

A news story as big as a doctoral thesis? Deploying journalistic methodology in academic research

Lee Duffield

Queensland University of Technology

l.duffield@qut.edu.au

Lee Richard Duffield PhD draws on a long background in news media and public affairs, writing as an academic on Journalism education, mass media and Europe, and development communication in the Asia Pacific. A journalist for more than twenty years with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, he was the first news editor on the Triple-Jay youth network and was European Correspondent at the time of the opening of the Berlin Wall. He teaches Journalism at the Queensland University of Technology, edits the online publication euastralia.com, is principal editor of the text *I, Journalist* (2006) and author of a monograph, *Berlin Wall in the News* (2009).

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to identify and recommend the emergence of an academic research methodology for Journalism the academic discipline, through reviewing various journalistic methods of research – those making up a key element in such methodology. Its focus is on journalistic styles of work employed in academic contexts especially research on mass media issues. It proposes that channelling such activity into disciplined academic forms will enhance both: allowing the former to provide more durable and deeper outcomes, injecting additional energy and intensity of purpose into the latter. It will briefly consider characteristics of research methodologies and methods, generally; characteristics of the Journalism discipline, and its relationship with mass media industries and professions. The model of journalism used here is the Western liberal stream.

*A proposition is made, that teaching and research in universities focused on professional preparation of journalists, has developed so that it is a mature academic discipline. Its adherents are for the most part academics with background in journalistic practice, and so able to deploy intellectual skills of journalists, while also accredited with Higher Degrees principally in humanities. Research produced in this discipline area stands to show two characteristics: (a) it employs practices used generally in academic research, e.g. qualitative research methods such as ethnographic studies or participant observation, or review of documents including archived media products, and (b) within such contexts it may use more specifically journalistic techniques, e.g. interviewing styles, reflection on practice of journalism, and in creative practice research, journalistic forms of writing – highlighting journalistic / practitioner capabilities of the author. So the Journalism discipline, as a discipline closely allied to a working profession, is described as one where individual professional skills and background preparation for media work will be applicable to academic research. In this connection the core *modus operandi* will be the directly research-related practices of: insistent establishment of facts, adept crafting of reportage, and economising well with time. Prospective fields for continuing research are*

ANZCA09 Communication, Creativity and Global Citizenship: Refereed Proceedings: <http://anzca09.org>

described:- work in new media; closer investigation of relations among media producers and audiences; journalism as creative practice, and general publishing by journalists, e.g. writing histories.

Introduction

The idea of a large research work as a “giant news story” came up as a reflection on practice by the present writer, whose 2003 doctoral thesis in the Journalism discipline was based on a review of work done as an overseas correspondent, and examined the role of news media in historical crises. It focused on the particular issue of the collapse of the Eastern Bloc in 1989, taking in the opening of the Berlin Wall. The methodology employed could be called orthodox, an interpretive approach, qualitative research *via* three inquiries: a literature review of histories being written about the social and political crises under investigation; semi-structured interviews with a large panel of journalists reflecting on their coverage of those crisis events, and then a review of documents, specifically a contents review of newspaper, television and radio coverage of the time, drawn from the archives of six major news services.

However the exercise had some peculiarly journalistic properties. The first of those was a fourth methodological element in the background to the study: observation, corresponding with the recognised academic research method of participant observation, yet necessarily more engaged and less structured. While well documented with an archive of scripts and recordings, it was made by the researcher in the particular field of crisis, the fall of the Wall, as a journalist, before commencing the research project. A second characteristic was the strong element of empathy between the interview subjects and the researcher because of shared professional assumptions and experience; a circumstance crucial to the inquiry though with obvious pitfalls had the interviewing not been at least semi-structured. A third was the specialised competence of the researcher to review media contents and describe how the news had been gathered, through strong life knowledge of that subject. Another journalistic characteristic was the management of particularly large volumes of material in media reports to discover the quality of sense-making that had been achieved; and another, using news values recognised among journalists to judge the exactitude of the media coverage under review.

From these we can draw out a further characteristic, that a journalist as researcher, writing about journalism, can adopt an inside perspective on arcane activity. Several other parts will be listed in the profile of journalistic research capabilities. For one, journalists’ work in news production always involves constant crafting of products, never simply unearthing and

documenting data before commencement of writing. Other aspects of journalism that influence research style: Journalistic work is highly dependent on societal and legal freedoms; and it is also transparent, as it is typically exposed to view at each step from source to publication, though this idea is open to challenge (given that sourcing and agenda setting frequently will be closed), and contentious because of arguments at a theoretical level over meanings.

The purpose here is to identify a research methodology for Journalism the academic discipline, by describing or explaining how it relates to various journalistic methods of inquiry. It may be seen as a sub-species of general academic research methodology, with certain distinct forms of investigation of its own and a main interest in mass media issues for subject matter. The paper will briefly characterise research methodologies and methods, generally; and list characteristics of the Journalism discipline including its relationship with mass media industries. Professional journalistic practice will be reviewed as to how it contributes to the foundation of the “journalism” research methodology, applied to academic work. Some contemporary research by scholars in Journalism and related fields will be referred to.

Research methodologies

Research methodologies are sometimes referred to as theories of research practice (Neuman 2003: 70-87, in Watson 2008: 28), theory being a way of organising ideas or information and making explanations. As mentioned, an *interpretive* kind of methodology was employed to make sense of the role of news media in an international crisis. The methods were qualitative, involving interviews and extraction of themes from an analysis of archived media reports. Under *positivist* methodology, more quantitative methods would be applied, e.g. statistical analysis of data from systematic attitude and opinion surveys. Writers on social relations using a *critical theory* approach, e.g. following posits of Barthes or Derrida will test a framework of assumptions and observations about language and power. In that connection, Ray (2006:38), quoting Landow (1992), observes a paradigm shift “from conceptual systems founded upon ideas of centre, margin, hierarchy, and linearity ... to ones of multilinearity, modes, links and networks.”

In creative disciplines, *practice-led* research has its own methodology, as described by Dunlop (2008), where the practice and product become both vehicle of inquiry and the output of the research (*see* Gray and Malins 2004). It must accommodate insider perspectives and subjective decision-making, but also has a history of accepting commentaries from observers

outside of a particular discipline area (Sullivan 2005: 83-84). Methodology gives a context for the inquiry process and a “basis for its logic and criteria” (Crotty 1998: 66). Methods are ways of gathering data within such contexts, and there is also a custom whereby a survey of methods in a particular field, putting them together, can be used to identify the methodology in use. In the present case a framework for a journalistic methodology will be posited and an array of methods described; the two to be matched and evaluated as a prototype description for journalism as a factor in research for academic purposes.

Journalism as an academic discipline

Journalism as an academic discipline is defined by its relationship with mass media industries and professions, and with associated disciplines. By this Century vocational, undergraduate Journalism courses had become pervasive (20 Australian universities offering them), popular with prospective students (many from the higher ranks of matriculants), and highly accepted by media employers who notice the benefit of obtaining start-ready graduates. This has helped in the “professionalisation” of journalism itself, in step with other sectors of industry, as Bromley (2000:6) observed: “Going to J-school has assumed the status of a ritualistic rite of passage into an occupation which has conscripted higher education as a means of enhancing its own status and power ...”

The discipline has become well institutionalised like other vocational disciplines, e.g. education or psychology. It has its national associations and international affiliates; conferences; highly-regarded journals; professoriate; “networks” and bodies of alumni. Its research has various branches including: pedagogical studies aimed at preparing new journalists for a radically changed mass media environment; related theoretical work attempting to make sense of the global contexts of media, and inputs into journalism education in response to social concerns, e.g. trauma studies or multicultural learning. A full account of the research program is revealed in the contents of four refereed journals published in Australia, on journalism, *see Appendix 1*, including the affiliate of the Journalism Education Association (JEA), *Australian Journalism Review*, in 2009 ranked A* in the ERA (Excellence in Research for Australia) journal list. The fact of more mass communication going on in society, accompanying the explosion in information and communication technologies (ICT) has increased the drive to theorise journalism as a social phenomenon, on the part of both Journalism and other academic disciplines.

Journalism scholars are from two main sources: Those continuing a tradition of practitioners transferring into academic roles, predominantly respond to demands from industry for

professionalisation and professional preparation. Others recruited directly from doctoral research with slight professional background meet a demand for more Higher Degree work and research. In both cases the concern is broadly with media in society, studies by Journalism researchers aiming to resolve concerns of practitioners. A good illustration of this is provided by the session topics for the JEA 2008 annual conference (JEA 2008), which ranged from micro studies of issues to do with writing and ethics, to curriculum reviews, to broad sociological attacks on new threats and opportunities confronting mass media. *See Appendix 2.*

While clearly offering service to industry through such research, the discipline has evolved away from an overweening focus on skills and job training. Debates in the United States in the late 1990s revealed strong demand for tertiary education by prospective journalists, in the form of good degrees including Higher degrees, as well as vocational degrees from Journalism schools. This trend was imposing pressure on ex-practitioner teachers without doctorates to keep up, e.g. as discussed in the Freedom Forum studies by Medsger (1996).

A closer look at the JEA program referred to above suggests the mature condition the Journalism discipline has now acquired, as a structural base for study of mass media issues. It is a small discipline but being to do with mass communication, strategically placed in the current phase of the history of knowledge and ideas. The writer drew from the conference program and used standard Internet search engines to obtain details on over 60 participants who delivered the 47 papers or chaired sessions. Leadership in this group was located in a category made up of academics with both a background as practising journalists, (at least five years full-time, frequently much more, often at senior levels), and academic attainment signified by holding a PhD. There were 17 in this category, including 11 of the 12 professors or associate professors. A second group, of 22, had journalistic background and no PhDs; (it included junior academics working towards doctorates). (A third group, of 14, was made up of PhD holders with no journalistic practice; and a fourth, 10, had neither journalistic background nor PhD credentials; but these last two categories included several guests from other disciplines, e.g. nursing, psychology, reporting on media issues or inter-disciplinary projects).

Work of the World Journalism Education Congress initiated by the United States-based Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC), drew in 27 organisations to convene the first international Congress at Singapore, in 2007. Debate among educators from Africa, Asia, Europe, North America and the Pacific region focused firstly on a qualified affirmation of orthodox values and standards of news reporting, and secondly on

ANZCA09 *Communication, Creativity and Global Citizenship*: Refereed Proceedings: <http://anzca09.org>

ways of coping with exponential economic, social and technological change. Preparation included the publication of the UNESCO Model Curricula for Journalism Education for Developing Countries (2007). Outcomes took in publication of the deliberations of the Congress (Goodman 2007), gathered under headings that included adaptation of journalism to the digital age; multiple voices in an era of consolidation, and the role of journalism education in changing the media.

Journalistic methods applied to academic work

Verification and crafting, in time

The journalism referred to here is the liberal mainstream, founded in the “Western” world but practiced everywhere especially in global publishing enterprises, e.g. BBC World, Al Jazeera, CNN, supporting free flow of information focused on establishing facts. It is in the model proposed by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), insistent on extensive media freedoms everywhere, in whatever circumstances, see www.ifj.org, (23.1.09). By the well-worn standard of the “four theories” (Siebert and Schramm 1956), this journalism lending itself to an academic standard of work may be “social responsibility” or rather “libertarian”. In a more contemporary treatment, Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001:70) identify the keystone of it as *verification*, highlighting the core *purpose* of the enterprise (to tell what is new and true), and the *practice* (to find best ways of finding out). We can draw from that the factor of *crafting* the news, and a dependable, two-step descriptor is at hand: Journalism is a business of establishing facts, but inseparably also a business of getting attention to those facts and explaining them effectively.

A third factor, *time*, is instrumental. As there is a constant flow of news, which makes deadlines crucial, *establishing facts* and *crafting* are done more or less simultaneously. So the journalist will be styling an artefact from the initial moment of conception of their story. For example the journalist may see the prospective new fact as a topical peg with which to start the report, to be supported by points recast from earlier reportage. That would show in advance what the eventual structure should be, while influencing the selection of leads to get the most relevant information. It is an efficient mental process, rigorous enough to deliver a research outcome that can withstand public scrutiny.

Doing research for the news

Research for the news is sometimes called “naïve empiricism”, whereby the journalist will trawl through possibilities looking for signs of a new development, construct an informal hypothesis from those and commence inquiries. It has a focus on evidence, where the journalist works to obtain a fact, which is tested through their own inquiries, but also is sent immediately for testing well beyond their resources, by being published.

To depict this process in two cases:-

In August 1997 “Diana is dead” was a news story founded on a fact which millions of people wanted to know of, but which was very difficult for a time for journalists to establish. In the hours after the car accident, verifying the person’s death was a matter of intense and serious investigation against misinformation (e.g. release of a “partial” medical report giving the minor injuries only), and some official obstruction.

A second example is the case of whether the East German politician Gunter Schabowski meant to announce on 9.11.89 that the Berlin wall was to be opened. News of this had immediate impacts as crowds stormed the wall. This writer investigated a detailed argument from a former Eastern bloc journalist, J. Horvat, that Schabowski meant to announce something else about the way that border restrictions were to be relaxed, which if reported as he’d intended, would have produced a controlled and ordered movement of people, and presumably not the overthrow of the communist state. Reviewed carefully over time, the text of Schabowski’s statement, his own public recollection of it, non-journalistic histories, and the text of media reports of the night all show that Schabowski, as spokesperson, accurately reported a decision of the communist party Central Committee, and was in turn accurately reported in the news. It then became a fact that the barrier to human movement was removed by those who had erected it; tested by concrete deeds. (Duffield, 2009: 138-9).

The news investigation in such cases involves discovery, and the news recipients (e.g. Britons preparing to mourn; East Germans preparing to cross the frontier), will themselves be able to validate it, and use it. Journalists also will deploy standard operational devices to produce the evidence for facts they have discovered and reported.

The first of those is the famous device of “objectification”, which means deferring one’s own interests and opinions while working. This can be wrongly confused with an idea of journalists being “neutral” in the sense of having no views and developing uncaring

personalities. It is actually just a manner of thought, or mental posture for trying to assess evidence effectively. The second device is called “checking”, a routine that gives rise to the myth of journalists as sceptics by nature. It is a reflex to receiving information, where an informant may be asked to reiterate it; then a second source sought; and a third party then confronted with the information to see what might be wrong with it.

Methods employed for such inquiries may be structured and have forms like more formal research. They begin with *observation*, for example going to a siege to see if shooting actually takes place. Secondly there is *passive research*, notably the review of all manner of *documents*, like statutory information made public by corporations and state agencies, reports or letters obtained through Freedom of Information (FOI) processes. Media releases and other material specifically prepared for journalists are among the most valuable sources of information, but again must quickly be handled “objectively”, with scepticism, and “checked”. High volumes of material must be handled; the news system is open to information from all quarters, so there must be routines for filtering and managing the flood, like the searching test: “is it new; is it true?”.

After observation and passive examination of documents comes the third main device, the *interview*. Journalism manuals abound in typologies of interviews, most describing news interviews as ersatz conversations; like conversations that take place in business or social life but more highly purposive. Fascinating dynamics of interviews, like tension over the relative status of the questioner or recipient, or performance aspects in broadcast interviews complicate the process of information transfer. Media interviews are public occasions because, by definition a mass public must soon learn of the encounter. This is put forward as an aspect of the *transparency* in journalistic inquiry.

Limitations and qualifications

News reporting has to be seen as permissive towards the journalist as researcher, less of a controlled exercise. It encompasses *shortcuts* where the researcher will obtain and publish the findings of somebody else’s research, hence the heavy reliance on expert commentators. There will be attribution, and it is a reasonable practice considering one journalist can have at best a few specialist fields of their own, e.g. they may be a lawyer versed in financial lore, but weak on sport, politics or gardening. Yet the journalist drawing on somebody else’s research has not demonstrated any capacity to conduct that research, and so their understanding will be open to question. An answer is that the journalist *is* indeed a specialist, in the field of picking up pieces of information and making sense of them in a broad life context. Obviously this can

be stiff intellectual work, e.g. grasping, telling of and interpreting for a wide audience, new information, to the satisfaction of the original researcher.

Fragments warrant special consideration here, as the use of small and highly significant bits of information relates directly to the purposes of journalistic research for the news. Two examples are drawn from politics: The first is the instance of the former President Richard Nixon conceding in a moment, he had “let down” the American public. Ten years later the French President, Francois Mitterrand, kept the nation on tenterhooks as to whether he would stand for a second term, resolved eventually by one word, “yes”. News frequently answers questions a public is very interested in, without needing or wanting explanation, as in the case of Diana’s mourners or the German border crossers, above. It wants, as in these cases, specifically the core admission, or fact. The news process is very much a dialogue with markets or audiences, today more so than ever with the improved interactive technologies.

For the reason that publics act on their own will, appropriating what they gather from the news, journalists overwhelmingly will explicitly deny that their work has predictable impacts. In the work referred to on the Berlin Wall, a panel of German journalists expressed regret that in the euphoria of 1989-90 they rather uncritically accepted assurances by their government that national reunification would usher in a period of new prosperity – a *Bluhendelandschaften*, “blooming landscape”. Yet most (not all) still denied that their own work of itself would have influenced the course of events; they were reporting on the process not leading it; they explicitly said they had no particular responsibility for what transpired. (Duffield, 2009: 64-69).

In interviews journalists can “socialise” with subjects and reassure them about the limits to the consequences of speaking publicly. This sociability opens the possibility of cooptation, or distortion of information through other kinds of personal interaction, but the justification is made that media interviews do very effectively yield facts. In the examples given of Nixon and Mitterrand, the revelations came in the course of television interviews. With less disingenuous talent, journalists in such a social setting with their informants can cause them to speak still less reservedly; the journalists will be encouraged in that by audiences, and it is frequently seen as helping the informants to explain themselves.

The *identity of the researcher* and capacities of the *researcher as a resource* are significant; journalists can empathise, e.g. with others in the media field, or with persons in public life where journalists are non-committal but always present. Journalists as reporters or as academic researchers can get good access to informants on the strength of their reputation and

publicly demonstrated reporting skills. Journalistic work requires maintaining files, a good memory for dates and events, and skills understanding the background to events. This all works in the service of the ultimate goal of research, i.e. finding out.

Journalistic methods, for application to academic research

The journalistic manner of inquiry obviously will not transfer *directly* into scholarship because it is too extemporised. It has qualities which can be coopted into use within academic and other more durable, deeper research. In the assessment of any data, the objectification device is used, but the skills of the practitioner in finding out, by many possible means, are emphasised. The selection and ordering of data is rather unconstrained, though information to be published is tested in a pragmatic and searching way. As for outcomes, journalists are accustomed to seeing their work have short-term effects, e.g. the standing-down of a government Minister caught lying, but are sceptical about influencing values or beliefs of their audiences. They would say, there would be no story but for facts unconnected with the actual news process, e.g. if the Minister were not a liar.

Similar thinking is reflected in the *representation* of the news as being close to daily experience, crafted so an audience member has access to events, as if having been there. Television news in particular will present the outcome of a day's stake-out and assembling of other footage as "one day in 1.5 minutes", seen "as-lived", i.e. in a chronological order, persons spoken with in the "natural conversational" Medium Close-up (MCU) view, the reporter appearing in shot to affirm and share their witnessing from the scene. Aspects of such styling of media artefacts for specific purposes or effects are treated in the field of genre theory, (e.g. implicit in Jarvis 1998). Significant to the present argument, journalists prefer direct representation as it is simple, and defensible, because transparent in the way audiences will commonly say, that seeing and hearing actuality gives you a capacity to judge it.

Journalistic practice involves daily deployment of learning and skills -- a tool kit -- adaptable to more extended research. Practitioners retain compendious background information to relate events to historical processes, so as to explain them; it is a discipline closely related to study of history. They will know the news-making process well, and be adept at narrative forms, the better to be able to study that process and their own place in it. They possess formulae to enable management of a burden of information, and to write and craft information accurately in short order. That includes a constant monitor of the news in volume, which confers knowledge of its rhythms and forms. Being mentally affiliated to news values confers an

inside understanding of the conception of mass media products; it also makes for an active capacity on the part of the journalist to get to and grasp the core of any issue under study.

There are grounds to argue that selected media products – news articles, documentaries, features in series-- should be registered of themselves as stand-alone research outcomes in academic categories. Such arguments are being made in a formal process, for the inclusion of certain forms of journalistic work in the Australian HERDC (Higher Education Research Data Collection). Those would include products of investigative journalism.

At this point a reverse factor should be mentioned, suitable for study at a future time: with the strengthening of a Journalism discipline that is influential in professional preparation, hence growing “research literacy” in this field; more research might be included in journalism curricula, which must in turn add unprecedented strengths to the skills base of future journalists. The entry of more formalised research practices into the news is referred to in the brief treatment of “precision journalism” under Applications (i), below.

However, in the present case the interest is in the adaptation of the knowledges and skills of journalistic practice explicitly for the extension of understanding, particularly understanding of mass media, strictly in academic contexts, e.g. through scholarly publishing.

Applicability

The above are properties of the situation where news is being unearthed “in the field” by journalism practitioners. These properties – the tradition of inquiry, objectification and search for evidence, containment of objectives to most realisable matters of fact, high skill in certain investigative methods especially interviewing, and skills in management of heavy data flows – will act as safeguards to help ensure the quality and integrity of the end product.

Journalistic forms of inquiry, and the capabilities and propensities of journalists themselves as researchers, specifically when focused on media issues as the topic, will apply well to academic research, when adapted into the standard methods. Hardly remarkably, research done in the Journalism discipline, usually qualitative research like an observation study or ethnographic study using semi-structured interviews, but also quantitative research such as surveys, will observe the standard protocols -- for development of research objectives, preparation for data collection and collating, conduct of field work, relations with informants, and management of data obtained. So far the case is being made that journalists doing research will have a good background for it. The fact of such research going on in volume,

settles at a basic level the claim of the Journalism academic discipline to be a home of academic research; mentioned here because in the early days of journalism teaching in universities that was prone to be challenged.

The point has been made that the object of inquiry most often will be issues to do with the relationships of mass media and society. This is by all accounts a complex relationship and there is healthy demand for knowledge about it. Practitioners with professional knowledge of media and with formal research capabilities are positioned to contribute substantially to discovery of important aspects of it. So one of the preoccupations of Journalism the academic discipline is to take a leading hand in theorising journalistic practice.

The following is an outline of Higher Degree projects of colleagues of the writer, Journalism academics, which can help show the links among background in journalistic practice and habits of investigation, formal research practices, and the drive for broader understanding of mass media.

Industrial disputes; a study of journalism's treatment of the 1998 Australian waterfront dispute. The scholar was a former industrial reporter and used conversation analysis to judge the significance of media interviews, (Bowman 1999).

Childrens' television; a study calling journalists to account over ethical practices in this case over exposure of infants to news. The editor, a journalist and commentator on childrens' issues, used a survey and focus groups for parents, and interviews with journalists, (Hetherington 2004).

Overseas correspondents; a study questioning the credentials of Australian foreign correspondents to explain complex events and processes. The researcher, a broadcast journalist, encountered correspondents in Hong Kong and while carrying out their field reporting in Cambodia. (Knight, in Kingsley et al 1999; Knight 1995).

Journalism in Jakarta; field work by the researcher, with background in broadcast journalism, entailed observing while accompanying Indonesian journalists on assignment in Jakarta, and interviews, (Romano 1999).

Tamil Tigers (LTTE) and terrorism; this project gave an extensive historical background to the Sri Lanka insurgency, and studied advantages obtained by the insurgents through their online news service. The writer carried out observation and interviews in LTTE and

government-held areas while working for Sri Lankan news media, and later while researching for the doctoral project, (Ubayasiri 2008).

In cases like these, the research process and outcomes are recognisably part of the mainstream of academic research, while on journalistic topics, and reflecting a background of professional engagement. Journalism scholarship is permitting journalism as a professional fraternity to handle larger inquiries about its practices including ways that news is realised and processed for the use of society. That answers a need, compensating for the way that daily journalism itself is pragmatic about getting facts, not introspective, and restricted in its range or depth of coverage. Mayer observed after studying Australian newspapers at length in the 1960s and 70s: “Hard news can’t handle process; is reductionist; treats events and politics as a glut of occurrences; and cannot cope with any long-term historical processes, nor with concepts”, (Mayer H in R Tiffen, 1994: 37). It has actually acquired better capability for that, though still not really intended for such purposes. This writer has argued that increasing space given to features and commentary, and digitised archiving have turned daily media coverage into a tool for research and for a rich understanding of historical processes, (*see Applications, (i) New Media Practice, below.*)

Applications

This paper will now address some specific ways where journalistic concerns are addressed, and where methods of work found in journalism are in companionship with research broadly:- (i) Studies of the use of ICTs, in searching, interacting and archiving; (ii) advanced applications of professional skills in empathising with research subjects, *viz* audiences, and practitioners themselves under study; (iii) the inclusion of works of journalism in creative practice research; and (iv) extension of the customary contribution of journalists in intellectual leadership of society, particularly in historical writing.

(i) New media practice

The journalistic fraternity has been generating a body of introspective work on new media journalism, in forums like the *Online Journalism Review* (2009). Use of search engines and open-access databases was routinised early by news organisations and individual journalists, bringing predictable increases in the efficiency of investigations for news -- with spinoffs for enhanced quality of research more generally. It has to be noted though, that technological change has seen a shift in the character of the intellectual process engaged in by journalists

along with very many others, towards “finding out” in preference to more generalised and conceptual “understanding”.

News media have been able to develop a strong capability to analyse and conduct their own survey research deploying both custom and proprietary software. Called “precision journalism” by its leading champion Meyer (2001), this practice is contributing to an increased representation in the media of information generated by more quantitative research techniques.

The concept of “annotative reporting” conveys an understanding of managed use of online sources, whereby journalists’ text in any format will be enriched with summaries from sources the audience can also access, and links to supporting information (Ray 2006: 60-63). Texts produced for journalism education acknowledge the utility of such systems but are usually cautious, emphasising content and the need to maintain the quality of verification and crafting (*see* Craig 1998, Duffield and Cokley 2006, Foust 2009, Ray 2006, Wilfmeyer 2006). Equally, new forms of mass communication have emerged forcefully, journalists present in the movement as participants and researchers, keeping web logs (as “bloggers”) and publishing independently at many levels, e.g. as citizen journalists canvassing global and local issues, or privately posting on *You Tube* and similar outlets.

Beckett (2008), a journalist, with his notion of “network journalism” provides a model of insightful self-examination by practitioners. He shows journalists and members of the public working together to produce news reports for major outlets. Some related concerns were taken up in a discussion of citizen journalism in Duffield and Cokley (2006: 5), concluding that the news-making engaged in by non-journalists demands actual journalistic training, so “everybody could do well to become a journalist.”

An additional perspective, on archiving, shows daily journalism production has become an unprecedentedly powerful research engine, due to the huge volume of output, marshalled and indexed overnight. The present writer has posited that major historical questions can be settled quickly as never before, by drawing on the massive volume of information and commentary held easily available, with for instance all major newspaper titles digitally stored from the mid 1990s – some also digitising back copies into the 18th Century (*see, The Times*, 2009). Further applications of this mining of information would see cross-cultural and inter-lingual studies, drawing on theory and practice of translation, (*see* Bassett and Lefevere 1995, Gentzer 1993, Hall *et al* 2005, Lefevere 1991). The project on 1989 referred to above made a

proposal for the study of international crises through “reconstruction” of the ubiquitous, now extremely well documented engagements of mass media:

“It can be labeled as ‘historical reconstruction through media’ ... (extending) to an overview of the research, operational planning, field activities and production work of media practitioners; their informed reflections; and the content of their news products...

News media products have not previously been so available for reference, checking and cross-comparison ... The situation might be compared with 1955 when Australia had effectively no archives from radio and television, and researchers using newspaper stacks normally would have to make copies by hand at the storage location. (For example, today, the Lexis Nexis commercial database contains full text articles from over 30000 newspapers, agency services, magazines or journals; ‘source local’ on <http://web.nexis.com/sources/> ...)... This makes for easy reference and possible easy checking.” (Duffield 2009: 278-9)

(ii) Practitioners’ identity and identifying with others.

This category is set up with special reference to the phenomenon of media use as social action identified by Renckstorf and others (2001, 1996). It is an explanation of media use and media effects determined by the will of media consumers, declaring that directive, manipulative impacts of mass media are elusive, but that audience members will appropriate media products to their purposes, and will engage in dialogue with journalists. It is plainly relevant to developments with ICT, inter-activity and citizen journalism. In research methodology, “media use as social action” sees citizens acting internally unto themselves in “perceiving, thematising and diagnosing”, while external or social communication “is assumed to be an interactive and recurrent process” (Renckstorf and Wester 2001:393).

“This means, a *verstehende* or interpretive methodology is to be employed which pays explicit attention to the reconstruction of the world of those involved. As for mass communication processes, this means -- in principle -- both communicators and recipients The procedure is to respect the nature of the empirical world of everyday experience by becoming acquainted with the sphere of social life under study ... Filstead (1970:2) in this regard considered qualitative methodology as ‘first-hand involvement in the social world’. Different data gathering techniques, such as observation, interview and content analysis have to be employed that complement each other (‘triangulation’)” (396).

Studying citizens’ use of media means seeing media artefacts as they are perceived by these citizens. This should involve reconstructing the reality, in a way, after Mead (1934), that

would involve “role-taking”, where researchers will place themselves in the situation of their subjects. (396) Here methods should be further constructed and tested, and a journalistic background on the part of the researcher, with a history of contact with citizens as informants, ought to be very applicable.

(iii) Creative practice research.

Journalism is recognised as belonging to the category of creative practice, in Higher Degree and other research. Typically in the performing or visual arts researchers will review a particular genre or area of practice looking for a problem or unresolved question to explore; they will review theoretical writing and frequently will write comparative treatments of the work of a set of existing practitioners; they will produce or perform an exemplar, to dissect it and draw out observations and conclusions, enforced by the preceding theoretical study and observation. Works of journalism are amenable to being created and treated in this way, and such research can help with re-examination of entrenched production practices and styles in mass media -- where standardisation of routines seems over-valued, because routines save time. Typically, a researcher may produce a portfolio based on a reporting expedition overseas, to be referenced to theory on intercultural issues and globalisation of mass media.

Examples drawn from two recent projects:- A student researching the “New Journalism” of the 1970s surveyed a literature on this subject and critiqued the reporting and commentary done by three of its leading exponents. He then wrote an extended article in a “New Journalism” form, an “on-the-road” story from the United States, reflecting on it to make a critique of the genre (Fromyhr 2005). A student who made a pilot current affairs program for community television extracted from it observations about ways to extend the range of production values and production devices for such products, using new technologies. Later in an interview schedule, these possibilities were then put to producers and presenters in national television current affairs, in the context of declining audience support for their programs. The outcome was an indicative representation of how mass media practitioners respond to changing circumstances (Ford 2003).

(iv) Books by journalists.

Affiliated with (iii) above, journalists have had a prominent place in general non-fiction publishing. Usually the writers will draw on a long period of work in extreme situations, e.g. profiling celebrities or political leaders in crisis. While much of this writing is about war and it is not published as systematic history, it is an esteemed form. Torney-Parlicki (in Curthoys ANZCA09 *Communication, Creativity and Global Citizenship*: Refereed Proceedings: <http://anzca09.org>

and Schultz 1999) identifies journalists as among intellectual leaders in colonial Australian society, who provided much of the early narrative of the country. Some of these and their successors were prolific and contentious, *viz* CEW Bean, Denis Warner and Wilfred Burchett (250-51), and while the 19th Century writers “eschewed objectivity” (247), preferring to revel in the controversies of their day, journalist historians have kept a reputation for dependability with facts, drawing on their notebooks to demonstrate an “obsessive determination not to waste hard-earned copy” (252).

Academic preparation of journalists themselves has been much extended since the time of a society with few openings to higher education; accessibility to information is being transformed through the information revolution; the knowledgeableness and crafting skills of journalists will continue to thrive in history writing and other fields, e.g. business, computing, politics, sport. Also, to return to a theme, journalistic practice in short time-spans can be a step into more long-term, hence more thorough and systematic research; here background in journalistic practice becomes a resource for the researcher.

Journalism in the context of research conventions

This paper sees journalists carrying out discovery work in mass media outlets, and employing that manner of inquiry for research they will do in the Journalism academic discipline. Characteristics that carry over should be: strong commitment to evidence-based inquiry; capacity for managing information in bulk, identifying significant facts at any level of detail, and economising on time; habits of openness and free exchange of ideas, which should promise probing and thorough exposure of sources; a professional disposition to strongly resist any blocking and obscuring of information, implying a drive to find out; and crafting ability, enabling the use of diverse ways to illustrate and explain an argument. Also, practitioners through exposure to processes of mass communication are prone to be sceptical about what impacts and effects mass communication may have, which becomes a constraint of making suppositions about relationships among media and society.

Going further, characteristics of journalistic research will be headed by its eclecticism and empiricist spirit. Beyond an insistence on free flow of information and repudiation of censorship, this branch of research is not ideological. It is unlike, for instance, such influential models for scholarship and research as a Marxist paradigm used in humanities and social science disciplines, or neo-liberalism prominent in economics or business disciplines in the 1970s and 1980s -- both having been affiliated with ideological political movements. The

Australian “history wars” episode was presented as a clash of ideologies about scholarship and about culture.

Journalism does require making sense of diverse issues and so does research in the Journalism discipline. Methods employed will be for the most part qualitative and interpretive, to include observation, review of documents, contents review of mass media publications, and interviews. Here the practices followed are among those dictated for any branch of social science or humanities. Controls on research activity must be faced because journalistic practice, though it has routines, thrives on creative extemporising of ideas in the moment, and makes limited claims as to the range of its findings or their impact; deliberative research much less so. Journalistic inquiry for media operates in an unregulated way, and while the skills involved will often be productive, on occasion efforts will be needed to reconcile two different approaches: between this informal side of journalistic work and standard academic protocols. For instance in an observation study in a small community or village, it would be a difference between a fairly forced extraction of salient facts, and patient, relatively passive accumulation.

Journalistic research is apt to remain pragmatic and will exploit the professional aptitudes of the researchers. For instance the habit of pressing for the truth of a matter against any obstacles becomes useful for obtaining information where efforts may be made to stop the information coming out. To protect quality, there will be, for instance, the habit of constantly “checking” including extensive doubling-up on sources. Skills of journalists in associating with contacts and news consumers, a subjective element in this practice, become useful in ethnography, or a branch of study like “media use as social action”.

Conclusions

The focus of this paper has been on the applicability of journalistic methods of investigation to research in academic contexts, notably on journalism itself and more general mass media topics. A research methodology has been sketched out, linking regular practice in daily media work and research done in the Journalism academic discipline. It is not a sequestered activity; Journalism academics arrive from diverse backgrounds and conduct their research by standard methods that may or may not be so directly related to the affiliated profession. Likewise, non-journalism researchers may take up some of the forms favoured by journalists, e.g. closely scrutinising news products and interviewing practitioners. However the main characteristics of a distinctive approach have been given, as a derivative of journalism’s preoccupation with establishing facts; with the crafting of its representation of findings, and managing

information within strict time frames. It is seen as most valid because of its capacity to produce findings from large volumes of material, that can be tested for accuracy.

The outcome of the application of journalistic practice to journalism research, is a pragmatic, interpretive form of inquiry favouring qualitative methods such as the interview or review of media archives. It is well adapted obviously enough, for dealing with media issues. It will make use of the attributes of the researcher where they have a journalistic background: in the routinised management and checking of masses of information; awareness of time and capacity to contain the scope of inquiry; skills in interviewing, and adept conduct of relations generally with informants and consumers. This is a branch of research activity which has an established place, as in the case of the journalist historians, but which will go further because of its suitability to exploit the expansion of activity made possible by new information and communications technology.

References

- Bassnett S and Lefevere A (1995) (eds.), *Translation, History and Culture*, London NY, Cassell.
- Beckett C (2008), *Super Media: Saving journalism so it can save the world*, Chichester, Blackwell.
- Bourma GD and Ling LR (2004), *The Research Process*, 3rd edition, Melbourne, OUP.
- Bowman L (1999), "[Journalistic analysis and the Fourth Estate](#) : a case study of interview challenges in the Watefront dispute", PhD thesis, Brisbane, University of Queensland.
- Bromley M, "Mainlining, Mainstreaming and Marginalising: Are Media Wars 'Good for Journalism'?", (Research paper to *Cultural Studies and Journalism: Tensions and Reconciliations*, International Crossroads in Cultural Studies Conference, Birmingham, 2002).
- Craig R (2005), *Online Journalism: Reporting, writing and editing for new media*, Belmont CA, Wadsworth.
- Crotty M (1998), *The Foundations of Social Research*, St Leonards, Allen and Unwin.
- Curthoys A and Schultz J (1999) (eds.), *Journalism: Print, politics and popular culture*, Brisbane, UQP.

Duffield L (2009), *Berlin Wall in the News: Mass media and the fall of the eastern Bloc in Europe*, 1989. Saarbrücken, VDM.

Duffield L and Cokley J (2006), [*I, Journalist: Coping with and crafting media information in the 21st century*](#), Sydney, Pearson.

Dunlop P (2008), *Unravelling Design: fashion and the plan*, unpublished seminar paper, Brisbane, QUT.

Filstead WJ (ed.) (1970), *Qualitative Methodology: Firsthand involvement with the social world*, Chicago, Markham.

Ford E (2003), *Making television Current Affairs in Australia* (Practice-led Project; B.Jour. – Hons.), Brisbane, QUT.

Foust JC (2009), *Online Journalism: Principles and practices of news for the Web*, Scottsdale AZ, Holcomb Hathaway.

Fromyhr K (2005), *New Journalism*, (Practice-led Project; B.Jour. – Hons.), Brisbane, QUT.

Goodman R (2007), “WJEC Syndicate Reports: Eight Approaches to Improving Journalism Education World Wide”, *ASJMC Insights*, journal of the Association of Schools of Journalism and Mass Communication, Fall 2007, 11-18.

Gentzer E (1993), *Contemporary Translation Theories*, London NY, Routledge.

Gray C and Mallins J (2004), *Visualising Research: A guide to the research process in art and design*, Aldershot, Ashgate.

Hall JK, Vitanova G and Marchenkova L (2005) (eds.), *Dialogue with Bakhtin on Second and Foreign Language Learning: New perspectives*, Mahwah NJ, LEA.

Hetherington S (2004), “Little Brother is watching you: preschool children, television news and responsibility in Australia”, MA thesis QUT, Brisbane.

Journalism Education Association, 2008 JEA Conference: *Research, Investigation, Storytelling*, 1-3 December 2008, Faculty of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong, (program and abstracts).

Kingsbury D, Loo E and E Payne (eds.) (2000), *Foreign Devils and other Journalists*, Melbourne, Clayton Australia: Monash Asia Institute.

Knight A (1995), "The Ghost of Colonialism: Australian foreign correspondents in Asia"; paper to Asian Mass Communication and Research Centre Annual Conference, Jakarta. Singapore, AMIC.

Kovach B and Rosenstiel T (2001), *The Elements of Journalism: What newspeople should know and the public should expect*, NY, Three Rivers Press.

Landow GP (1992), *Hypertext: The convergence of critical theory and technology*, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press.

Lefevere A (1992) (ed.), *Translation – History, Culture: A Sourcebook*, London NY, Routledge.

Mead GH (1934), *Mind, Self and Society*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

Medsger B (1996), *Winds of Change: Challenges Confronting Journalism Education*, Arlington Va., Freedom Forum.

Meyer P (2001), *The New Precision Journalism*, Lanham MD, Rowman and Littlefield.

Neuman WL (2003), *Social Research Methods* 5th ed., Boston, Allyn and Bacon.

Online Journalism Review, USC Annenberg and Knight Digital Media Centre, www.ojr.org, (23.1.09).

Ray T (2006), *Online Journalism: a basic text*, New Delhi, Foundation.

Renckstorf K and Wester F (2001), "The 'Media Use as Social Action' Approach: Theory, methodology and research evidence so far", *Communications: European Journal of Communication Research*, Berlin, Vol 26, No.4.

Renckstorf K, McQuail D and Jakowski N (eds.) (1996), *Media Use as Social Action: A European Approach to Audience Studies*, Acamedia Research Monograph 15, London, John Libby.

Romano A (1999), "Journalistic identity and practices in late new order Indonesia", PhD thesis QUT, Brisbane.

Siebert FS, Peterson TB and Schramm W (1956), *Four Theories of the Press: the authoritarian, libertarian, social responsibility and Soviet Communist concepts of what the press should be and do*, Urbana Ill. Univ. of Illinois Press.

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (2007), *Model Curricula for Journalism Education for Developing Countries and Emerging Democracies*, Paris.

Sullivan G, (2005) *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the visual arts*. London, Sage.

Tiffen R (1994), *Mayer on the Media: issues and arguments*. Sydney, AFTRS – Allen and Unwin.

The Times, London, No. 1023 (18.3.1788) --, ISSN 0140-0460.

Ubayasiri K (2008), “Media, Tamil Tigers, terrorism and the Internet : the cyber interface between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and mainstream media”, PhD thesis QUT, Brisbane.

Watson AHA (2008), “New Communication technology in developing countries: the role of mobile telephony and change in rural Papua New Guinean communities”, unpublished paper, Brisbane, QUT.

Wilfemeyer KT (2006), *Online Newswriting*, Oxford, Blackwell.

Appendix 1. Refereed journals: Australian Journalism Review, ISSN 08102686; Pacific Journalism Review, ISSN 1023 9499; eJournalist (online publication), 1444 741X; Asia Pacific Media Educator, 1326 365X

Appendix 2. JEA Conference session topics 2008: Training for future journalists; analysing news; teaching and reporting diversity; ethical issues in journalism; the future of news; sporting heroics and news narratives; news narratives, myths and legends; educating digital natives; change in the newsroom; communities, networks and change; Response Ability training (a specialised program on handling mental health and suicide issues); creative work; creative story telling; journalism work, journalism lives.