

THE CRITIC'S CORNER

Consolidating the Role of the Fourth Estate in Disaster Work

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Reflections on the role and function of the press, radio, and television in times of public emergency, led to a consideration of the platform of critical independence occupied by the news media as the 'Fourth Estate' since its emergence as an important constitutional component of society in the late 18th century. The result showed that while the original raison-d'être was to provide a reputable outlet for criticism of the policies and practices of the agencies of power in an emerging democratic state, vested interests have long compromised the noble purpose. The suggestion is that were the media to develop and consolidate its post-disaster work, it would improve the service it gives to the community and at the same time begin to reclaim the high standing it once had.

Introduction

The influence of the mass media in relation to the commission of crime, violence, use of harmful substances, suicide, and teenage sexual behavior is never far from awareness (Young, 1994/2004 update, Chapter 1; Brown, 1996; Ministries of Youth Affairs, Health, and Maori Development, 2005: 35-36). While the publicity has many positive aspects, it carries the risk of inducing copy-cat behavior, desensitization, re-victimization, or the perception of the

world necessarily as being a mean and fearful place (Family and Community Development Committee, 2000, Chapter 7).¹ Similarly the influence of the media in relation to disasters is never far from the spotlight, and it carries similar risks (including copy-cat behavior in the creation of major disturbances and riots).

The matter came sharply to mind with the constant television replay of the graphic and horrific consequences of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York on September 11, 2001 over the following two days. The riveting presentation recalled the pictures published after the napalm-bombing of the civilian population in Vietnam. But this time, when precise data on the reactions came to hand, the adverse effects of the compelling imagery could be confirmed as dose-related and vulnerability-related—the more the pictures were seen and the more psychologically vulnerable the viewer, the greater the psychological trauma they produced (Hamblen, 2005; Editorial, International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies, 2005).

Since then the bombardment of images continued with the retaliatory campaign against Al Qaeda in Afghanistan and its pre-emptive extension to Iraq—to say nothing of the barrage of reports from the conflicts in Northern Ireland, Israel and Palestine. Any pause in the display of agony, anguish, and carnage was taken up with accounts of the unenviable plight of people displaced by civil war either in their own country or seeking sanctuary abroad. Then there were the human effects of droughts, earthquakes, famine, volcanic eruptions, and most recently of the hurricanes in the southern States of America and of tsunamis around the coast of the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal to be absorbed by the receptive public. Even more numbing were the person-to-person embellishments via digital camera technology showing the atrocities perpetrated enthusiastically by captors at Al Ghraib against prisoners that violated any conceivable notion of decency (quite apart from the codes of the Geneva Convention (1949) and of the organizations of health professionals who would have been involved in the research, training and application of torture (Victorian, 1996; Physicians for Human Rights, 2005).²

The typical ‘ratings raisers’ use hyperbole to heighten rather than reduce community awareness of personal tragedy and potential trauma (cf. Raftery, 1997).³ They glorify the agony and distress of casualties,

and justify their excessive intrusion by saying that the public's 'need to know' is paramount. Soon their deliveries induce a surfeit of suffering that leads many people to withdraw with compassion fatigue, focus on self-preservation, and bunker down defensively within their circle of close family and friends—witness the focus on building anti-nuclear bomb shelters during the 1980's (Taylor, 1989, Chapter 8), and the current anxiety generated by the precautions adopted to guard against terrorism (Breckenridge and Zimbardo, in press). By persistently proclaiming threats to security, the news media foster a state of hyper vigilance that is counter-productive for all but those with hands on the levers of power (cf. McDermott and Zimbardo, in press).

In the words of a recent assembly of august academics and health professionals:

'Given the significance of the prolonged exposure to fear on the human mind and body, we should, as a society, be extremely aware of the actions and rhetoric of political leaders and media representatives who consciously contribute to sustained levels of fear, unrelated to the actual risk of attack. Equally important, significant long-term psychological and physical ramifications can be reduced by the adoption of a systematic, comprehensive coordinated approach to build societal resilience' (Ryan, 2005).

In their recent emphasis on the dramatic, the media made little mention of Archbishop Desmond Tutu's revelation in his foreword to *The Human Security Report* (2005, p.iii) that 'Over the last 30 years the collapse of some 60 dictatorships has freed countless millions from repressive rule. The number of democracies has soared, interstate wars have become increasingly rare, and all wars have become less deadly'. According to Andrew Mack, the Director of the reputable agency producing that report, 'The global media gave front-page coverage to new wars, but mostly ignores the larger number of existing conflicts that quietly ended. And neither the UN nor any other organization collected data on wars, genocides, terrorism and violent abuses of human rights' (ibid p. vii). Consequently the media is said to have latched onto whatever figures were available, and in the process to have created the myth that 90% of deaths in war were civilian (ibid p.75).

To press home the point about the superficial use of figures, the Report (ibid p.64) endorsed a UN source to say:

‘When it comes to statistics...numbers take on a life of their own, gaining acceptance through repetition, often with little inquiry into their derivations. Journalists, bowing to the pressures of editors, demand numbers, any number. Organizations feel obliged to supply them, lending false precision and spurious authority to many reports’.

Invariably wise words are pronounced by the authorities after disasters at follow-up conferences, and promises are made to improve systems of communication before another catastrophe occurs. But too often the logistic debriefing documents flow to the archives, and the next generation of journalists has to learn the lessons afresh. To take but one example, the seminal volume produced in the US by a committee of the National Research Council (1980) with contributions from leading practitioners and researchers on the role of the media in disasters has yet to bear fruit. One of the major stumbling blocks, in the words of the most recent update of the US Federal Emergency Management Association (FEMA) (2005, 4.1), is that some organizations ‘view the media in a negative light, based on past experience or stereotype notions of who the media is ... (and it warns) ... Media and public relations is an art that can take a professional years to master’.

To its credit, since 1999 the Dart Centre for Journalism and Trauma has organized a global network of journalists, educators and health professionals ‘dedicated to improving media coverage of trauma, conflict and tragedy’, and to addressing the consequences of the coverage for those working in journalism (cf. <http://www.dartcenter.org/about/index.html>). Some journalists and photographers have also begun to acknowledge the ‘silent scourge’ from the repetitive exposure to death and destruction as it affects them (Ochberg, 1998; Kalter, 1999; Owen, 2001; Ricciardi, 2002; Hollings, in press). Consequently it should not be too difficult for them, if not their colleagues, to imagine members of the public being affected in much the same way. Their experience might also inspire them to try to persuade the policy-makers in their organizations to regard disaster work as a matter of social concern consistent with their being constitutional ‘watch dogs’ of society.

Towards that end, it was thought appropriate to develop the proposition by showing examples of the positive responses the media has made to critical events, and to touch on the worthy principles of the fourth estate, before suggesting that the consolidation and extension of the one might also lead to the restoration of the other.

Positive Media Response to Critical Events

Despite the disparagement, many journalists have risen to the occasion when confronted with ‘socioticism’—a term coined to refer to the absolute disintegration of the social environment comparable to psychoticism, the complete breakdown of the mind (Taylor, 1986).⁴ At such times, to quote the historian Eric Hobsbawm: ‘When people face what nothing in the past has prepared them for they grope for words to name the unknown, even if they can neither define nor understand it’ (cited by Barbara Epstein, 1997). After the massive earthquake in Mexico City in 1985 that caused 6 to 10 thousand deaths and widespread damage, the local news media accepted the offer of a group of psycho-analysts to provide guidance and support to the benefit of the community-at-large (Palacios, Cueli, Camacho, Cleriga, Cuevas, Ayala, and Cossoff, 1986. But there are many similar instances of the media—particularly those local and nationally as distinct from internationally based—having acted as a conduit between the casualties and the emergency support services while satisfying the interests of their own management (cf. Auf der Heide, 1989, Chapter 10; *FEMA News*, 2003).

When the dust settles, the more discerning journalists begin to put disasters into perspective (cf. Langewiesche, 2002), while others move quickly onto diversionary themes (Rodrigue, 2002). They delve into the causes of catastrophe, and critically appraise the response to them of individuals, families, local communities, public authorities, and governmental agencies. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina of 29th August 2005 the judicious mix of media material from conventional and alternative sources gave a valuable pattern of accounts of what did and did not happen in the four states of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, and Mississippi. Within days, the first-hand reports from experienced journalists and amateurs with

cell-phones about the organizational and political complexity of the State and Federal emergency services helped to correct the tangle of rumor and misinformation about the ensuing anarchy and chaos. In chronological order, the paramedics Larry Bradshaw and Lorrie Slonsky paid tribute to the ‘heroes and sheroes’ of the residents for using basic skills and common-sense to do what was necessary to help others survive (network email received 9 September 2005). On the 11th September, the journalists Lipton, Drew, Shane, and Rhode (2005) applied their perceptive skills to highlight the conflicting policies and the structural inadequacies of the bureaucracies engaged in disaster response and recovery, as well as to point to deficiencies in leadership at different levels in the chain of command that compounded the suffering of the community. The electronic journal *Medscape General Medicine* broke convention by presenting a lengthy first-hand account of the frustrations of a volunteer medico with an emergency team on the front-line in Louisiana (Delacroix, 2005).⁵ *The American Scene* (2005) carried 16 pages of commentaries from people in the central disaster zone that reflected the altruism and compassion of people rather than the opposite. Davis and Fontenot (2005) also drew up a list of 25 ecological questions the authorities should bear in mind when conducting a critique of the overall organizational response to the disaster. Then as a healthy reminder for critics to retain a sense of perspective about the number of casualties involved, on 17 October 2005 the Director of the World Food Program reported that more than six million people died in 2004 from hunger and related diseases (<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=16203&Cr=food&Cr1>).⁶

For its part, the media in New Zealand drew attention to the work of a small international group of volunteer software developers, web designers, and graphic designers who quickly established a centralized web-site clearing house for information about refugees and their families displaced by Hurricane Katrina (<http://www.disastersearch.org>) (Lynne Pope—interviewed on ‘Morning Report,’ Radio NZ program 16 September 2005). At the suggestion of the US Joomla Open Source Community, three volunteers in America, Holland, and New Zealand, with the help of contacts in Sweden and Switzerland, produced a *Unified Central Name Database* with a

list of missing persons, survivors, and relocated refugees that could merge records from various scattered name lists and databases, such as msnbc.com and nola.com. It was a truly remarkable achievement that attracted more than 252,000 inquiries about missing persons within ten days of opening, to say nothing of the number of inquiries about other matters.

The same database carried a private and secure *Medical Records System* for the use of triage doctors treating patients at the disaster zones and refugee centers; a *Shelter Database* advertising the capabilities and needs for volunteer helpers, food, beverages, supplies; a *Volunteer/Helper/Supporter Pool* for volunteers who could offer their help in disaster aid according to their skills, and search to find where they may be needed; an *Employment Board* for putting unemployed evacuees and businesses looking for staff together; a document library of government aid forms; a *Forum* for easy communication between evacuees, families and their friends; a *Resources Database* showing a directory of links to important aid sites, government sites, and other websites providing vital information; and a *Morgue Database* in which family members might search for loved ones (while being advised to have supporters close-by should their worst fears be confirmed). Finally the group developed *Website Applications* that enabled other sites to add direct links for searching its database of missing people and those looking for people.

A Partnership in Disaster Management

The foregoing gave rise to three questions that need to be put to media organizations for consideration.

- The first is, whether they might accept an obligation to monitor the impact of manifold adversity other than in terms of circulation and viewer numbers;
- the second, whether they might play a part in the readiness, recovery and reduction phases of disaster, rather than confine themselves largely to the response phase; and
- the third, whether, with the tremendous resources at their command, they might be inspired to establish an ongoing community service in relation to disasters of any kind.

Were the outcome to be favorable, disasters could become established as a sector of expertise for journalists that would be comparable to their existing portfolios on business, education, employment, finance, health, justice, local government, central government, and international relations. It would also be consistent with the philosophical fundamentals of ‘the Fourth Estate’, and deserve to be mentioned in the respective Mission Statements of the press, radio, and television services.

Philosophical Fundamentals of the Fourth Estate

According to Wikipedia⁷ the first reference to the three estates was made in France in 1302. It described the clergy, the nobility, and the commoners as the distinct units of society that remained unchanged until the 1789 revolution (Underwood, 2003a). The Online Oxford Dictionary gave the later date of 1559 in Britain, with the cleric John Aylmer reporting a slightly different composition of power with the monarchy replacing the clergy. But both of the authorities agree that it was the Scottish social philosopher and literary figure Thomas Carlyle who in 1841 attributed the specific description of the ‘fourth’ estate’ to a speech given by Edmund Burke⁸ at least 50 years before. Evidently by Burke’s time the three estates of the realm had become transformed into the Lords Spiritual and the Lords Temporal (sitting in the House of Lords), and the House of Commons. But Burke went on to say, “in the Reporters’ Gallery yonder, there sat a *Fourth Estate*, more important far than they all .. Whoever can speak, speaking now to the whole nation, becomes a power, a branch of government, with inalienable weight in law-making, in all acts of authority.”

At the time Burke had gathered a coterie of writers and intellectuals around him to provide a wide platform for the dissemination and critique of policies that would avoid the excesses of the French revolution. Through discussions and the distribution of pamphlets, the group became respected as a powerful watchdog for: a) the emerging liberal democracy; b) exposing the state abuse of authority; and c) defending the rights of citizens against tyranny.⁹

When Thomas Carlyle took up the reins, he emphasized the need for intellectual leadership in Parliament, and the need to protect

individual citizens from both political domination and the power of mass persuasion. But over the ensuing years, with the increasing mechanization of the press, the advent first of the radio and then of television, and the domination of the press by business conglomerates with strong political links, the protection of individuals and the fundamental concerns of democratic society increasingly became neglected (cf. Underwood, 2003b; 2003c).

The Erosion of Ideals

The rearrangement of power and neglect of constitutional obligations did not pass unnoticed in parts of the world other than Britain and the United States. In 1924 Thomas Hunter,¹⁰ the founding Professor of Mental and Moral Philosophy and Principal of Victoria University College in Wellington, New Zealand, used his Presidential address to the Australasian Philosophical Society in Sydney to chide the press for being directed more by commercial interests and propaganda than the truth (Hunter, 1924). For good measure he declared that Parliament had failed by stifling freedom of thought and resolution. He went on (with words that have a familiar ring) to describe the country's economic system as a miserable failure for creating a 'Himalaya of wealth at one end of the social scale and the Saharas of poverty at the other', saying that 'too frequently wealth is not a sign of intelligence and hard work but of opportunity combined with a measure of moral callousness'. He flayed the education system for not developing initiative in pupils and a spirit of inquiry and a willingness to follow truth wherever it might lead, and he criticized the church for 'shackling human freedom with the chains of the superstitions and ignorance of a primitive people'. But the media's corruption of purpose continued unabated.

The 1949 Royal Commission on the Press in the United Kingdom ruled that the press was 'more than just another business. It had a public task and a corresponding public responsibility, being the 'chief instrument' for instructing the public on the issues of the day.... Democratic society therefore needs a clear and informed criticism; and a means whereby individuals and groups can express a point of view or advocate a cause'(cited in Underwood, 2003a). In the 1980s the

German philosopher and social theorist Jürgen Habermas expressed similar sentiments, saying that the public sphere was ‘an area of informed public and reasoned debate, to which the emergence of an independent, public market-based press was critical’ (Underwood, 2003a). He argued that such a social institution was necessary for preserving the basic rights that included the freedom of speech and assembly, the recognition of the inalienable status of human beings, and equity before the law.

Although the same worthy and democratic principles were pillars of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948*, they seem not to have been enshrined in codes of conduct of the news media.¹¹ Certainly the *Codes of Practice* currently applied by the New Zealand Press Council pamphlet (presscouncil@asa.co.nz), Free to Air Television booklet (<http://www.bsa.govt.nz>), and Radio booklet (<http://www.bsa.govt.nz>), are light on the founding principles—apart from stating briefly the need to preserve the freedom of expression, to satisfy public interest, and to balance competing interests. Somewhat defensively, the prime concern of the documents seems to be that of making clear the grounds for legitimate complaint open to parties who consider themselves aggrieved by comments the media might have made about them. None mentions a positive function that the media might have in the attainment of democracy, much less a positive role it might have in dealing with disasters.

According to Underwood (2003c), powerful national and international business conglomerates have taken control of the media. Under the banner of the global free market economy they have elevated self-interest above the fundamental necessities of life on which others depended (cf. Taylor, 1990; Korten, 1996; Bakan, 2005). In doing so they seem to be following Friederich Hayek (1899-1992), the authority who had inspired Milton Friedman and others of the Chicago School of Economics in providing the ideology for the New Right in politics. Hayek (1944), a Nobel laureate economist, lauded the narrow individualist stance of management as a necessary defense against the encroachments of centralized government. But he did concede that ‘a society in which a few can exert power to which they feel they are entitled may be highly unpleasant for the others’, although ‘at least it would be viable’ (Hayek, 1979, p.30). For him the

market reigned supreme in the determination of price, and it operated as a game in which ‘the results must be accepted as fair, so long as all obey the same rules, and no one cheats’ (ibid, p.11).

A principled man himself, Hayek would have been extremely disappointed by the subsequent behavior of many leading buccaneers in business and commerce. Their ‘corporate malfeasance’ has been ranked with other types of human disaster (Taylor, 2003). As a group they refute altruism, compassion, and community cohesion as basic motivating factors (cf. Jackall, 1988), except when needing the government to rescue their organizations from financial ruin. But because they either own the media or have strong ties there, their business ‘ethics’ are rarely challenged by journalist, much less their ideological inconsistencies.

Of course there are exceptions. For example, in the USA at the turn of the last century Lincoln Steffens (1931) disclosed the widespread corruption that was present in City Halls, and from the 1950’s Jack Anderson reported the results of his shadowy bureaucratic and political relationships with such people as J. Edgar Hoover of the Federal Bureau of Investigation and Senator Joseph McCarthy the communist hater, before exposing the Reagan-Iran/Contra deal to sell arms to Iran and channel the proceeds to anti-Communist forces in Central America (see <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAandersonJ.htm>—accessed 31 December 2005). Also deserving of mention are the journalists Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein of the *Washington Post* for giving full publicity in 1972 to the Nixon-Watergate scandal concerned with wire-tapping the proceedings of the democratic convention in Washington DC,; the independent journalists like Seymour Hersh for exposing the My Lai massacre in the Vietnam War; as well as Robert Fisk and John Pilger for presenting perceptive accounts of ‘anti-terrorist campaigns’ that currently have the major powers on the brink of World War 3. There are also the journalists to be remembered who either have been killed or taken hostage while working at the frontiers, or imprisoned by their own governments for expressing dissent, as well as those who on principle steadfastly protect the anonymity of their sources while reporting their findings.

But regrettably many competent journalists compromised their independence by becoming subservient lobbyists, propagandists,

and ‘spin doctors’ (trainers in the art of confabulation) for pressure groups and people in power.¹² Others became free-lance Pulitzer prize-hunters and paparazzi that hunted in packs for the elusive ‘scoop’, and some chose to be ‘embedded’ in military organizations that could not but compromise the content of reports they wrote.¹³ The occasional journalist also fabricated stories, like Jayson Blair who ‘wrote falsely about emotionally charged moments in recent history, from deadly sniper attacks in suburban Washington to the anguish of families grieving for loved ones killed in Iraq’ (*New York Times*, 2 May 2003).¹⁴ Almost as bad were the pretenders hired from tax-payer funds to present themselves as journalists with stories concocted for propaganda purposes (Editorial, ‘Faux news is bad news’, *New York Times*, 4 October 2005), and the Lincoln Group that paid to get stories published in Iraq and Afghanistan as if they were produced independently by local journalists (*New York Times*, 11 December 2005).

As a result, it can be argued that the owners of the media abused the legacy of their forebears, their journalist employees lost the right to be regarded as watchdogs of democracy, and the lucrative attractions of free-lance work corrupted the aspirations of others. But were the media to take a sustained interest in disasters, they could do much to regain the moral standing of their predecessors.

As a parting thought, there is the example of Count Leo Tolstoy to bear in mind, because he joined the Russian Army to fight in the Crimean War in 1865 and extend the range of his experience of life and tragedy. He wrote a series of monthly articles about his first-hand experience of front-line combat that led subsequently to his monumental volume *War and Peace*. There are also the highly moral journalists to be remembered who have been killed, taken hostage while working at the frontiers of conflict, or imprisoned by their own governments for expressing dissent, and those who on principle steadfastly protect the anonymity of their sources while reporting their findings.

The Challenge

Were they to make a stand, the media would need to study disasters *per se* in their initial training and up-dating of professional requirements.

The course would take them beyond the immediate response phase of disasters, that Balduc described as ‘having all the ingredients for the perfect media event...It’s brief, spectacular, often mysterious, action-oriented, and portrays human suffering and courage’ (cited in Auf der Heide, 1989, Chapter 10). It would lead to a consideration of the problems encountered in the recovery, reduction, and readiness phases¹⁵ each of which would provide opportunities for informed criticism and debate consistent with a continuing involvement in social policy (cf. Ministry of Civil Defence and Emergency Management, 2002; 2003). It would go beyond addressing the personal psycho-social hazards of working in a stressful environment, to put disasters, casualties, and consequences into a meaningful philosophical and social context (cf. Bracken, 2002; Peters, 2005).

A focus on the recovery phase alone would yield more than enough material to whet their intellectual appetites (cf. Norman, 2004.). Presently the prospect of recovery and reconstruction in places like New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina must alarm planners and policy-makers alike. How would anyone set about creating a viable community from scratch? What skills would they need? Whom should they consult? What factors should they take into consideration, and in what order of priority? How long would it take? What costs are involved, and who would meet them? The questions lead into the risk reduction phase to prevent the recurrence of catastrophe, such as the raising of protective barriers, leaving original wetlands aside for drainage rather than housing development, and the relocation of industries, towns, and even cities. To his credit the journalist Robin Pogrebin (2005) has opened the issue. He reports that many architects and town planners have already begun to respond to the challenge—but his colleague Paul Krugman (2005) was not sanguine about the prospect without there being a substantial change in the prevailing political and economic philosophy in Washington.

Obviously there is plenty of scope for the media to take a sustained interest in phases of disaster recovery and reduction. Politics aside for the moment, there are templates available from the creation of many large cities and towns throughout the world in the last century from which lessons might be drawn.¹⁶ Already in earthquake-prone Wellington, the capital of New Zealand, an urban designer has begun

to contemplate the benefits that might arise from such a catastrophe (*Dominion Post*, 10 September 2005). But new cities consist of more than bricks and mortar. They need to accommodate people psychologically and socio/culturally as well as physically, and for that they require an appropriate mix of interdisciplinary planners who are able to share a common pathway for as long as it takes to finish the job (Taylor, 2004).

In approaching the more comprehensive and sustained task, the media might consider the succinct conceptualization of the social theorists Aberle, Cohen, Davis, Levy, and Sutton (1949/50)—but there will be others to guide them (cf. Dynes, 2003). The Aberle team defined a society (i.e. a community) as a group of human beings ‘sharing a self-sufficient system of action which is capable of living longer than the life-span of an individual, the group being recruited at least in part by the sexual reproduction of the members’. They made clear that to be viable a society has to be able to adapt, manipulate, and alter its situation to deal with threats, natural hazards, and technological changes. Its activities have ‘to be broken down and assigned to capable individuals trained and motivated to carry them out’. They pointed out that a society requires a common language and medium of communication, and a shared cognitive orientation to make the social situation stable, meaningful, and predictable to its members. It needs a shared and articulated set of goals, a normative regulation of means, the regulation of affective expression, and provision for the socialization of new members.

But no plan will succeed if it is foisted on a beleaguered community without consultation, and in this matter the media has an important part to play both as a stimulator and a mediator in voicing community concerns. For that reason, the Ministry of Civil Defence and Emergency Management in New Zealand has established a central interactive committee that *inter alia* would invite the media members to broaden their conventional inquisitorial role and function with regard to disasters (National Civil Defence Plan, 2002, sec. 7). However, it is evident from local inquiries that the deliberations of the joint planning committee have yet to be disseminated and discussed with working journalists and their organizations further down the line.

Were the media to consolidate their disaster work as suggested, they would improve the service they provide the public ahead of disasters, during disasters, in the recovery from them, and then complete the circle by making critical contributions to debates on prevention. In the process they would also do much to reclaim the respect of the community at large.

The matter is open for discussion.

Notes

1. To take the viewing of violence as but one example, the *PTC State of the Art Television Industry Report* (2004) observed that ‘Well over 1000 studies point overwhelmingly to a causal connection between media violence and aggressive behavior in some children... (*and that*) by the time an average child leaves elementary school, he or she will have witnessed 8,000 murders and over 100,000 other acts of violence. By the time that child is 18 years-of-age: he or she will witness 2,000,000 acts of violence, including 40,000 murders.’ Also, Thompson and Yokota (2004) found a marked tendency for classified movies in all categories to have a higher rating of potentially objectionable content than in previous years, the Paediatric and Child Health Division of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians (2004) drew the matter to the attention of its membership, and Strasburger (2005) correlated the promotion of violent themes directly with displays of aggressive behavior in real-life situations.

2. Conceivably the impact might have been compounded by the intensity and multiplicity of different press and radio reports, by subsequent fears of further terrorist attacks, and by the many intangible and extraneous factors that contribute to adverse clinical reactions (cf. McFarlane and Yahuda, 1996), but studies have yet to disentangle the presentations from different providers and different casualties sufficiently to address the point.

3. At times the media is known to create panic of major proportions—witness the now-classic episode of H. G. Wells’ ‘War of the Worlds’ that was broadcast in 1938 (cf. *American Atheists*, 2005), and the recent race-riots in Sydney incited to some extent by talkback radio (www.new.com.au/story 16 December 2005; www.

guardian.co.uk/print/0.3858,5358646-110732,00.html 18 December 2005; *Radio's War of the worlds broadcast in 1938* (rep. 2005)—accessed 16 December 2005 from <http://www.members.aol.cpm/jeff1070/wotw.html>).

4. Such extreme devastation does not often happen, although there are a few clear examples of it on record - in the USA with the devastation of Galveston, Texas by a hurricane in 1900 (Larsen, 1999), in Europe with the plaster-bombing of Dresden by the British in World War 2 in February 1945, and in Japan with the obliteration of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by American atomic bombs in August 1945.

5. But as George Lundberg (2005) Editor-in-Chief of *Medscape General Medicine* warned, 'since the blogger may be the author, editor, publisher, advertiser, critic, reviewer, and owner—all at the same time and fake the whole thing. A trustworthy medical company may embrace unfiltered blogging at its ... peril'.

6. Similarly, soon after 9/11, 2001, the epidemiologists Wallace and Pritchard (2004) reported that every fortnight in the USA the total death from 'internal' causes (suicide, homicide, and road accidents) exceeded by 30 times the number killed by the 'external' attack of terrorists in New York and Washington. They were anxious to ensure that funds would not be diverted from areas of continuing heavy demand to meet dramatic events, and, no doubt with tongue in cheek, they paraphrased *Hamlet* to say that there is no private grief worthy of public note unless 'the media makes it so'.

7. Any doubts about the accuracy of such an emerging database as compared to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* might be somewhat resolved by the findings of Giles (2005) and the enthusiastic support of Phillip Campbell, the Editor-in-Chief of *Nature* in the same volume (p.890).

8. Burke was an eloquent, inveterate, if at times long-winded, orator. But he made a number of pithy observations that included 'All government, indeed every human benefit and enjoyment, every virtue, and every prudent act, is founded on compromise and barter': and 'When bad men combine, the good must associate; else they will fall one by one, an unpitied sacrifice in a contemptible struggle'.

9. Yet curiously in his extensive biographical entry about Burke in the *Stanford Dictionary of Philosophy*, Ian Harris (2004) makes no mention of Burke having fostered the fourth estate.

10. Hunter's contributions in many fields earned him the first Knighthood awarded to an academic in New Zealand (Beaglehole, 2003).

11. A veteran journalist recalls being told as a junior reporter that his job was simply 'for publicizing thoughts that need assistance, for the wrongs that need resistance, for the future in the distance, and for the good we can do'—personal communication Jim Tucker, Executive Director, NZ Journalists Training Organisation, 30 August, 2005.

12. At the height of a scrap between politicians in the lead-up to an election in New Zealand, a panel representing advertising agencies, public relations advisers, and speech writers concurred with silence when one of them declared openly that they were all 'paid liars'—*Close-up* TV1 9 September 2005.

13. See 'The media embedded' at <http://www.tomdispatch.com/index.mhtml?pid=418>;

'Tomgram: Michael Massing on Iraq coverage and the election' at <http://www.tomdispath.com/index.mhtml?pid=2020>—both retrieved 11 September 2005; and Isaac Baker 'Embedded in the Spin Cycle' *IPS-Inter Press Service* retrieved 12 September 2005.

14. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Journalistic_fraud catalogues more examples that arose in the USA. But other countries are not exempt—e.g.: in New Zealand the Press Association reported the firing of a journalist of the *Herald on Sunday* for fabricating stories (*Dominion Post*, 24 October 2005), and the next week it reported the resignation of the director of the right-wing Maxim Institute after his exposure for plagiarism (*Dominion Post*, 5 November 2005).

15. The four phases are virtually the same as the preparation, response, recovery, and mitigation phases identified originally by Thomas Drabek (1986) from his monumental study of over a thousand disasters.

16. For an initial orientation see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_town—accessed 12 September 2005

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