument, resistance and even, at times, ridicule. In the UK, where cultural and then creative industries policies emerged from the 1980s onwards as part of the need to find new initiatives for local and regional development in light of the downturn of manufacturing, O’Connor – a former Professor of Cultural Industries at the University of Leeds, now Professor of the Creative Industries at the CCI⁴⁸ – argues that it has been as much about the commercialisation of culture as it has the emergence of creativity into economic fields, as culture, “previously seen as a marginal and mainly decorative or

⁴⁸ As I outline in this section, O’Connor’s work is critical of the political-economic underpinning of the creative industries, but his move to the CCI suggests that he is now working within this framework.
prestige expenditure, began to move much closer to the centre of policy making as a potential economic development” (O’Connor, 2007, p. 26). Hesmondhalgh traces the development of the creative industries from the intersection of the ideas around the cultural industries with cultural policy. He locates the emergence of cultural policy from the left-wing Greater London Council’s (GLC) development of its own cultural policy from 1983. This was shaped by both a more democratic understanding of culture that encompassed not only the ‘high’ arts, but also commercial forms, with a funding emphasis not on the artists or creators, but on distribution and reaching audiences, and the recognition of the cultural industries as a valuable form of investment for the economic regeneration of urban centres. While the GLC was abolished in 1986 by Margaret Thatcher’s British Conservative government, the ideas it generated about the value of the cultural industries as a means of regeneration and employment creation were re-imagined as a neoliberal project, the emphasis no longer on public investment but rather “an increasing emphasis on entrepreneurialism in the private and public sectors” (Hesmondhalgh, 2007, p. 140). The shift away from socially-oriented policy and towards individual responsibility that came with a neoliberal politics grew as the concept of the cultural industries evolved into the creative industries, while “the view that independent cultural production might be connected to wider movements for progressive social change, implicit in at least some of the GLC work, was by now being steadily erased” (Hesmondhalgh, 2007, p. 140).
But Toby Miller (2009b) accurately locates an earlier point of conceptual emergence, arguing that neoliberalism’s genesis in the United States under Reaganism – where, interestingly, the creative industries have never had much purchase – provides the global political backdrop against which the creative industries were formed:

What eventually became the creative industries as a discourse began in the 1960s with Ronald Reagan’s neo-liberal opposition to welfare and European attempts to create a new, practical humanities, in response to charges of irrelevancy, conservatism, and light-headedness. The West recognized 40 years ago that its economic future lay in post-industrial activities – not food or manufactures, but finance and ideology. (p. 93).

Regardless of the exact point of genesis, this longer history provides the backdrop for a political shift away from ‘culture’ and towards the broader and more malleable concept of ‘creativity’. In the UK, the shift in policy direction from cultural to creative industries was signified by the release of the 1998 Mapping Document – although it is worth noting that the concept’s earliest policy incarnation was in the form of the Australian Labor Party’s 1994 Creative Nation cultural policy document (Hesmondhalgh, 2007). The move from cultural to creative industries was explained as merely pragmatic by the responsible government minister, Chris Smith, and as a step away from ‘the
arts’ and their usual distance from all things economic. However, O’Connor (2007) argues that pragmatic or otherwise, the shift in name remains significant:

Pragmatic or not, the change of terminology was not neutral; it served to uncouple the ‘creative industries’ from ‘arts and cultural’ policy, yet hoping at the same time to recoup (some of) the benefits for those very arts and cultural policy agencies. Crucial to this political trick was the identification of the creative industries with a ‘new economy’ driven by ‘digital’ technologies and closely related to the ‘information’ or knowledge’ economy. (p. 42)

This re-conceptualisation of cultural policy allowed governments and academics to take advantage of the rhetorical breadth and flexibility of concepts like creativity, technology and the new economy. However, as O’Connor notes, the move was not only rhetorical, but also shaped by the dispersion of neoliberal politics across increasing areas of social life.

One of the greatest criticisms of the cultural industries framework levelled by the creative industries advocates is that it represents a top-down national project. But Hesmondhalgh counters this by first, citing the work of Garnham (2005) to argue that the sort of education that emerges from the creative industries discourse reflects, in its structure, the very “‘artist’-centred notion of subsidy” (p. 145) (or top-down funding) that it seeks to reject. Second,
he argues that Flew’s (2005b) suggestion that the creative industries act as an area of research and development (R&D) – whose value is mediated by the market, rather than the top-down funding of the arts – risks reinstating a different form of top-down control, this time in the form of the massive corporations that exercise similar dominance within the market, with its systematic “inequalities of access and outcome” (pp. 147–149). Similarly, Toby Miller (2008) argues that the creative industries approach fails to fully account for the types of work practices, relations and inequities that it advocates. He instead calls for what he labels ‘Media Studies 3.0’, in which texts and audiences remain central, but so does productive labour. Of central importance to Miller is the question of work practices and exploitation. He considers examples of the career patterns and work practices of members of the creative class and their alignment with self-governing practices, as such, as the development and maintenance of a ‘portfolio career’. One such example is his consideration of the highly fraught work practices forced upon video game creators at Los Angeles-based EA Games, where up to 91 hours of work per week for several weeks becomes the norm (pp. 224–225).

But Miller (2009b) does not go as far as Daniel Mato (2009), to whom he responds in an issue of Cultural Studies, in which both authors address the concept of the cultural industries. Mato argues that “all industries and forms of consumption are cultural” (p. 72), but Miller suggests that this broad conceptualisation of culture “enters the troubling domain of the
decontextualised vocabulary where words mean everything and hence nothing” (p. 92). Nonetheless, he is openly critical of the creative industries agenda, and in particular, its politics, which he demonstrates in an attack on the concept and those who subscribe to it, in his Cultural Studies article. He begins by identifying the neoliberal origins of the creative industries, painting this as an abandonment of the values of socialism that once typified the humanities (p. 94), before mocking creative industries disciples, including Richard Florida and his followers, the creative industries scholars at QUT, and “Brussels bureaucrats” for their slavish (and somewhat foolish) devotion to the concept:

Consider (Richard) Floridians, riding around on their bicycles to spy on ballet-loving, gay-friendly, multicultural computer geeks who have moved to de-industrialized, freezing rust/rusting freeze belts; true-believer creationists in Australia who find even cultural-policy studies too residually socialistic and textual for their taste; and endlessly sprouting Brussels bureaucrats offering blueprints to cities eager to be made over by culture and tolerance in search of affluence. They think many industries are cultural, and the way they mobilize that insight is through the neo-classical shibboleth of unlocking creativity through individual human capital. (p. 94)

Miller even mentions the CCI, bitterly commenting that the Australian Research Council has funded the Centre, “run by a lapsed-poet and Girardian
(Stuart Cunningham) and a hitherto semiotic romantic (John Hartley)” (p. 94).
The personal nature of the attack undermines Miller’s point, which is, it seems, that the creative industries are an untenable concept because they are not measured like other industries – something that the CCI has tackled in its formulation of its social network market approach.

But Miller does not consider Potts et al.’s formulation of the creative industries as social network markets, or the specificities of measurements and methods outlined by Higgs et al. in making this critique. Rather, he takes issue with the fact that in the creative industries, “what is made in a sector of the economy does not characterize that sector, but rather, what goes into it” (p. 95) – that is, creativity is not an output but an input, in any manner of sectors.
Miller argues that this “bizarre shift in adjectival meaning makes it possible for anything that makes money to be creative” (p. 95) – likening this reckoning to Mato’s belief that all industries are cultural. Miller suggests that the motivation for the development of the discipline is a desire for power and relevancy (by the “propagandists of the creative industries” (p. 95): “What such moves achieve at a tactical level, however, is a sleight of hand that places the humanities at the center of economic innovation by pretending that it encompasses information technology” (p. 95).

His highly personal attacks aside, Miller’s alternative is not convincing.
He recommends that researchers analyse the economic sectors encompassed by
the cultural and creative industries – and to recognise that all economic sectors have cultural elements while also maintaining the specificities of culture. While there are some merits to Miller’s critique, the creative industries scholars have worked assiduously to clearly demarcate their area of study and to develop a precise empirical methodology. They are not, as Miller claims, studying anything and everything under the tag of creativity – quite the opposite, particularly in their latest formulation of the creative industries as social network markets. However, Miller’s analysis is useful in identifying the neoliberal overlaps of the creative industries rhetoric – in both the government and academic contexts – and in highlighting the attendant issues to do with (global and regional) labour practices and relations.

But it is also necessary to recognise that it is not possible to voluntaristically strip away this politics and simply replace it with any of its political precedents, nor is it a simple task to transform the governing relations of neoliberalism into a modern government of socialism, as I touch on in the next section. But just because this politics cannot be transcended or easily transformed does not mean that drawing attention to it is a futile task. Here, the critique of Hesmondhalgh and Miller is of most use – in drawing attention to the politics of what is rapidly becoming the status quo, and in giving detailed examples of the sorts of relations this entails. In this instance, it provides an analytical framework through which to observe the sort of politics that infuses the training, production and study of journalism and other associated ‘creative
industries’. The task then is not to wish for a return to a non-market-oriented system, but rather how to work within current political economic realities in order to maintain those things from the past that are worth saving. As I map out the relationship between the creative industries and neoliberalism in the following final section of this chapter, I hope to demonstrate the way in which it is possible to work from inside this politics to map a path forward for politics – and journalism – without appealing for a return to a former era.

**Creative industries and neoliberalism**

At the heart of Miller’s critique of the creative industries is what he sees as a political divide in which neoliberalism is the wedge between cultural studies and the creative industries:

> From this flows an entire host of methodologically critical matters in the growing distinction between cultural studies and creative industries: a focus on collective struggle over meaning versus the rush to the discourse of creativity and the subordination of politics; the refusal of neoliberalism versus its embrace; and the methods of political economy (study material conflicts) versus narcissography (watching TV or playing games with one’s children and friends). (Miller, 2009a, p. 271)

Miller (2010) takes a dim view of neoliberalism, arguing that it was “one of the most successful attempts in world history to reshape individuals in human
history via government programs” (p. 56) – placing it in the ranks of Christianity, colonialism, Islam and Marxism. He argues that its mission was (he uses the past tense, arguing that recent economic events, namely the global financial crisis, has compromised its stranglehold on global political systems) to reshape populations according to market objectives, “invoking and training them as ratiocinative liberal actors waiting for their inner creativity to be unlocked” (p. 57). Miller positions the imperatives of the creative industries as a cynical attempt to impose market imperatives on unwitting individuals, and neoliberalism as a scheme by the powerful to brainwash populations with the language of the market.

Indeed, Flew (2010) argues that Miller presents neoliberalism as the “deux ex machina lying behind the rise of the creative industries discourse” (p. 3). He suggests that approaches like Miller’s are symptomatic of a tendency to employ the term neoliberalism in a negative, normative way as well as reducing its conceptual complexities and multiplicities to “a kind of all or nothing phenomenon: you either have bad neo-liberalism or a largely undefined good society” (p. 4). The sort of critique of neoliberalism presented by Miller, and to a lesser extent, Hesmondhalgh, is informed by a Marxist understanding of culture and government – something Miller brings to his reading of Foucault’s collected lectures, *The Birth of Biopolitics: lectures at the college de France 1978–1979*, of which neoliberalism is a central theme. Miller (2009a) reads into these a Marxist critique of neoliberalism, arguing that Foucault saw in this politics a
“grand paradox” and positioning his take as highly critical (p. 270; see also Miller, 2010). But Flew argues that this approach to Foucault and neoliberalism is anachronistic, misrepresenting Foucault’s politics and relationship to Marxism. Rather, Foucault’s politics were far more ambiguous than Miller’s reading suggests:

The account of liberalism and neo-liberalism in these lectures, I would argue, presents a critique of Marxism as much as it does of neo-liberalism itself, positioning Foucault in a more ambiguous political space than this synthesis of his work into the canon of contemporary radical thought would suggest (Flew, 2010, p. 11).

Indeed, this interpretation of neoliberalism does away with the sort of agency that Foucault describes as an essential part of the government of populations.

Rather, Foucault’s lectures, though highly critical in style also represent a rejection of the sort of critique that Miller makes of neoliberalism in presenting it as a dominant ideology foisted upon the unwitting masses:

The lectures consistently reject the easy critique of neoliberalism as ideology, presenting it as neither ‘a convenient cover for an underlying reality of oppression and domination’ or as ‘pseudo-science, to be exposed and condemned as the servant of whatever power is in
Further, Foucault is adamant that the task of reviving the values of socialism in the era of liberal government is not as easy as a simple return to the past – which is what is suggested by Miller and again, to a lesser extent, by Hesmondhalgh. Rather, Foucault argues that a return to an earlier socialist art of liberal government is not feasible because it is yet to be invented. Foucault (2008) argues that socialism has put forward an historical and economic rationality, as well as rational techniques of administrative intervention – but no autonomous socialist governmentality (p. 92). Rather, he argues that socialism has been successful at connecting itself to diverse types of governmentality – including liberalism – in which case “socialism and its forms of rationality function as counterweights, as a corrective, and a palliative to internal dangers” (p. 92). But in his 1979 lecture Foucault (2008) remarked: “I do not think that there is an autonomous socialist governmentality,” (p. 92) – which only seems even more true in the 21st century.

Instead, Foucault suggests that we should interrogate the notion of governmentality in order to ascertain how it might be used to meet socialist ends:

What would be the governmentality appropriate to socialism? Is there a governmentality appropriate to socialism? What governmentality is
possible as a strictly, intrinsically and autonomously socialist
governmentality? In any case, we know only that if there is a really
socialist governmentality, then it is not hidden within socialism and its
texts. It cannot be deducted from them. It must be invented. (p. 94)

As Dean (2009) suggests, today, “Foucault would urge the left to invent its own
art of government … and to do so, it would have inevitably to borrow, adapt
and modify elements from the liberal traditions”. This is why accounts like
those of Miller provide an interesting critical counterpoint – much like the way
in which socialism has operated in relation to liberalism to date. But such
critiques are necessarily limited. In order to understand the contours of
neoliberalism as it intersects with journalism and agendas like the creative
industries, it is necessary to see this sophisticated and contemporary form of
government for what it is – a rationality of government – and not an oppressive
ideology that can easily be shed or ‘seen through’. Critique without this
recognition is ultimately unconstructive and all the more so if no alternative is
offered.

Just as appeals for a return to a foregone political age (and its
concomitant policy and research agenda) are untenable, given the nature of
contemporary liberal government, so too are hopes of a return to a past era of
journalism. If a socialist liberal governmentality has yet to be invented then
perhaps so too a democratically oriented journalism that can work within the
economic rationality of advanced liberalism. What this requires is rhetorically – and practically – removing the broader political potential of journalism from its ‘fourth estate’ goals, something entailed in Keane’s (2009) vision of monitory democracy. But the separation of journalism from the persuasive rhetoric of its ‘fourth estate’ role, while necessary, requires the uncomfortable recognition of change in debates in which key actors have much at stake.

In the following chapter I outline the way in which discussions of online news revolve around the utility of its ‘business model’ – a rhetorical device employed both as a diagnostic tool as well as the hopeful source of journalism’s renewal. But as I demonstrate, a narrow understanding of the news ‘business model’ which seeks to separate the business of news from its social role fails to account for the demands of numerous stakeholders whose investment in news and journalism is not (solely, or even slightly) financial. On the other hand, this separation – of news from its traditional social role – may also be the necessary step required to ensure that journalism, and what it can enable more broadly in terms of politics, government and citizenship, can be reformulated and reconceptualised within the constraints and demands of advanced liberal conditions. That is, it may be the disavowal of journalism’s ‘fourth estate’ role that will allow for journalism’s adaptation, and the securing of what this term has come to represent – journalism’s broader social role.
Chapter Six:

The Business of News
Introduction

I begin this chapter by outlining a recent example in the development of online news, with both local and global implications: Rupert Murdoch’s announcement and implementation of paywalls across News Corporation news sites. After outlining the details of this example, I identify the way in which, in the surrounding media coverage, the business model is upheld as a singular concept, an explanatory frame and diagnostic tool. At the same time, the discussion of the business model involves discomfort, as it requires recognition of the fact that journalism is a business – as well as a social institution. Thus drawing particularly on the work of Julie Froud, Sukhdev Johal, Adam Leaver, Richard Phillips and Karel Williams (2006, 2009), as well as Grahame Thompson (1986), I use this example to demonstrate that the business model is an insufficient explanatory frame for understanding online news, its problems, prospects and future, because it seeks to isolate the business element of journalism’s operation from its other roles. I outline the way in which firms, and in particular, media firms in the business of news production, are not best understood as existing to fulfil a singular role (i.e. to ‘produce quality journalism’) but rather as sites of competing objectives – some of them economic, some of them social, some political, and so on.

Nonetheless, it is also necessary to acknowledge that economic imperatives are increasingly central to the production of culture – and specifically, the development of online news – under conditions of advanced
liberalism. Thus these economic imperatives also increasingly shape the development and evolution of journalism’s other more traditionally social roles. Therefore, in the second part of the chapter I consider the extent to which an advanced liberal politics is shaping the economic development of online news around business objectives, and the way this is in tension with liberal journalistic traditions and objectives. Drawing this time on a local example, I outline the recent tumultuous history of Fairfax Media, focusing on the tension between its board of directors and the editorial arms of the company. I demonstrate the way in which, through the work of publisher Eric Beecher, *Crikey* has actively positioned itself in opposition to the Fairfax board and its economically driven decisions, whilst downplaying its own business model. While Beecher, and thus *Crikey*, would like to suggest that attention to business imperatives is at odds with securing the future of journalism online, I argue that Fairfax is demonstrating dexterity and flexibility around the political and economic evolution of contemporary journalism – albeit at the expense of liberal journalistic traditions and values, as well as the esteem of many of its media peers. *Crikey*, on the other hand, while seeking to diminish the importance of its business model in order to assert its professional legitimacy and status within the mainstream media, embodies what Clay Shirky (2010)

49 Indeed, it is important to emphasise here that the “dexterity and flexibility” noted in the Fairfax response to changing economic conditions by no means represents a better response to other news organisations, including *Crikey*. Rather, what I suggest is that Fairfax demonstrates a heightened attunement and attention to its financial imperatives. But this is certainly at the expense of an erosion of its previous commitment to its political and social imperatives. Thus while Fairfax represents a necessary and perhaps even sensible – given its business status – reaction to the current media environment, this does not remove the fact that something is lost when one of the imperatives of the news business is given higher precedence than the others. What exactly is lost is what is treasured at *Crikey*. How the two values can coexist represents the greatest challenge to journalism today, and will be the concern of the conclusion of this chapter.
identifies as a “transformed alternative” to the current dominant organisational form of journalism – rather than the ‘traditional’ liberal journalistic product it seeks to identify with.

**Murdoch and paywalls**

In May 2009, Rupert Murdoch held a conference call with journalists and economic analysts to discuss News Corporation’s most recent quarterly profits – down 47 per cent to $755 million (Clark, 2009a). In the discussion, he made a bold pronouncement about the company’s plans for its news businesses, outlining his plans to fix what he calls a “malfunctioning” business model. Murdoch said that all newspapers online were going through an “epochal debate over whether to charge” – and announced that News Corporation’s news websites would begin charging for content within a year. He used the success of *The Wall Street Journal*, which has long charged for content, as an example that it is possible to convince people to pay for content online. While he later extended the timeframe in which to undertake this operation, Murdoch did indeed begin erecting ‘paywalls’ around his content, beginning with *The Times* (of London) and its Sunday edition, *The Sunday Times*, in July 2010. Four months later, News International – the UK arm of News Corporation – announced that “the new digital products for *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* have achieved more than 105,000 paid-for customer sales to date” ("105,000 Digital Sales," 2010). The response to this announcement was mixed, with some declaring the results abysmal, and others finding in them encouragement
for the future of online news. The *BBC* reported that this represented an 87 per cent drop in visits to the website – but that the company had expected to lose 90 per cent of its readers, so this represents a good result ("Times and Sunday Times readership," 2011). On the other hand, *The Guardian’s OrganGrinder* blog reports that the gross yearly earnings represented by that number is only £5.5 million, and “given that the advertising revenue lost could be in the £10m to £20m range, that suggests there is a long way to go” (Sabbagh, 2010).

Regardless of its reception, Murdoch’s paywall experiment generated a great deal of debate about the future of news online, and positioned the business model as central to the success of news online.

Responses to Murdoch’s paywall announcement generally fell into two camps: that this was a necessary move to ensure the preservation of journalism online, or that this was a ludicrous attempt to control an uncontrollable technology. In the latter camp, Guy Rundle (2009) writes that the announcement reflects Murdoch’s “arsed-up relationship to the internet”. Rundle’s technologically determinist argument is that Murdoch’s decision is evidence of his inability to understand the inherently free nature of the web, much like the inherent logic of technologies that came before it:

Central to his idea that papers can suddenly claw back the material they’ve put out for free is the delusion that newspaper buying and reading is a static habit, unchanging beneath the flow of tech change.
It’s not – the net has changed our relationship to writing, news and information utterly, and to think otherwise is to believe that the middle ages could have uninvented block printing and gone back to the monasteries.

Similarly, Michael Tomasky, in his blog at The Guardian’s website, suggests that Murdoch’s paywall plans indicate that the media mogul lacks an understanding of the nature of news online. He argues that The Wall Street Journal and the Financial Times work on a subscription system because “you can charge global financial elites to read a tailored product of financial news” (Tomasky, 2009). But there are a lot of things you can’t charge for, he argues – including gossip, sports, and the soft porn that populates some of the UK’s tabloids. Maybe, suggests Tomasky, Murdoch “knows something the rest of the world doesn’t. He often [does]. Or maybe he’s just losing his touch.”

Arianna Huffington (2009), founder of online-only, US-based news aggregation and comment site, The Huffington Post, believes that thanks to the combination of “transformative technology, the advent of sites such as Craigslist, dramatic changes in consumer habits, and the dire impact the economic crisis has had on advertising” – the paywall is history. Subsequently, we are living through a “Golden Age” for news consumers, she argues, thanks to the geographical freedom and egalitarian nature of the web. The mistake is to believe that the future of journalism is dependent on newspapers; it’s not,
according to Huffington, and the best way to ensure its survival is to embrace a
hybrid future, “where old media players embrace the ways of new media
(including transparency, interactivity and immediacy) and new media
companies adopt the best practices of old media (including fairness, accuracy
and high-impact investigative journalism)”.

New media researcher Clay Shirky (2010) argues that Murdoch’s
paywall decision is significant because people are taking it as a serious move in
the development of online news – in a way that they didn’t when The New York
Times introduced TimesSelect in 2005. Shirky argues: “to the newspaper world,
TimesSelect looked like an experiment. The Times and Sunday Times look like a
referendum on the future”. But he argues that it is wrong to think of paywalls as
something that will ‘save’ journalism, because as The Times experiment
demonstrates, they don’t expand the revenue that is available from the existing
audience – rather they “contract the audience to that subset willing to pay”.

What paywalls do then, suggests Shirky, is change the nature of newspapers
online. This is because the very nature of a newspaper is linked to its
availability to the general public. When newspapers go online and protect their
information behind a paywall, the proportion of the general public who can
access that information contracts so dramatically that it changes the very nature
of the newspaper:

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30 TimesSelect was The New York Times’ first experiment in paid content online, in which opinion pieces
were only available to subscribers. However, many of the paid columns were made public by bloggers,
and two years later the premium service was abolished on the basis that more money could be made
from advertising fuelled by search engines and search engine optimisation (SEO) (“New York Times to
close TimesSelect,” 2007).
One way to think of this transition is that online, the Times has stopped being a newspaper, in the sense of a generally available and omnibus account of the news of the day, broadly read in the community. Instead, it is becoming a newsletter, an outlet supported by, and speaking to, a specific and relatively coherent and compact audience. (In this case, the Times is becoming the online newsletter of the Tories, the UK’s conservative political party, read much less widely than its paper counterpart). (Shirky, 2010)

Following this argument to its conclusion, the implications of this sort of change are that, despite the success of paywalls, they are not a solution that can protect newspapers online because their existence changes the nature of the organisation they are trying to protect. Or as Shirky puts it: “This re-engineering suggests that paywalls don’t and can’t rescue current organizational forms. They offer instead yet another transformed alternative to it”.

However, Eric Beecher (2010d) argues that for Rupert Murdoch, the usual conundrum of finding an online news ‘business model’ does not exist because Murdoch’s news businesses operate on another form of currency. Beecher suggests that while most discussions of the business model for journalism assume that the end result is profit, Murdoch uses a different sort of
funding model that “while it appears to lose a lot of money, is highly profitable in a different currency – the currency of power and influence”. Beecher argues that Murdoch can afford to lose a lot of money on his flagship newspapers – such as *The Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Post* and *The Australian* – because they are worth the investment in power and influence with the governments who control his business environment:

> Without doubt, there is immense value for News Corp in owning strategically positioned newspapers to influence government policies – like media and broadcasting legislation, ownership limits, cross-media regulations, foreign ownership laws – which have a direct impact on the company’s profits.

Further, Beecher argues that the decision to restrict online news content to paid subscribers, while presented by many as a gamble, is nothing of the sort. He argues instead that “publishers may be slow, but they aren’t stupid. They are hardly likely to create a situation that makes life even worse for newspapers than it is now” – leaving paywalls as an obvious and necessary solution. Beecher argues that it is possible for publishers to make the best of a bad situation by adopting three key strategies: publish enough free content – on current issues, breaking news, and gossip – to maintain the current audience and advertising; charge for ‘value added’ content such as investigative reporting, features, analysis and commentary (though Beecher states that “any
revenue gained here will be incremental”); and bundle online content with newspaper subscriptions as a way of protecting print newspaper circulations (in the short term). However, he maintains that these strategies only amount to a stop-gap solution, and that none will “solve the burning dilemma of how to fund highly-resourced quality journalism”.

The business model as an explanatory frame

What will solve Beecher’s (2009e) “burning dilemma of how to fund highly-resourced quality journalism”, it is implied, is the right business model. But despite the current tendency to employ the term ‘business model’ to encapsulate both the malady and the remedy facing contemporary news businesses, Froud, Johal, Leaver, Phillips and Williams (2009) argue that business model is currently an “indistinct term”, used to mean a variety of different things (p. 254). In discussions around the development of online news, the business model is used as a rhetorical device to describe the revenue-raising activities of media companies, and is often divorced from the broader social context in which such businesses operate. Froud et al. argue that the business model is best understood as socially located, encompassing both the financial characteristics of the firm, but also the varied and socially-shaped demands of external stakeholders:

All firms, whether public or private, are embedded within social networks of obligation where key stakeholders make influential
judgements about firm performance and those judgements then have important feedback repercussions on key variables such as share price in the private sector or the assessment of value for money in the public sector. (p. 255)

That is, while businesses are required to produce revenues, this is just one of the measures of performance for just some of their stakeholders. Stakeholder demands can be varied and specific depending on the circumstances because the question of “how much profit or what kind of product or service is expected (as well as the variables used to judge firm performance) vary in different contexts, activities and patterns of ownership” (p. 255; original emphasis). In the case of journalism, revenue might be one measure of performance for shareholder-stakeholders, but for other stakeholders, such as audiences and journalists, the provision of ‘quality journalism’ may be a more important measure of success.

By adopting Froud et al.’s definition of business model, it can be employed as they recommend – “primarily as an analytical device that adds understanding, rather than explicitly a prescriptive strategic tool that offers managers solutions or templates …” (2006, p. 7). It also draws attention to the way in which stakeholder demands are shaped by the political and economic context in which they emerge. For instance, Froud et al. contrast the expectations of stakeholders in the German market to the UK one. While the German stakeholders measure success in line with the expectations of a social
market, the UK experience is very different, and shaped by the particularities of its politics:

\[ \ldots \text{the market-based system of the UK rests on neo-liberal precepts that assert the market primacy of shareholders as owners and the capital market as a disciplinary check on management slacking. The result is a governance system that aims to align management and shareholder interests around corporate strategies of increasing shareholder returns. (Froud et al., 2006, p. 8)} \]

Thus the expectations of stakeholders are shaped by the specific political and economic context in which the business operates. This demonstrates the value of attention to the advanced liberal conditions in which news businesses are being shaped, which reflects the sorts of conditions Froud et al. outline as shaping stakeholder demands in the UK context.

It is also necessary to consider what other sorts of demands and measures might be made and used by stakeholders in the case of news businesses. Froud et al. (2006) argue that for private businesses, the aim is not only one of financial viability, but also credibility in the eyes of the stakeholders. The authors argue that this joining of viability and credibility is often achieved through the work of narrative, “including company narrative of purpose and achievement, industry narrative and grand narrative of economic
transformation” (p. 9). Arianna Huffington’s comment about the “Golden Age” of news, brought about by the combination of technology, innovation, changes in consumption and economic conditions is indicative of the sort of narratives that have emerged around the news industry as it adapts to a range of challenges, and this narrative itself is situated in relation to the larger ‘grand narrative’ of social and economic transformation wrought by the internet. This narrative tells us that news businesses need to find a new business model that will adapt to the irreversible path of technological evolution along which news finds itself intersected.

But there is also a counter-narrative, as demonstrated by Beecher, that seeks to question the viability, and especially the credibility, that this narrative attempts to secure for online news. Beecher’s counter-narrative questions the journalistic credibility of the forms that news takes in this ‘evolution’ as well as the financial viability of traditional journalism within this evolved media landscape. This is demonstrated throughout his critique of Fairfax Media, and specifically, their constant attempts to appease their shareholder-stakeholders through the attainment of the best business model, as my later discussion of the negotiations over the Fairfax board will illuminate. Rather, the narrative espoused by Beecher in his critique of Fairfax challenges the demands of stakeholders in news businesses to question not only the financial viability of news, but also its journalistic credibility, and demonstrates the multiple levels on which a business model can operate.
As this example indicates, satisfying the demands and measures of stakeholders can be further complicated when the business in question has not only financial but also social aims. This is so in the case study that Froud et al. explore: the BBC – the UK’s increasingly privatised public service broadcaster. But it is also true of privately owned or publicly listed news organisations whose social role requires vastly different demands and measures of success to its financial role. That is, the production of journalism, the very product that is being sold, can also be in conflict with the business imperatives of that company. In the example that I outline later in this chapter, Fairfax Media demonstrates the tensions between the social expectations of a news business whose journalism, in order to satisfy the demands of its traditional social role, requires levels of funding in conflict with the financial expectations of its shareholder-stakeholders. Similarly, Froud et al. argue that the sorts of services offered by a public sector organisation, which in its social role can be taken as analogous to news organisations, cannot be “easily or wholly reduced to simple measures of efficiency or value for money” (2006, p. 11).

This resonates with Thompson’s (1986) argument that a firm necessarily consists of disparate centres of action, and multiple and sometimes conflicting objectives – rather than the “organic unity” drawn together by management, as is often presented (p. 175). Thompson suggests that the firm is best understood as a “heterogeneous non-unitary, dispersed and fractured entity or social
agency” (p. 177; original emphasis). In this conception, the firm becomes the site of reconciliation of a range of objectives and expectations that are articulated, negotiated and juxtaposed – but not necessarily with a unified outcome. This conception of the firm is in direct opposition to the dominant understanding of the firm as a singular unitary identity. Thus it follows that there can be “no overarchingly unambiguous or fully coherent ‘meta-objective’ for the firm” but only a “shifting series of conflicting, contradictory and contingent partial ‘objectives’ organized with respect to particular knowledges and ‘interests’” (p. 178). Such contradictory objectives are clearly in play when journalism becomes compromised as media firms deal with current financial pressures. In a financialised environment, with a regime of shareholder value, the financial objectives of media firms are more pressing, and displace the broader social objectives of the firm. Further, there is no meta-objective that encompasses both the financial and social objectives of the news firm, thus the struggle to find a prescriptive business model to accommodate both. It is in its absence that the tension between the two arms of the business arises.

The BBC example outlined by Froud et al. also demonstrates that the balance between financial viability and political credibility can often be maintained until there is a major shift or adjustment required of a business. In the case of the BBC, this came with the broadcaster’s expansion into digital services. It was an expansion that required many more hours of programming material that was achieved at first by the provision of cheaper programs and
more repeats. But while this provided financial viability, regulators in the form of the BBC’s Board of Governor’s held the broadcaster to account for lacking the prestige – or credibility – that their quality measures demanded. They insisted the BBC do better, and they did, committing to 7,000 hours more new and original programming a year. This placed pressure on the business model, which was further compounded by the situation of expensive compulsory outsourcing placed upon the BBC by a succession of government privatisation arrangements. Under these conditions, the BBC was forced to “adjust internal labour costs” – that is, make job cuts. But while they present this as the only alternative for the BBC in order to balance viability and credibility, Froud et al. do not present this as sustainable, particularly if workers take action against these moves. Rather, the authors argue that what this model suggests is the need for a new kind of regulation which is framed not by the “preoccupations with markets, consumer choice and corporate power” (2006, p. 24) of mainstream economic analyses, but rather in terms of the business model. Such an approach would be broader in its scope and socially grounded, able to account for “political credibility and the interaction between composition of costs and the politically sponsored expectations of key stakeholders at the business level” (p. 24). In terms of our study, it demonstrates the way in which what was once a sustainable business model can become stressed to the point that it becomes unsustainable when new challenges arise. Below, I outline the way in which Fairfax Media provides a similar example, and further, the way in
which the reaction of *Crikey* demonstrates the tensions that arise when one element of a business model – or one particular objective – dominates the rest.

**The Fairfax board**

In recent years, Fairfax Media has become perhaps the most troubled media company in Australia. I will demonstrate how many of the troubles the company has encountered have arisen from tensions between the management and editorial branches of the company, and particularly, the make-up and direction of the company’s board of directors. Among the board’s many critics, Eric Beecher and *Crikey* have been some of the most vocal, positioning themselves as ardent opponents of the board’s finance-based decision-making at the expense of editorial investment. Within the recent history considered by this research, Beecher’s criticism of the Fairfax board first arose when then CEO David Kirk announced plans to reduce the broadsheet newspapers’ (*The Age* and *The SMH*) size by around 14 per cent, to a “slightly narrower broadsheet” (but not tabloid) size – something that never eventuated (Kirk, 2007; Ricketson & Williams, 2008). Kirk presented this as a move by the board to deliver what readers “keep telling us they want”. But Beecher argues that this announcement was used to hide the economic rationale and consequences behind it, including the 35 jobs and unspecified editorial space that would be lost due to the reduction in size. Beecher asks:
Why couldn’t they simply follow the Fairfax editorial mantra: tell the truth. That profits from Fairfax’s major newspapers are likely to decline substantially over coming years (like most major comparable newspapers throughout the world). That the reduction in page size is to save money … That in all probability there will be a net loss of editorial space when the page size is cut. (Beecher, 2007)

By February of the next year the discontent at Fairfax centred on the then editor of *The Age*, Andrew Jaspan, who, editorial staff claimed, threatened their independence, and who was in turn in an increasingly compromised relationship with senior management (Simons, 2008a).

In April of 2008, Margaret Simons reported on an ‘extraordinary meeting’ between *The Age* editor Andrew Jaspan and 235 editorial staff who voted that he was compromising their independence, particularly with reference to a number of sponsorships and partnerships made at a managerial or board level (Simons, 2008a). This came shortly after allegations by *Crikey* that the newspaper’s coverage of Earth Hour was compromised by their sponsorship of the event (Green, 2008b). Simons argues that the situation that emerged between Jaspan and the editorial staff essentially represented a motion of no confidence in the newspaper’s editor, but also provided evidence of deeper problems at the media company:
The fact that things were allowed to deteriorate to this stage is evidence of specturally poor management not only by Jaspan but by his superiors – Victorian Chief Executive Don Churchill, Fairfax CEO David Kirk and the Fairfax Board (Simons, 2008a).

Similarly, Eric Beecher argues that the incident points to larger problems within Fairfax, which are chiefly found at the level of the board and management. Beecher (2008f) believes that the Fairfax board was ill equipped to face the range of problems facing newspaper journalism and the challenges that lay ahead as it continued to converge with the internet:

Fairfax is in a bad way. It has no proprietor who understands media, its board works chiefly in the interests of its institutional investors, its share price is wallowing well below the levels of the sharemarket correction, its broadsheet business model has run out of growth and may be broken, its classified advertising base is eroding, it has been beaten by internet competitors in all key classified advertising categories, its editors have become marketeers, many of its journalists hold their owners and editors in contempt and its websites and in part its newspapers are being dumbed-down every day to reach a popular audience to replace a serious one.
However, despite the public nature of the incident, and the vocal concern from *Crikey*, within Fairfax there was only denial and counter-strike, with CEO David Kirk hitting back at journalists who leaked audio of the meeting to *Crikey*, and arguing that “Fairfax Media has never been in better shape” (“Kirk: Fairfax Media,” 2008). He continues: “I do not need any lessons in the issues surrounding ‘quality journalism’ from Eric Beecher. *Crikey*’s standards are hardly a credit to quality journalism”.

But by August 2008 it was harder for Fairfax to hide their woes, with the media company announcing cuts of 550 staff across operations in Australia and New Zealand, including up to 55 (or 14 per cent of) editorial staff at *The Age* – despite the week earlier posting a net profit increase of 47 per cent for the year (Ricketson, 2008d). The cuts were presented as a necessary and ultimately positive step by Kirk, who argued that the 5 per cent staff cut – which was met with a commensurate 5 per cent rise in the company’s share price – was necessary for Fairfax if they were to “succeed in the modern media world” (Hogan & Ricketson, 2008). Included in the cull was beleaguered *Age* editor Andrew Jaspan, who stepped down on the day of the announcement – 27 August 2008 (Green, 2008a). The following day, Beecher commented in *Crikey* on the lack of reflection on this latest incident, and those before it, from within Fairfax itself, arguing that there is “a distinct odour of internal censorship on this subject inside the Fairfax quality newspapers” (Beecher, 2008c). He argued that the silence from within Fairfax about its own demise suggests that the
newspapers and their journalism are not only financially compromised, but that the “pincer attack on fearless and independent journalism isn’t confined to sacking staff. It is editorial as well as commercial” – proving, he suggests, that editorial independence, as well as numbers, is under siege from management at Fairfax.

Despite – or because of – Beecher’s claims, a week later *The Age*’s media and communications editor Matthew Ricketson addressed the cuts and their context in a longer piece of analysis (Ricketson, 2008g). He positions the rise of the internet as the root cause of the cuts, and Fairfax’s current financial challenges – but not only because of the commercial threat it poses. Ricketson also explores the way in which the rise of the internet as a journalistic tool has worked to undermine the traditional methods that fuelled the investigative ‘real world’ journalism for which Fairfax became famous. He does also consider the threat that the internet poses to the newspaper ‘business model’, and interestingly, apportions some of the blame to former Fairfax head Fred Hilmer for failing to transfer their classified monopoly from print to online. Perhaps most startling, the statistic that “in 2003 *The Age* and *The Sydney Morning Herald* accounted for about 75% of Fairfax revenue; today they make up about 25%” (Ricketson, 2008g). Despite reiterating Kirk’s claims that the staff cuts will not affect editorial priorities, Ricketson concludes by questioning how the newspaper’s tradition of journalism will stand up to this further most recent challenge.
In the aftermath of this series of incidents, former Age editor (from 1997–2004) Michael Gawenda delivered the 2008 AN Smith Lecture in Journalism in his new role as the Director of the Centre for Advanced Journalism at the University of Melbourne. In the lecture he was highly critical of the recent direction of the Fairfax board in its management of its newspapers and approach to journalism. He argues that there is a “confusion and lack of confidence at Fairfax about newspapers” (Gawenda, 2008a, p. 7) that pervades the recent management of the organisation, and in particular, the recent staff cuts. This lack of confidence is best typified, he suggests, by the editorial approach to the 2007 federal election. Gawenda begins by describing the sort of confidence that surrounded journalistic culture during his years as a young journalist in the 1970s. In that era, editorial staff regarded their job with a certain weight, and editorials he argues, “were written with a tone of confidence, confidence that readers wanted and expected the paper to take positions on matters that mattered to them and their community” (p. 6).

Gawenda contrasts this to the editorial that ran in The Age on the eve of the federal election, 2007, in which the paper stated that they would not make a judgement as to which party ought to form the next government, as it traditionally had, because “the paper did not believe its role was to tell readers how to vote” (p. 6). Gawenda argues that this statement represents a “sort of surrender”, revealing a “fundamental misunderstanding of the role of editorials and an even more fundamental misunderstanding of the relationship between a
newspaper and its readers” (p. 6). This episode in *The Age’s* history, Gawenda suggests, encapsulates the fact that “newspapers are unsure of their role and deeply unsure of their future” (p. 6).

Like Beecher, Gawenda’s criticism of Fairfax rests squarely on the shoulders of the board, which he argues has lost confidence in the company’s newspapers and can no longer see a future for them:

> At a time of transition and great challenges for the newspapers, Fairfax … was run by people who had no experience of the business, no knowledge of its history and role in the communities in which their newspapers operated and what’s more, no great love of them. (Gawenda, 2008a, p. 11)

He attacks the board for its inadequate response to the loss of Fairfax’s classifieds monopoly, labelling its online classified sites (such as real estate website *Domain*, and cars website, *Drive*) “disappointing” (p. 11). Gawenda describes the process he saw unfold during his seven years as editor at *The Age*, wherein “journalism became content, reporters became content providers, the newspaper became a content platform” (p. 8). This change in nomenclature, Gawenda suggests, is symptomatic of an attitude that no longer values journalism in and of itself, but rather primarily as a business product. He suggests that the board, lacking in newspaper experience, was one of the first to
lead a newspaper company in Australia to reduce journalism to its business elements ..., and in doing so “junk[ed] the history and traditions of newspapers and journalism” at the company (p. 8).

The contents of Gawenda’s speech predictably caused a ripple in the local media. But confirming his earlier suggestion of internal censorship at the Fairfax papers around such matters, Beecher notes that the Fairfax coverage of Gawenda’s speech diverged from that of the Murdoch-owned papers on one important point (Beecher, 2008d). While *The Age* and *The SMH* boldly published Gawenda’s criticism, they omitted his pointed criticism of the Fairfax board, while *The Australian* did not (see Gawenda, 2008b, 2008c). Beecher suggests that Gawenda’s lecture made public what many media insiders have known for years – that “Australia’s premier newspaper publisher was (and largely still is) run by people with no experience of or love for newspapers” (Beecher, 2008d). Further, he agrees with Gawenda that there is a place, and a business model, for quality newspapers in the local media landscape: “It’s just that the people running Fairfax don’t even know how to start conceiving it”.

The defence from Fairfax came a week later in the form of CEO David Kirk’s (2008) address to the Sydney Institute. In the address, Kirk defends the recent moves by his company, arguing that they will not affect the quality journalism that distinguishes Fairfax’s publications. He positions himself as a supporter of the role of a free press in a democracy, and to that end is
committed to investigative journalism and the provision of insight and information for the benefit of civic society through the Fairfax press. Further, Kirk specifically addresses the criticism of Beecher and Gawenda:

I must say it is galling to have to listen to the self-appointed experts prattle from the sidelines. Some people think we should give up the fight. Eric Beecher has been a poisonous critic of our company, for reasons best known to him … a self-proclaimed champion of the cause of quality journalism in Australia, and publisher of that quality online site, Crikey, telling us to roll over and die.\(^{51}\) (Kirk, 2008)

But Kirk insists, “We won’t be throwing in the towel”. Similarly, he lashes out at Gawenda, criticising his “prescription” for a niche newspaper with a smaller circulation, premium cover price, and no lifestyle segments. Kirk notes Gawenda’s comment that such a publication would require a smaller staff than present – “I daresay, under Gawenda, there would be many more staff cuts at the Herald and The Age than we have contemplated”. But this defensive move by Kirk did not help much. By early December 2008 he was no longer Fairfax CEO, announcing his resignation following pressure from board members (Ricketson, 2008c).

\(^{51}\) This is in response to Beecher’s comments on (ABC Television current affairs program) Lateline, when asked by journalist Virginia Trioli, “What would you do with Fairfax if you got your hands on it tomorrow?” to which he responded, “Well, the first option would be to sell it or break it up and sell it. That’s what I would do … the problem is, if you owned 100 per cent of it and there wasn’t a share market to deal with, yeah, you could do lots of things with it … but whilst you’ve got a share register which is just open like theirs, no I don’t think there’s anything you can do” (Trioli, 2008).
But this only sparked a new controversy, this time surrounding Ron Walker, one, Fairfax chairman, and one of Kirk’s few supporters on the board. With Kirk gone, Walker’s chairmanship became the new issue of tension, symbolic of the problems facing the board and the company in general. Following Kirk’s departure, Beecher wrote of the deep problems facing the company:

The problems at Fairfax will get worse, not better, unless and until someone sacks the company’s board of directors … Fairfax Media is suffering from an almost total absence of direction, strategy, comprehension of its problems or understanding of its business … The culpability for the smoking mess at Fairfax, and for the death-by-a-thousand-cuts of Australia’s best journalism at The Sydney Morning Herald and The Age, lies entirely with the board. (Beecher, 2008c)

He is particularly scathing towards Walker, who released an announcement of Kirk’s resignation, praising his work at the company. “These are the words of a chairman of a company that has been hijacked and destroyed by a board of directors whose epitaph will read: They murdered Australia’s best journalism and newspapers without knowing what they were doing” (Beecher, 2008c).

Beecher had found a new target for his rage, and it was reignited when Walker became embroiled in a public feud with the Fairfax family over the direction of the board and company in 2009.
In September 2009, John B. Fairfax and his son Nicholas made public their dissatisfaction with Walker’s chairmanship when the latter announced his intention to delay his retirement from the position for another year. The Fairfax family, who own 9.7 per cent of Fairfax Media through their private company Marinya Media, responded by announcing they could no longer support Walker’s stewardship of the company, and would vote to dump him at the upcoming October Annual General Meeting:

Marinya, for one, cannot see how Mr Walker’s stated intention to delay his retirement assists the company or its shareholders. It unnecessarily defers the commencement of the much-needed process of board and leadership renewal and we consider it inappropriate that a departing chairman would be influential in the choice of new directors (Oakes & Huxley, 2009).

While Walker had the support of most of the board, the Fairfax family carry a substantial degree of clout within the media itself, and the following day Beecher came out in support of the Fairfax family, and soundly against Walker. He argued that Walker had failed as chairman to address the company’s biggest challenge in recent history, and failed to provide a plan for the future (Beecher, 2009a). He claimed that Walker and the board had failed Fairfax and that for the sake of the company he needed to step down:
To have any chance of surviving the media industry maelstrom, Fairfax needs to be guided by people like the Fairfax family, who understand newspapers and journalism, and others like them … Ron Walker should think hard about legacy — his own and Fairfax’s. Then he should gracefully resign. (Beecher, 2009a)

By the end of September, Walker was announcing his decision to step down – “in view of the unfortunate developments of the previous few weeks” (Zappone, 2009) – indicating an apparent truce between himself and the Fairfax family, who had originally opposed the ascent of Walker’s deputy Roger Corbett into his position, but seemed to reach an agreement to that end. But despite Walker’s resignation, Beecher remained adamant that the Fairfax board was mismanaging what was once Australia’s premier journalism company. He argues that Roger Corbett, “former grocer” (as CEO of the Woolworths supermarket chain) was not fit to lead a troubled media company at such a difficult time, illustrating this with an anecdote about an earlier encounter with Corbett, some five years prior, when asked to present to the Fairfax board about its company’s future. Beecher describes how he presented a “Catastrophe Scenario” based on the loss of a large portion of the company’s classified advertising – a scenario that is startlingly realistic today. Beecher tells of Corbett’s disdain for him and the scenario he was presenting, and his inability to conceive of the likelihood of such a scenario:
Throughout most of the hour I talked, Roger Corbett prowled the back of the Fairfax boardroom like a caged tiger, his body language suggesting a disdain for me and for what I was saying. After I finished speaking, Corbett moved to the head of the board table. Picking up a copy of one of Fairfax’s hefty Saturday broadsheets from a nearby pile, he told his fellow directors that he didn’t want anyone coming into the Fairfax boardroom again suggesting that people will buy houses or cars or look for jobs without “this”, as he held up the newspaper bulging with classified ads. (Beecher, 2009d)

Despite this attitude, Corbett was indeed elected to lead the company, being unanimously named the chairman of the board in mid-October 2009 ("Roger Corbett named Fairfax chairman," 2009). What followed was a period of relative calm for the company under Corbett’s leadership until the events of late 2010 saw more trouble in the media company.

In November 2010, Fairfax CEO (since Kirk’s outing in 2008) Brian McCarthy presented his vision for the future of Fairfax with the release of his updated strategic plan for the company. The plan proposed an integrated Fairfax across print and online operations, something that many within and outside of the media company saw as essential to ensuring the success of both arms and better relations between staff. But aside from this structural proposal,
the strategy failed to address the problem of “how Fairfax plans to better monetise its digital presence” (Bartholomeusz, 2010b). Two weeks after the release of McCarthy’s strategy, he was gone too – he said it was because he could not commit to the position for the three to five years the board demanded of him, but others suggest it was because his strategy had been underwhelming and he had lost the confidence of the board (Chessell & Clegg, 2010) or that a power struggle over the filling of management positions had emerged between him and Corbett (Day, 2010b). Just prior to McCarthy’s departure an anonymous group of “concerned citizens” – including several former Age executives – released a document, ‘The Age: a litany of decline’, damning the paper’s management, calling for urgent action to save the paper (Day, 2010c) and forming the basis of a campaign to demonstrate a public vote of no confidence in Fairfax management to take place in the coming year.

Following McCarthy’s departure, Beecher again decried the failure of Fairfax to confront its problems, specifically locating the problem at the level of the business model, not at the level of commitment to quality journalism, as he has previously:

The truth is that “quality journalism” (whatever that means) or the “very best” is not enough. The solutions to the future of newspapers such as the Herald and The Age lie in their business models, not just in their journalism … They need to be totally re-invented, editorially and
commercially, from top to toe … Otherwise they will take a large chunk of Australia’s most important institutional journalism down with them.

(Beecher, 2010a)

For Beecher, the champion of quality journalism, this is a remarkable shift of focus. It represents an admission that the pursuit of ‘quality journalism’ is no longer the sole determinant of the business success of journalism. However, it does not represent an abandonment – quality journalism still remains central to his vision of the future of journalism online.

Beecher’s direct acknowledgement of the necessity of finding a viable business model to underpin the quality journalism he seeks to secure is an important step in safeguarding his authority as an expert on the business of journalism. But it has little to do with *Crikey*, which already has a successful business model. This model involves a dual income stream with revenues raised from both advertising and subscriptions. Beecher admits that this model, while successful for *Crikey*, is unlikely to be adapted to other publications (E. Beecher, personal communication, 13 March 2009). Further, this model is also sustained by *Crikey’s* unique position in the media as an independent but reliable insider voice, and it is unclear whether the Australian media landscape could support another similar publication. What this reveals about *Crikey* and the discussion of the future news business model is twofold. First, *Crikey*, in its structure and business model, is more like what Shirky (2010) calls a “transformed
alternative” to the traditional newspaper model. Shirky argues that as news organisations erect paywalls around news content online, and their audiences contract, these sites become less like the newspapers they originated from, and more like online newsletters. Crikey already is an online newsletter, and in this it represents the sort of online alternative Shirky is describing. Secondly, Crikey’s successful business model, given its basis on such a different mode of news provision, cannot be offered as a widespread alternative in the search for a business model for quality newspaper journalism. It is these two facts in combination that, if acknowledged, could work to undermine Beecher’s, and Crikey’s, authority. But in downplaying these facts, and in working to maintain Crikey’s professional status in the mainstream media as outlined in Chapter Four, Beecher seeks to maintain a central position for himself and Crikey in negotiations about journalism’s future.

Indeed, as Beecher’s at times highly emotive engagement suggests, the series of recent events encompassing the Fairfax board expose the highly political nature of the current state of news and journalism. And while financially driven decisions on the part of the Fairfax board demonstrate an uncomfortable awareness of the economic realities of the contemporary news industry – realities that even Beecher, for all his idealism, is able to acknowledge – this does not mean that such decisions will secure and sustain journalism’s future. Rather, the moves at Fairfax, while financially necessary at a business and shareholder level, continue to undercut the quality journalism
for which the company has become known. Indeed, while decisions to prioritise the financial stability of the company over its journalistic reputation have led to a tumultuous time for the media company, there is no saying that the decision to prioritise its journalism would not have been equally tumultuous. As this quandary suggests, the problem for news businesses and journalists alike arise because these two branches of news – the journalism and the business model – that were once comfortably and successfully paired under different political and economic conditions, have come adrift. The challenge now for news producers is to find a path that values both imperatives – the journalism, and the business. However, it is not safe to assume that just because society has always had or ‘needed’ journalism, it will continue to survive. It is an unfortunate reality that current political economic conditions may mean that socially concerned journalism will always struggle – or that it will only survive where it can identify a niche business model, as Crikey did. The hope is that a model – or number of models – will be found that allow for the coexistence and balance between journalism’s social, political and economic imperatives. It is presently impossible to say what this or these model(s) might be, or whether they will indeed be ‘found’ and tested. But that is not to say that it is impossible.

Indeed, while this will by no means involve a rejection of the necessity of a business model for journalism, it will require an acknowledgement of the sort of business model that is necessary to secure journalism’s future. That is, the sustainability of journalism (online and elsewhere) requires a business model that grasps and values a broad conception of the news business, rather than a model with a narrow, solely financial focus. While a business model that focuses on the ‘financials’ – perhaps of the sort found at Fairfax – may be successful in the short term, evidence suggests that it is incapable of sustaining journalism’s broader traditional social and political remit in the long term.
Conclusion

This thesis ends with what must sound by now like a familiar tale. On the eve of submission, the Pew Project for Excellence in Journalism (2011) has released its latest annual report on the news industry in the US. Among its most striking findings is the revelation that, for the first time, more people reported getting their news from internet sources than newspapers. While television continues to be the leading source of news for Americans, the internet is closing the gap between first and second place. Significantly for those who say the struggle between print news and internet sources is not one of readership but of advertising, the report found that online advertising spending has surpassed print newspaper advertising for the first time. This thesis has argued that print journalism is being embraced by a broad crisis, and this latest empirical evidence adds to that which was offered in Chapter One to establish the nature of this crisis.

While the symptoms of the crisis are expressed through advertising spending and readership figures, its source is less easily conveyed. A changing technological environment, generational differences, a declining trust in the authority of journalists, and a qualitative shift in the practices of journalism are all held up as possible causes of this crisis. These various accounts swirl around the production, consumption, discussion and deliberation of online news, rhetorics that tap into familiar narratives about journalism’s already-written
decline. In opposition to these are the counter arguments about journalism’s renewal online, with the availability of new technologies posited as opening the way for a new, closer relationship between audiences and journalists, the democratisation of news production so that ‘anyone can publish’, and an increased civic or public role for journalism.

As I indicated in Chapter One, these competing rhetorics exist in opposition, suggesting either threat or opportunity in the advent of the internet and its intersection with the practices of journalism. But while this opposition makes for an interesting point of intervention into the arguments that surround the development of online news, they neither accurately describe the problems facing journalism, nor its possible solutions. As I outlined in Chapter Two, the genealogical approach allows for a more constructive take on the nature of this problem, through consideration of the way in which particular areas of social life are shaped into commonly held problems. By positioning journalism as a domain of action that has been shaped into a shared social problem, this thesis has been able to more precisely describe the historical nature of that problem.

In Chapter Three I outlined the way in which ‘the problem of news’ is deeply political. While for working journalists and the businesses that employ them the crisis affecting journalism is about financial losses, these concerns are underpinned by a concern about journalism’s traditional political role. This traditional model positioned the press as a fourth estate and additional check to
government power. The fear is that with the decline in traditional journalism, democracy will be less robust, its citizens less engaged. However, by demonstrating that journalism has long existed in a problematic and changing relationship with politics, any presumptions that this relationship is natural or essential are left on shaky ground. Rather, by working to position journalism as a cultural technology within a broad, governmental approach to politics, it is possible to see that journalism’s relationship to politics is not fixed but shifts in relation to changing political rationalities. It is the relatively recent shift from more socially-oriented incarnations of liberal government to forms of advanced liberalism, and the associated changes to journalism, that are of most concern to those who decry the loss of journalism as a fourth estate. I have argued that by decoupling journalism from its fourth estate role, a more productive, precise and mobile concept of journalism as a cultural technology can be grasped and used in description and analysis.

For instance, in Chapter Four I extended this approach to consider the way journalistic autonomy is used to shape journalism as a governmental technology in a range of political programs, but especially as part of the self-government of its own professional status. Within the changing professional environment, rhetorics of professionalism proliferate in attempts to secure journalistic authority in the face of perceived threats, like the one to the traditional newspaper audience posed by shifting news consumption habits outlined above. But in this environment, independent online news sites like
*Crikey* find themselves compromised by their twin desires for professional status, as well as recognition of their authenticity as alternatives to the mainstream media. In comparison, *The Age Online* embodies a changed professionalism online, particularly in comparison to the print newspaper from which it is made both culturally and structurally separate.

In Chapter Five I added to my political analysis by considering the way in which advanced liberal rationalities of government are reshaping the relations between audiences, news, and journalists. I describe how, in the conditions of advanced liberalism, audiences and journalists are increasingly brought into new, closer relations with one another. This refiguring of time and space between audiences and news producers has been popularly positioned as either a positive step towards the democratisation of news, or as a threat to the traditional journalistic news judgement that enshrines journalism’s fourth estate role. I map the way in which these changed relations are symptomatic of Thrift’s (2005, 2006) description of a broader refiguring of relations between producers and consumers in intensified and sped-up capitalist conditions. This refiguring can have swift disruptive impacts, as illustrated in the example of Catherine Deveny, an *Age* columnist who was sacked following a spate of negative readers’ comments in response to remarks made on her Twitter account.
This event is marked by the market populist logic that has come to infuse increasing areas of our social life. Deveny was sacked in response to the loud and clear voice of ‘the public’, exercising their voice as consumers. But I have suggested that another way to think of this event is as an expression of the operation of social network markets, the presence of which indicates the existence of creative industries as defined by Potts, et al. (2008). It was the negotiation of the value of Deveny’s contribution to *The Age (Online)* within the social network constituted by active consumer-commenters on that site that determined her value to that network and prompted her dismissal. The creative industries framework is instructive here because of the way it can be used to analyse the activities of social network markets. In my fifth chapter I have aimed to convey that this framework is of central importance to the development of online news, not only because of the way in which it is informing the framing, education, and training of professional journalism, but also because of the way that its politics brings journalism into being in quite specific ways. That is, the creative industries research and policy agenda positions news producers and consumers in a changed relationship, informed by a neoliberal focus on the market.

In Chapter Six I isolated the financial element of online news, considering the way in which the business model is presented as central to its development. While the rhetoric of the business model permeates discussions of journalism’s future, as a concept it is of limited utility because of what it
conceals. That is, the rhetoric of the business model seeks to detach the financial element of journalism from its broader social, political and cultural roles and is thus unable to account for the influence they have on the success of journalism. It is only with a broader understanding of the range of social groups with some sort of stake in the production of news that any assessment can begin to be made about its ability to survive in the future. While this of course requires a financial viability, it also requires maintenance (even in a transformed manner) of some sort of broader social role for journalism, and I argue, a continued consideration of what journalism can do for politics.

What then can be said about the future of news and journalism in light of this thesis’ investigation? While my aim throughout has been to suggest a constructive separation of journalism from its fourth estate role, I do not propose an apolitical journalism. Rather, I argue that journalism is deeply political given its status as a cultural technology, and thus always operating in relation to specific political rationalities and programs. However, I have also aimed to map the history of journalism’s fourth estate role and the way in which current historical conditions are dismantling this perceived traditional model. With this broader political and historical understanding, journalism’s relationship with politics remains, though it is re-imagined beyond the fourth estate. Further, the fourth estate is recognised as an untenable ideal, and it is the uncompromised commitment to it that brings discomfort to those railing against the current shifts occurring within journalism practices.
One remedy offered in the US is the public journalism movement, but this is underpinned by a populist logic that conceals the many social inequalities it seeks to address. Nonetheless, we can find promise in one of its central elements, perhaps not in the way its proponents imagine. Here I refer to the increased ‘interactivity’ or new closeness emerging between consumers and producers of content online. What Thrift has described as a reconfigured spatial and temporal relationship, bringing consumers into the processes of innovation, resonates with Keane’s (2009) description of monitory democracy in which “[q]uestions are raised about which SUVs are most likely to roll over, and which companies retail the worst fast food, and which are the biggest polluters” (p. 19). This new intersection between producers and consumers is suggestive of a way forward.

Keane’s monitory democracy is a far more useful rendering of journalism’s political possibilities replete as it is with the acknowledgement that it does not present an idealistic or utopian view of future democracy. Monitory democracy is, of course, political – it is even democratic – but without being attached to the objectives of a fourth estate. It accounts for and indeed exploits the changing media environment in which journalism now operates and in which audiences as consumers have access to worlds of information that were once beyond their reach. Within this environment, too, consumers are more willing to use their time, knowledge and skills to produce content and wrangle
information for free. Wikipedia epitomises the ever more prominent practices of non-market innovation in which people take part for altruistic reasons:

“people put information up on the web or contribute to Wikipedia, mostly anonymously, simply because they think it is a good thing to do” (Quiggin & Potts, 2008, p. 146). It is in this “gift exchange model”, alongside which Quiggin (in Quiggin & Potts, 2008) argues there is a growing importance of “collective innovation of individuals and households” (p. 147) that models of ‘computational journalism’ explored by Daniel et al. (2010) can be said to operate. As outlined in Chapter One, these models of journalism provide a larger space for the routine innovation of individuals alongside the expertise and reach of journalists.

These examples are suggestive of a vision of journalism’s future that can cut through the ‘threat or opportunity’ dichotomy, maintaining the political importance of journalism, but decoupling it from its fourth estate ideal. While acknowledging the way in which practices of journalism are being radically reshaped, these examples maintain a place for journalism without seeking a return to a former era. The tussles, struggles, disagreements, decisions and negotiations that fill the pages of this thesis suggest that the political, economic and cultural changes that are found within journalism come for some at a great cost. For those, like Eric Beecher, invested in maintaining journalism’s traditional political role, this might mean the re-imagining of the way in which his public trust model for journalism might be fulfilled. And while a return to
the journalistic models of social liberalism is not a battle likely to be won, advanced liberal politics has not rendered journalists completely redundant. Rather, there is a continuing need for the expertise of journalists, through the cultural technology of journalism, as part of the complex task of governing populations in an advanced liberal political rationality.

I would like to conclude by pointing out a suggestive connection between the communicative abundance that Keane argues makes possible new forms of monitory democracy, and Schudson’s (2010) call for the continued need for journalists-as-experts. Schudson begins by outlining Walter Lippmann’s call in 1920 for the establishment of ‘political observatories’ to make sense of the growing complexity of modern life. In the contemporary political environment the sorts of observatories Lippmann imagined have flourished. They take the form of non-government organisations, research bodies, advocacy groups, and increasingly, government agencies that are themselves involved in the monitoring of government. In short, these observatories are involved in the multiple tasks and processes of Keane’s monitory democracy. This proliferation of expert bodies does not make the work of journalists obsolete. Rather, Schudson argues that the “matters of professional training, experience, and judgement are as or more important than ever” (p. 6). In Schudson’s vision of a possible future journalism, these monitory bodies work alongside (a changed) journalism:
The population of news organizations in 2012 or 2020 will likely have many newspapers, but smaller, leaner staffs than today. It will have many new, online-only organisations run by a handful or a couple dozen journalists, perhaps with a significantly larger set of loyal readers who also serve as scouts, correspondents, or citizen journalists. It may have enhanced reporting capacity in public radio or television. It will surely be assisted by the large number of political observatories that we can think of as institutions of adjunct journalism. (Schudson, 2010, p. 7)

In Schudson’s projection, and Keane’s monitory democracy, it is possible to see a more carefully formed, precise, and qualified relationship between journalism and politics. But in spite of changing relationships between democratic mechanisms and journalistic practices, politics does not recede entirely. Indeed, as I have argued, the politics of journalism continues to be of utmost importance.
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