MAKING WAR REAL: the discourse of professional journalism and the Iraq War, 2003.

Giles Robert Dodson

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at

The University of Queensland in March 2009

School of Journalism and Communication
DECLARATION

This thesis is composed of my original work, and contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in the text. I have clearly stated the contribution by others to jointly-authored works that I have included in my thesis.

I have clearly stated the contribution of others to my thesis as a whole, including statistical assistance, survey design, data analysis, significant technical procedures, professional editorial advice, and any other original research work used or reported in my thesis. The content of my thesis is the result of work I have carried out since the commencement of my research higher degree candidature and does not include a substantial part of work that has been submitted to qualify for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution. I have clearly stated which parts of my thesis, if any, have been submitted to qualify for another award.

I acknowledge that an electronic copy of my thesis must be lodged with the University Library and, subject to the General Award Rules of The University of Queensland, immediately made available for research and study in accordance with the Copyright Act 1968.

I acknowledge that copyright of all material contained in my thesis resides with the copyright holder(s) of that material.

Giles Robert Dodson

Statement of Contributions to Jointly Authored Works Contained in the Thesis
No jointly-authored works.

Statement of Contributions by Others to the Thesis as a Whole
No contributions by others.

Statement of Parts of the Thesis Submitted to Qualify for the Award of Another Degree
None.
Published Works by the Author Incorporated into the Thesis
None.

Additional Published Works by the Author Relevant to the Thesis but not Forming Part of it
None
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Completion of this project would not have been possible without the ongoing support, assistance and encouragement of many parties. In particular, the University of Queensland Graduate School awarded me an Australian Postgraduate Award in 2006 and without the financial security that this provided, this project would have been impossible. The UQ School of Journalism and Communication also provided funds which enabled me to undertake important research interstate. The ongoing support of my colleagues and fellow postgraduate students in the SJC has been invaluable.

Thanks also go to those journalists and editors who agreed to participate in this project and who subjected themselves to interview by the author. While there is much to be criticised in Australian journalism - as this thesis makes clear - criticism is directed predominantly at the way in which Australian journalism is conceived and enacted, rather than at the individuals concerned.

Particular thanks go to my supervisors, Assoc. Professor Eric Louw and Assoc. Professor Pradip Thomas whose advice and knowledge provided me with both intellectual freedom and useful guidance over the last four years. Many thanks also to those colleagues who took an interest in my work, especially to Dr. Lincoln Dahlberg and Dr. Zala Volcic, who both read and commented on various draft chapters and who were always willing to provide advice and pay for the coffee.

Lastly, thanks to all those friends, family and colleagues who took an interest in, tolerated, and strategically avoided mention of this project and who contributed to my quality of life while in Brisbane these last years. Without this support the research process would have been intolerable and impossible.
ABSTRACT

As this thesis argues, the pursuit of professionalism in journalism should be understood as a discourse that hegemonises the discursive formation of journalism and produces news that fulfils professional needs. Professionalism articulates and states its object, in this case war, rather than apprehending it through fidelity to normative criteria, such as the objective truth of ‘reality’. Conceiving of professional journalism as such provides a means of understanding and analysing media production outside of the theoretical bounds of ‘ideology critique’.

Empirically, this thesis takes Australian war journalism during the invasion of Iraq, 2003, and professional journalistic discourse observed in interview with a selection of Australian Iraq war correspondents as its object of analysis. Previous analyses and critiques of journalism generally, and war journalism specifically, rely heavily on some conception of journalism as ideological. As this thesis argues this category of analysis is theoretically redundant and the discourse perspective provides a more fecund and insightful critique of journalism.

The thesis provides a historical and critical account of professionalism’s emergence, eventual domination and hegemony of the journalistic field. It is argued that professionalism, as an articulation of social and cultural norms, retains its central cultural legitimacy in journalism, and is expressed through the journalistic norms of objectivity, independence and news values. It is argued that within the contemporary cultural conditions of postmodernism and neo-liberalism these modern norms are no-longer credible and useful in journalism.

The empirical analysis of the professional discourse undertaken by the thesis demonstrates journalism as a pragmatic and contingent process of meaning creation, which legitimates and normalises its practices, forms and pre-occupations. In this sense the discourse, as a regime and process of meaning creation, produces its object, or makes war ‘real’ for news audiences, rather than reflecting the independent reality of war. In the context of the Iraq invasion, 2003, the thesis reveals many limitations, contradictions and inconsistencies within journalistic norms and subjectivities. The thesis also demonstrates how the discursive needs of professional journalism tend to be
coincident with the strategic communication intent of military and political power. This stands in marked contrast to journalism’s professed normative democratic function and to analyses of war journalism that consider this normative function irresistibly dominated by military and political power.
KEYWORDS
journalism, war, professionalism, discourse, conflict, media, Iraq, Australia

AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZEALAND STANDARD RESEARCH CLASSIFICATIONS
(ANZSRC)
190301 – Journalism Studies 50%, 200101; Communication Studies 30%, 160699; Political Science 20%
PART ONE – METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

CHAPTER ONE – THE PURPOSE OF THE THESIS
1.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................1
1.2 Journalism .......................................................................................................7
1.3 Professionalism ...............................................................................................8
1.4 War ..................................................................................................................8
1.5 Theoretical Innovation ....................................................................................9
1.6 Contribution ....................................................................................................12
1.7 The Structure of the Thesis .............................................................................13
1.8 Conclusion .....................................................................................................16

CHAPTER TWO - LITERATURE REVIEW: JOURNALISM, PROFESSIONALISM AND WAR

Part One ..................................................................................................................18
2.1 Introduction ....................................................................................................18
2.2 The Sociological Perspective ..........................................................................19
2.3 The Cultural Perspective ................................................................................25
2.4 The Political Economy Perspective ...............................................................28
2.5 The Nexus of Three Traditions .......................................................................33

Part Two ..................................................................................................................36
2.6 War Journalism .............................................................................................36
2.7 Domination ....................................................................................................37
CHAPTER THREE - THEORETICAL CONTEXT

Part One .................................................................................................................. 52
3.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................ 52
3.2 Ideology ................................................................................................................ 52
3.3 Hegemony ............................................................................................................ 55
3.4 Structural Marxism .............................................................................................. 57
3.5 Discourse ............................................................................................................. 59

Part Two ................................................................................................................... 60
3.6 Foucault and Journalism ....................................................................................... 60
3.7 The Archaeology of Professionalism ..................................................................... 61
3.8 Genealogy and Objectivity .................................................................................. 66
3.9 Laclau and Mouffe’s Discourse Theory ............................................................... 69
3.9.1 Articulation ....................................................................................................... 70
3.9.2 Antagonism ....................................................................................................... 71
3.9.3 Hegemony ......................................................................................................... 73
3.10 Ideological Fantasy ............................................................................................. 74

Part Three ................................................................................................................ 75
3.11 Discourse Theory and Professional Journalism ................................................ 75
3.12 Using Theory ...................................................................................................... 76
3.13 Conclusion .......................................................................................................... 77

CHAPTER FOUR - METHODOLOGY
4.1 Introduction .......................................................................................................... 78
4.2 Research Questions .............................................................................................. 78
4.3 Paradigm – Critical Qualitative Research ........................................................... 79
4.4 The Purpose of the Method .................................................................................. 82
4.5 Interviews and Discourse ..................................................................................... 85
PART TWO – HISTORICAL AND CRITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

CHAPTER FIVE - THE EMERGENCE OF PROFESSIONALISM

Part One...........................................................................................................................96
5.1 Introduction................................................................................................................96
5.2 The Emergence of Anglo-Professionalism...............................................................98
5.3 Emerging Professional Culture...............................................................................102
5.4 Professionalism Hegemonic.....................................................................................105

Part Two..........................................................................................................................107
5.5 The Professional Method.........................................................................................107
5.6 The Professional Ideology.......................................................................................109

Part Three.........................................................................................................................113
5.7 Journalism and the Postmodern Era.......................................................................113
5.8 Journalism in Crisis..................................................................................................117
5.9 Contemporary Australian Journalism.......................................................................123
5.10 Conclusion...............................................................................................................128

PART THREE – EMPIRICAL AND ANALYTICAL OBSERVATIONS

CHAPTER SIX - THE DISCOURSE OF PROFESSIONALISM AND WAR

Part One...........................................................................................................................130
6.1 Introduction...............................................................................................................130
6.2 Objectivity...............................................................................................................131
6.3 The Statement of Objectivity..................................................................................132
   6.3.1 Reality..............................................................................................................138
6.3.2 Authority.................................................................139
6.3.3 Professionalism and Technique........................................140

Part Two...........................................................................143

6.4 Independence................................................................143

6.5 The Statement of Independence........................................143

6.5.1 Embedding..............................................................145
6.5.2 Centcom.................................................................150
6.5.3 The Defence of the Professional Identity..............................153

Part Three........................................................................157

6.6 News Values..............................................................157

6.7 The Statement of News Values........................................159

6.7.1 Morality and the ‘People’s Story’.....................................161
6.7.2 Centcom, Embedding and Baghdad.................................164
6.7.3 Judgement.................................................................166

6.8 Conclusion...................................................................170

CHAPTER SEVEN - PROFESSIONALISM AND POWER IN IRAQ 2003

Part One – Discourse and Power...........................................172

7.1 Introduction................................................................172
7.2 Objectivity.................................................................172
7.3 Independence.............................................................176
7.4 News Values...............................................................181
7.5 The Power to Represent..................................................182
7.6 Control, Regulation and Exclusion....................................183
7.7 ‘Useful’ Journalists.........................................................185

Part Two – The Context of Power.........................................188

7.8 Institutions.................................................................188
7.9 Coercion....................................................................189
7.10 Administration............................................................192
7.11 Conclusion..................................................................205
CHAPTER EIGHT - THE PROFESSIONAL DISCOURSE AND THE LEGITIMATION OF WAR COVERAGE

8.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................ 207
8.2 Legitimating Coverage ...................................................................................... 208
8.3 The ‘People’s Story’ ......................................................................................... 209
8.4 Journalists as ‘Witness’ .................................................................................. 217
8.5 Central Command ............................................................................................ 222
8.6 Embedded ......................................................................................................... 230
8.7 Conclusion ......................................................................................................... 242

CHAPTER NINE - THE PROFESSIONAL DISCOURSE AND THE GENERATION OF MEANING

9.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................ 246
9.2 Institutional Controls ....................................................................................... 247
9.3 Journalist as ‘Star’ ......................................................................................... 250
9.4 Parochialism ...................................................................................................... 253
9.5 The Militarisation of Consciousness ................................................................. 256
9.6 The Journalisation of the Military .................................................................... 261
9.7 Conclusion ......................................................................................................... 271

CHAPTER TEN - CONCLUSION

10.1 Overview ......................................................................................................... 274
10.2 Methodology .................................................................................................... 274
10.3 Theoretical Orientation .................................................................................. 275
10.4 The Thesis in Context .................................................................................... 276
10.5 Empirical Observations .................................................................................. 276
10.6 The Role of Professionalism in Journalism ..................................................... 282
10.7 The Contribution of the Thesis ....................................................................... 285

BIBLIOGRAPHY ..................................................................................................... 287
APPENDIX I - INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS IAN MCPHEDRAN (NEWS LIMITED)
17 MAY 2006................................................................................................................308
APPENDIX II - INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS TREVOR BORMANN (ABC)
15 JUNE 2006................................................................................................................317
APPENDIX III - INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS JONATHAN HARLEY (ABC)
15 JUNE 2006................................................................................................................328
APPENDIX IV - INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS LINDSAY MURDOCH (SMH)
19 MAY 2006................................................................................................................335
APPENDIX V - INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS PETER WILSON (NEWS LIMITED)
19 MAY 2006................................................................................................................345
APPENDIX VI - INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS MARK WILLACY (ABC)
2 JULY 2006..................................................................................................................360
APPENDIX VII - INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS ERIC CAMPBELL (ABC)
19 MAY 2006................................................................................................................367
APPENDIX VIII - INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS GEOFF THOMPSON (ABC)
30 NOVEMBER 2006........................................................................................................374
APPENDIX IX - INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS RORY CALLINAN (NEWS LIMITED)
18 DECEMBER 2006........................................................................................................383
APPENDIX X - SECOND ROUND INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS IAN MCPHEDRAN
(NEWS LIMITED)
18 DECEMBER 2006........................................................................................................396
APPENDIX XI - SECOND ROUND INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS
JONATHAN HARLEY (ABC)
30 NOVEMBER 2006........................................................................................................399
APPENDIX XII - INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS SECOND ROUND
PETER WILSON (NEWS LIMITED)
5 DECEMBER 2006........................................................................................................408
APPENDIX XIII - INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT – SECOND ROUND
MARK WILLACY (ABC)
7 NOVEMBER 2006.......................................................................................................417
APPENDIX XIV – EDITOR INTERVIEWS
MICHAEL CAREY – EXECUTIVE PRODUCER (ABC)
22 DECEMBER 2007 ...........................................................................................................426
APPENDIX XV – EDITOR INTERVIEWS
PETER KERR - FOREIGN EDITOR SMH (2003)
18 MAY 2006 ..................................................................................................................433
APPENDIX XVI - EDITOR INTERVIEWS
PETER KERR - FOREIGN EDITOR SMH (2003)
22 DECEMBER 2007 ...........................................................................................................445
APPENDIX XVII – EDITOR INTERVIEWS
7 JANUARY 2008 .................................................................................................................449
PART ONE – METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

CHAPTER ONE – THE PURPOSE OF THE THESIS

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In this thesis professionalism and professional journalism are understood as discursive. Professionalism is a discourse articulated by journalists, circulated and objectified in their production of news. The Iraq invasion, 2003 provides this study’s empirical context, in which professionalism is observed. I argue professionalism-as-discourse produces specific effects within both news journalism of war and within journalistic subjectivity. Professionalism in journalism, as a set of concepts, identities and practices, makes war real for news audiences. In this sense, professional journalism brings war into existence for news consumers according to the discursive requirements and constraints of professionalism, rather than through fidelity to the objective reality of war. This observation contradicts professionalism’s central normative claim, which is to be a neutral observer of objective social reality. However, in the contemporary era, professional journalism produces a highly contingent account of war for consumers of mainstream war news, while promoting its ability to produce evermore truthful accounts of reality. Furthermore, the thesis identifies professionalism as a discourse which diverts journalistic self-reflexivity, preventing journalists from reconsidering their socio-political function or their professional norms, in light of this contradiction. Although journalists are to varying degrees aware of the contradictions of their practice, professionalism is a form of fantasy preventing reflection and an adjustment of normative practice. Practically, professional journalism presents a popular, dramatic and parochial representation of war, laced with exciting narratives and journalistic archetypes. Importantly, professionalism also enables the militarisation of journalistic endeavours during war and, conversely, ‘journalises’ the military, through close, sympathetic coverage of military activities. This thesis considers these aspects of professionalism as ‘useful’ within the contemporary political economies of warfare and war journalism, which have commodified war reporting and introduced commercial logic into war coverage. This thesis’ critical discourse-theoretic position is hesitant to provide normative direction or inspiration for journalism. It does however demonstrate the
theoretical possibility of journalism producing counter-hegemonic discursive articulations and consequently reformulating the function of journalism beyond, or indeed, in spite of, professionalism.

This thesis thus analyses the influence and effect of Australian journalistic professionalism on the production of public information and on the formation of journalistic subjectivity in the context of the Iraq invasion, 2003. My argument is constructed using discursive analysis of in-depth interviews with Australian Iraq war journalists and of the news stories they produced. Through this methodological approach an innovative means of understanding professional journalism is presented, yielding new insight into the formation of news journalistic knowledge.

Professionalism has consistently featured as a significant area of critical inquiry in journalism studies. Engaging with and developing this tradition, I apply concepts drawn from discourse theory to professional war journalism. The thesis demonstrates professional journalism can be understood as an articulatory practice of enunciation and meaning creation. These practices hegemonise the processes of journalistic social meaning creation and they sustain contemporary forms of political, military and economic hegemony. This study thus expands our knowledge of professionalism’s influence in journalism. Importantly, I make clear the complicit role the media play in the administration of society and politics - in the present case through the normalisation of war and military logics. I understand journalism as a discourse of realism that itself constructs accounts of war yet overlooks this central ‘useful’ role within contemporary formations of power. Rather than critiquing journalism’s normative function, I analyse how professional norms produce problematic journalism.

Much energy has been expended in critiquing the quality of journalism’s social function (Tuchman, 1978; Hall et al, 1978; Gans, 1980; Gitlin, 1980; Soloski, 1997; McChesney, 2004b). In developing this criticism, I argue professionalism in journalism necessarily produces knowledge that normalises war and legitimates journalism’s role in this process. This conception contrasts sharply with journalism’s perceived normative liberal-democratic function as a ‘watchdog’ or Fourth Estate of government. My argument is, however, not concerned with the quality of professionalism’s attainment of positive absolutes, such as truth and reality. Rather, I am interested in the kinds of truth
and realities that professionalism produces. The extent to which this aspect of journalism is overlooked by journalists themselves is a significant consideration. In short, I am concerned with the constraining role played by professionalism in journalism. I argue dogmatic adherence to professional discursive requirements does not achieve valuable social knowledge of war. Rather, through the dogmatic application of professional principles to war journalism a form of public knowledge is produced that necessarily normalises and legitimates war.

This study applies concepts drawn from discourse theory to the problem of professionalism in journalism. Discourse theory has been widely applied to social science research. Until recently studies of journalism have tended to analyse journalism's ideological message content and the ways in which journalism embodies cultural ideology (Hall et al 1978; GUMG 1976; 1980). My thesis combines this theoretical concern for meaning with an interest in the formation of identities, practices and institutional norms most commonly associated with media sociology. Through my use of discourse theory I provide insight into the way in which news-meanings are generated and how journalism functions as a discursive regime in its own right. In the area of war journalism studies discourse theory has seldom been applied. Studies of war journalism have tended to emphasise the domination of the media by the military rather than analyse how media norms and practices are 'useful' to military strategy. Consequently, this thesis provides new insight as it demonstrates how journalism during war constructs contingent accounts of war and contributes to the normalisation of contemporary forms of military-political power. The thesis demonstrates the utility of this innovative use of theory.

Discourse theory permits the analysis of professionalism in journalism to move beyond concerns over journalism’s normative function or that journalism is captured by ideology. Rather, the discourse perspective reveals professional journalism as a contingent set of practices and concepts which function as a 'regime of truth' (Foucault 1980), regulating what may be said by journalists. This approach to journalism, augmented by the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe (1985), permits understanding journalism as a purposefully deployed, yet contingent set of concepts, ideas and statements that organise the activity of journalism. Journalism here constructs and
produces truths about the world on which it reports, rather than reflecting an independent reality, as is its normative claim. As a discursive project, professionalism hegemonises the production of social knowledge, de-legitimating other journalistic knowledge forms. This thesis is avowedly non-positivist in its conceptualisation of knowledge generation, in sharp contrast to the naive empiricism of professional journalists (Tuchman 1978). The contradictions and contingencies of the empirical objective journalistic method are vividly illustrated by my analytical method, which demonstrates objectivity as a central legitimating concept in journalism. Additionally, I argue professionalism is continuously concerned with its own legitimacy and reproduction. It is through professionalism that journalists hegemonise the social process of public information provision, in which they remain pre-eminent. This perspective enables an understanding of journalism freed from the rigidities of ideology critique and permits a conceptualisation of journalism as produced through contingencies and articulatory practices of naming and definition.

Within journalism studies, professionalism has been conceptualised as central to understanding the social and institutional processes of news production. In early studies, professionalism was understood as produced through a range of demographic factors, with education levels receiving particular emphasis and being connected to a more politically committed or involved journalism (Johnstone et al 1972). In such studies scholars sought to understand journalists as individuals. Early studies sought to apply the science of demography and behavioural psychology to journalism in order to measure professionalism. Later, sociologists investigated how an ideology of professional journalism was produced through processes of socialisation, the routinisation of journalism work and the commitment to conservative professional values. Professionalism here was conceived as a set of conventional occupational norms and a politically neutral means of apprehending and understanding the world. However, critical scholars identified these aspects of professionalism as contributing to the establishment cast which characterised the journalism of the later twentieth century. Hallin (1992) has called this journalism’s high modern era, in which the normative, democratic function of journalism was considered achieved, yet journalism was ultimately a conservative form. Media sociologists, cultural critics and political economic
analysts have shown professionalism plays an integral role in the reproduction of
dominant cultural and political ideologies and of status quo social institutions. This
thesis argues by contrast that accounts of war are made real through discursive
practices rather than as ideological constructions. In this view journalism normalises
and legitimates war, reporting it in accordance with professional and administrative
needs, rather than providing either a normative watchdog role in relation to power or a
crudely ideological representation of war. Crucially the discourse, with its commitment
to objective, positivist norms, operates as a form of ideological fantasy (Žižek 1989) in
which the contingencies of discursive projects are overlooked and they are considered
fully complete, fixed systems of meaning. The result is journalists do not perceive their
role in reproducing and legitimating contemporary forms of military and political
hegemony through their professionalism.

Recently, scholars have begun to demonstrate the utility of discourse theory in
understanding journalism (Carpentier 2005; Carpentier and Cammaerts 2006;
Andrejevic 2008). These scholars have proposed new directions for critical journalism
research and innovative uses for contemporary discourse theory, such as investigating
the role played by journalism in the ‘governmentality’ (Foucault 1991) of modern society
Andrejevic 2008). This thesis builds on this work and seeks to demonstrate how
professional practice is produced by the contingencies of discourse, how journalists
bring information about war into existence and to illustrate the discursive processes that
form journalistic identity. Importantly too, my use of discourse theory helps identify the
role played by professionalism within broader political and military projects, rather than
the capture of journalism by ideology. This study therefore seeks to achieve a more
nuanced, insightful understanding of news production than that facilitated by ideology
critique.

The thesis seeks to achieve this critical progress through reconceptualising
professionalism. Until recently ideology provided the central critical impulse within
social science research. However, the concept of ideology has been problematised as
a means for obtaining understandings of the operation of professionalism. Ideology has
been progressively re-theorised since its inception as a critical concept by Marx and this
genealogy is presented in Chapter Three. As I demonstrate, ideology as a critical
concept has been exhausted and is of little use to the present study. It is thus necessary to reinvigorate the analysis of professionalism with an array of analytic and theoretic concepts which facilitate critical progress. Chapter Three argues that discourse theory provides the necessary theoretical tools. Simply, discourse theory is concerned with how social meaning is produced and circulated, and the social dynamics that structure this process. This thesis therefore considers professionalism, not as ideology, but as a discursive formation of meaning to be analysed.

I argue professionalism in journalism constructs both public knowledge and journalistic subjectivity in accordance with the professional needs of journalists and news institutions. In this sense, professionalism disguises a journalistic form which contradicts professionalism’s normative ideals, and this is revealed through analysis. That is, accounts of war are produced through news discourse and made real for audiences through the operation of discursive strategies and logics, rather than through an objective, truthful representation of social reality, achieved by normative professionalism. The thesis further demonstrates how professionalism operates to prevent meaningful journalistic self-reflection upon their social role. Central to my argument is that this fantasy ensures that the role played by professionalism in legitimating contemporary military and political logics goes unaddressed. In making this argument I demonstrate the complicity of journalism, as a ‘regime of truth’ (Foucault 1980) in the maintenance of Western militarism. Professionalism thus operates as hegemony within journalism. The discourse theoretic understanding of meaning construction, however, theoretically permits the articulation of counter-hegemonic journalistic forms. Ultimately, this posits the possibility of alternative methods of public knowledge creation or substantive changes to the dogmatism of professionalism.

This introductory chapter has begun to outline my argument by first providing an overview of the central thematic concerns and motivation for conducting the research. Next, this chapter presents these central themes in greater depth. I provide a discussion of the thesis’ theoretical innovation and comment briefly on my contribution to the field of journalism studies. A brief survey of the general structure of the thesis is then provided, presenting the development of the argument.
1.2 JOURNALISM

Broadly an interest in and concern for the idea and craft of journalism has motivated my inquiry into the contemporary condition of mainstream news journalism. Journalism is a primary means by which public knowledge is generated within Western, liberal-democratic societies. Critics have however questioned the quality of public information produced by journalists. This debate has experienced renewed interest in the era of neo-liberal globalisation as technological and economic changes affect the news industry (Bagdikian, 2004; McNair 2000; 2006). Nonetheless, mainstream news journalism continues to play an important role in informing and educating the public. Indeed, journalism remains deeply entrenched within prevailing liberal political theory, as a primary organ of representative democracy. Here, it is held that normative, professional journalism produces public knowledge with veracity and independence, permitting the monitoring and moderation of social and political power. This function is understood as journalism’s normative, watchdog or Forth Estate role (Siebert et al 1956). This function of journalism has been the subject of numerous critical studies which have questioned whether journalism performs this function effectively (Hall et al 1978; Gitlin 1980; Hallin 1986; McNair 1999; McChesney 2004a; 2004b). Recognising these criticisms, this study seeks to move beyond this critical interest, as I am concerned not with the quality of journalism’s normative achievements, but with how a commitment to normative goals produces problematic journalism.

This inquiry is both timely and necessary, given the contemporary challenges to traditional journalism. Technological and economic developments continue to change the structure and practice of the news industry, through processes such as corporate conglomeration and digitalisation (Bagdikian 2004). Professional journalism is subject to ongoing public criticism too. News journalism has been roundly criticised for its descent into commercialism, punditry and scandal-mongering and for its alleged abrogation of its normative function (McNair 2000; 1999). The current state of professional news journalism is therefore one of my central concerns. I argue the perceived corruption of journalism is an inevitable consequence of professionalism, rather than a result of failing to carry it out correctly.
1.3 PROFESSIONALISM
This thesis demonstrates the analytic category of professionalism remains central to journalism studies. This category has featured prominently in the literature as a primary means of understanding journalism. Although the meaning of professionalism is contested, the variety and persistence of analytic approaches to professionalism pursued within the discipline are testimony to its ongoing importance. Professionalism is a potent socio-cultural category, central to liberal theory (Siebert et al 1956) embodying concepts of ethics, skill, knowledge and public service (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2003). Professionalism maintains its central analytic relevance too, through its resistance to precise definition as an analytic category. Consequently, professionalism has been subject to a range of definitions. Professionalism has frequently been defined as ideology. In this thesis I have sought a theoretical perspective that helps to describe the current form of contemporary Australian war journalism and which can conceive of the formation of journalistic knowledge outside ideology.

A fixed definition of professionalism is not agreed upon by scholars. The use of this analytic category is recurrent within the journalism studies literature (Johnstone et al 1972; Tuchman 1978; Gans 1980; Gitlin 1980; Soloski 1997; McChesney 2004b). However, this variety of understandings of professionalism offers much scope for critical purchase upon the field. I too employ the contested category of professionalism in order to analyse journalism and I conceptualise the professional discourse as the persistent core of contemporary news journalism. The historical development, cultural significance and meaning of professionalism within journalism are detailed in Chapter Five.

1.4 WAR
This study is further contextualised by my concern and interest in interrogating the quality of public information produced by journalists. Specifically, the public information concerning issues of war and conflict and the administration and policy of warfare is my central interest. The recent Iraq invasion has been selected as that event of global importance and resonance in which this assessment of journalism takes place.
Contemporary limited wars, involving technologised (largely Western) military forces, are extremely destructive and expensive operations and political policies. Contemporary war is also a complex media event, involving thousands of media professionals, massive quantities of resources and highly sophisticated reporting and news management strategies. Furthermore, war is also among the most consequential and controversial actions that political and military leaders may conduct. The ‘media war’, however, which combines wartime events with cultural martial discourse and dramatic narratives, has frequently presented modern Western conflict as sanitised and relatively bloodless (see Chapter Two). Regardless of its level of technological advancement however, war remains organised, systematic, rational killing and destruction, characterised by horror and, commonly, by atrocity. The Iraq invasion in 2003 has been the most recent expression of these features of modern warfare, both mediatised and real. Thus the thesis is timely in providing a case study of professional influence in the production of war news.

In recent decades the meaning of war has changed in other ways too. In the television age, and now arguably in the digital age, war has come to be produced and commodified as a media product designed for consumption by Western audiences. In this context, warfare is represented less as a complex political and military activity with profound sociological and economic consequences and rather as a consumer product. War is produced as a form of entertainment, designed and packaged to appeal to consumer sensibilities. The Iraq invasion provides therefore a political, military and media event of the greatest magnitude, public importance and controversy through which the performance of the professional media may be usefully empirically observed and analysed.

1.5 THEORETICAL INNOVATION

It is also my concern to provide an innovative perspective with respect to the discipline of journalism studies. As noted, many authors have considered the problem of professionalism in journalism. Likewise many have written about the experiences of war journalists in relation to military and political power (Hallin 1986; Tumber and Morrison 1988; Kellner 1992). This study applies concepts drawn from contemporary
social and political theory to the longstanding issue of professionalism. This application will be demonstrated as both theoretically and methodologically innovative. Currently such theoretical tools are underutilised in journalism studies, a situation this thesis seeks to rectify. Specifically, this thesis employs the discourse and social theory of Michel Foucault and the discourse-theoretic and political theory of Laclau and Mouffe to describe the way in which professionalism in journalism produces journalistic subjectivity, articulates journalistic norms and necessarily brings war into existence and visibility within the field of journalism. I draw upon Žižek's (1989) psychoanalytic concept of 'ideological fantasy' to provide a sophisticated reconceptualisation of the older category of 'ideology' and in order to describe the manner in which journalists self-consciously overlook the limitations of professionalism.

This theoretical perspective facilitates a powerful critical analysis of the formation of contemporary professional war journalism. This perspective also permits the reconceptualisation of professionalism outside ideology. Through this analysis the contingent, pragmatic construction of professionalism is demonstrated. Here, news is constructed in accordance with the discursive needs of journalists and their employers. Rather than as a representation of an objective reality outside discourse, war is made real in war journalism through contingent discursive processes and is consonant with the needs of professional journalists. Discourse theory also allows one to conceptualise meaning, both professional and journalistic as unfixed. That is, while discourses are powerful in articulating and fixing certain meanings, which can solidify into hegemonies and horizons of meaning (Laclau and Mouffe 1985), this solidification is not absolute. Theoretically, space exists within discursive formations for counter-hegemonic articulations and constructions. Indeed, no hegemonic discursive project is ever completely successful under conditions of fundamental social antagonism\(^1\), posited by this conception of discourse theory. Thus, professional journalistic conceptions of their normative socio-political function and the discourses concerning war are subject to discursive logics. These conceptions are, therefore, contingent and contestable.

---

\(^1\) The concept of fundamental social antagonism which is socially constitutive is here understood as the competitive dynamics of discourse, in which discourses compete to establish meaning. No discourse, in this conception is ever completely successful and can never become a total, closed system of meaning (ideology). This conception then posits the possibility of discursively driven social and political change (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Laclau 2004). Further, see Chapter Three.
Through an analysis of the practices of war news production and professional discourse observed in interview, this thesis seeks to identify and analyse the discursive strategies of meaning construction that construct both professional subjectivity and the external social reality which is journalism’s object. In this sense, discourse does not generate social reality, merely knowledge of that reality. Furthermore, discourse theory demonstrates the contingency of all forms of meaning and meaning construction, laying bare the processes of knowledge creation. From this theoretical perspective ‘war news’ and ‘public war knowledge’ can be understood as ultimately contingent and produced through discursive processes of articulation, enunciation and naming rather than through direct fidelity to objective reality. As stated, it is through discourse that social reality is given social meaning. The thesis therefore theorises the potential for journalists to revisit and recast their avowed normative criticism of power. Central to this normative criticism is a critique of those interests and processes which seek to fix or freeze meaning in certain hegemonic formations, such as political interests. This capacity however, is restrained and mitigated by relations of power immanent to journalism. Indeed, the thesis theorises professionalism itself as a hegemonic discourse within journalism.

It is important to recognise however that arguments, conclusions and theoretical understandings drawn from discourse theoretic analysis make no claim on universal validity. The thesis recognises its own contingency as an interpretation of evidence, rather than as an attempt to prove certain truths about professional journalism and the Iraq invasion, 2003. The thesis' theoretical position holds that meaning is created through relations of antagonism between discourses and that this dynamic process is socially constitutive. That is, meaning is potentially always contested by competing discourses. Interpretive understandings and persuasive argumentation are therefore this thesis’ highest goal. In any case, rather than establishing positive truths, the insights and theoretical understanding of journalism that this thesis constructs present an innovative means for understanding contemporary professional war journalism, as a discursive formation.
1.6 CONTRIBUTION

This section briefly outlines the contribution that this thesis’ theoretic-methodological approach makes to the academic field of journalism studies. As noted in the review of the relevant literature, presented in Chapter Two, the sociological tradition in journalism studies has focused on the demographics of news workers (Johnstone et al 1972; Henningham 1995; 1996a) and on the behaviours, institutional norms and disciplines that structure their work (Tuchman 1972; Molotch and Lester 1974; Altheide 1976). Professionalism in this tradition has been an ongoing concern, with many writers tracing the evolution of the professional ethic, such as the development of the objective method (Schudson 1978) and paying close attention to the operation of values and ideologies in the production of mainstream news (Gans 1980). Much of this research, especially that focusing on professional norms, employed the methods associated with sociology: ethnographic participation, observation, interview research and institutional analysis.

Within the sub-genre of war journalism studies, traditions of sociological and cultural inquiry feature prominently. In the post-Vietnam era many studies have focused on the experiences and accounts of journalists who reported from the front lines of various conflicts (Tumber and Morrison 1988; Young 1992; Tumber and Webster 2006). From the cultural-political perspective, the domination of the media by the information management strategies of the military authorities is emphasised (Kellner 1992). Several writers have addressed the sociological aspects of war journalism, such as the culture of the press corps (Pedelty 1995; Bell 1996; McLaughlin 2002) and the institutional contexts within which journalists performed their work.

Seldom however has an interest for textual analysis, relations of power and hegemony combined with a sociological concern for the processes and conditions of news production. This thesis’ approach demonstrates the value of this combined approach. Here, the sociological, economic and institutional conditions of production are illustrated as mutually conditioning, interrelated and historically specific. The conditions of professionalism are not natural or evolutionary, but purposefully created to fulfil certain journalistic needs, such as securing public legitimacy and producing a saleable commodity. The thesis seeks to draw these distinct approaches in journalism scholarship and media studies together. Specifically, the thesis maintains a sociological
interest in the conditions of news production, empirically observed through in-depth interviews conducted with journalists and editors concerning their reporting of the Iraq invasion. Raw news data are provided by news articles and transcripts which these journalists produced and which form the second major data source drawn on by this thesis. Discourse analytic concepts and techniques are then applied to both interview and news data in order to identify and understand the influence of the professional discourse on news production. This combination of sources and analytic techniques provides a useful understanding of war journalism and permits an analysis of the relationship between the conditions of production and the news content so produced.

This contribution to the field, both methodological and theoretical is constructive, as it illustrates potential future directions for journalism scholars and it demonstrates the applicability of contemporary social and political theory to the discipline. It is argued that this twofold contribution to journalism studies is both useful and novel. The thesis also provides a timely empirical study of contemporary Australian war journalism, as this field of scholarship remains relatively undeveloped.

1.7 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS
The thesis is comprised of ten chapters containing introductory, theoretic, methodological and empirical considerations and observations. The thesis concludes with a chapter uniting and discussing the various themes of the argument detailed below.

The thesis commences with a review of the relevant literature. Here two broad traditions are surveyed: critical studies of professionalism in journalism and the significant approaches taken by scholars of war journalism. This review demonstrates that space exists within critical approaches to professional journalism for a re-conceptualisation of professionalism as discursive.

In Chapter Two, the theoretical context of the thesis is established and detailed. Firstly, a genealogy of the concept of ideology is provided, as this concept features prominently in critical studies of professional journalism and provides a theoretical point of departure for the present study. Ideology, as a critical concept, is a central aspect of the intellectual inheritance of Marx, from which the discourse theoretical concepts
employed by this thesis have been developed. This concept has been developed by subsequent theorists, and this chapter demonstrates how ultimately ideology has been exhausted as a directly useful analytic category, due to its theoretic totalisation.

Secondly, the concept of discourse is introduced, examined and its utility in providing critical-analytical purchase evaluated. Of primary importance in this regard are the social theory of Foucault and the discourse and political theory of Laclau and Mouffe. Specifically, both Foucault’s genealogical and archaeological analytic methodologies provide considerable inspiration to this study. The genealogical method is employed in the thesis’ examination of the emergence and historicity of professionalism. And Foucault’s archaeological approach is important in describing and delineating the discourse of professional journalism observed during the research. The inclusion of Laclau and Mouffe’s theoretical innovations in discourse theory permits apprehending the dynamism of the discursive process. The dynamism points to the contingency and instability of discursive forms. Importantly, such conceptions make the identification of hegemonic intent possible, as well as positing the possibility for change in normative conceptions of journalism.

Chapter Four briefly discusses methodological considerations. Here the central research questions are presented and the rationale of the thesis’ method explicated. The empirical techniques that were employed in the research process are also addressed. Specifically, the selection, gathering and the treatment of the data and methods of analysis are discussed.

Chapter Five commences the formal analysis of professionalism conducted by this research. This section is specifically concerned with providing an account of the historic emergence of professionalism as the hegemonic concept within the developing cultural, political and economic practices of journalism and their articulation within liberal political theory. It is argued professionalism emerged primarily both in response to a social need for reliable information, free from egregious fiction and exaggeration and from a commercial imperative to massify the audience of such public information. Professionalism articulates both the public credibility journalism required and the professed neutrality and independence that the creation of a mass audience necessitated.
Chapter Five concludes by placing professional journalism within its contemporary cultural and commercial context. This section argues professionalism has served as the fundamental epistemological foundation for journalism. However, in the contemporary era the certainties of professionalism have faced powerful critiques. Moreover, journalism’s normative function has been challenged by the contemporary conditions of neo-liberal globalisation, in which news journalism has become highly commodified. I argue that professional journalism’s inability to contend with these challenges and critiques indicates the need to re-consider the suitability of professional norms for providing public information.

In Chapter Six the thesis provides an examination of the ‘archive’ of professional journalism. This archive is constructed through the research process and examined with reference to the discourse analytic methods proposed by Foucault (1972). In providing this analysis the thesis presents the professional discourse of war journalism as it was observed, recorded and interpreted during the research process. This analysis moves the focus of the thesis specifically onto the Iraq invasion in 2003.

Chapter Seven builds this argument, delineating, describing and analysing the power dynamics that characterise and influence the operation of professionalism within Iraq war journalism. The analysis is conducted with reference to Foucault’s genealogical principles and the various categories, levels and intensities of power within professionalism are examined. This section holds that while power is diffused throughout journalism, the discourse of professionalism, through both individual journalists and their institutional and organisational power relations, exerts hegemonic power. Here ‘useful’ journalists are produced through discursive practices, which in turn produce journalistic knowledge that accords with the needs of contemporary, administrative and military power.

In Chapter Eight the argument focuses on the discourse as a dynamic process of naming and meaning creation. This section builds on the insights of earlier chapters and more fully draws upon the discourse-analytic concepts of Laclau and Mouffe. Chapter Eight demonstrates how discursive processes of antagonism, articulation and the operation of discursive logics advance professionalism as hegemony by legitimating certain forms of war coverage. Specifically, this chapter demonstrates how, through
professionalism, certain locations and forms of war coverage, that is, public war knowledge, are brought into existence and legitimated as ‘news’.

Chapter Nine expands this argument. This section concentrates the analysis on the meaning that the professional discourse imparts to those aspects of war’s reality made real as news through professionalism’s function. This chapter argues that the professional discourse constructs the meaning of war consistent with the discursive requirements of professionalism, rather than through the normative operation of liberal, professional journalism. Specifically, this chapter describes the way in which professionalism produces problematic journalism which is highly conventionalised and ultimately reproductive of militarism and the logic of war. This chapter (along with Chapter Eight) also demonstrates the contingency of these meanings and their constitution through antagonism and articulation, and ultimately, as hegemonic meanings sedimented as normalised, highly militarised news discourse.

1.8 CONCLUSION
The thesis then presents a complex argument that both traces historically the development of professionalism and analyses its function within the contemporary era. I argue that rather than achieving normative goals, contemporary journalism constructs public knowledge that accords with its own requirements. That is, the need of professionalism to reproduce control over the discipline of journalism. Indeed, the thesis also argues that the public knowledge so produced is ‘useful’ within the contemporary cultural, economic and political conditions, in particular within the administration of contemporary warfare. The criticism of professional journalism presented here is that this journalistic function results directly from the pursuit of normative professionalism. Rather than journalism not being ‘objective enough’, this thesis identifies the pursuit and attainment of these norms as problematic in and of themselves. Indeed, the pursuit of journalism’s normative goals has a significant effect on public knowledge formation. It is argued therefore that in order to enact a form of journalism that retains journalism’s central democratic functions, a less professional form of journalism is required. Firstly, however, it is necessary to locate this thesis and its methodological and theoretical approach within the tradition of journalism and media
studies. It is also important to specifically position this thesis in relation to recent studies which have taken war journalism as their object of analysis, and it is to these tasks that the thesis now turns.
CHAPTER TWO - LITERATURE REVIEW: JOURNALISM, PROFESSIONALISM AND WAR

PART ONE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. The first is to critically review significant theoretical approaches towards the problem of professionalism and 'ideology' in journalism. Secondly, this chapter surveys recent scholarship in the field of war journalism studies. This chapter argues that although significant contributions have been made to conceptual understandings of professionalism in journalism, there clearly exists scope for fruitfully enhancing our understanding of professional journalism, especially during wartime. Specifically, this section demonstrates the conceptualisation of professionalism as a discursive formation offers a novel means through which to conceive of journalism and its production of knowledge during war.

A discursive understanding of professionalism builds on previous sociological, cultural and institutional conceptions that are here presented and critically reviewed. As discourse, journalism is understood as an internally coherent body of statements operating as a 'regime of truth' (Foucault, 1980). This body of statements is expressed through contingent modes of articulation and enunciation which serve to normalise and regulate what may or may not be enunciated by journalism.

This chapter also provides a critical review of recent scholarship concerning war journalism. The extent to which the significant theoretical approaches to professionalism are present in this scholarship is examined. On the basis of this review, a discursive conception of journalistic professionalism is held to yield a novel understanding of war journalism. Most notably, such a re-conceptualisation enables an understanding of war news as a necessary and inevitable product of professional discourse. In this sense, professionalism establishes the realm of possible statements about war that can be produced as news. War journalism, in this conception, does not neutrally and independently reflect the reality of war. Rather, the requirements of professionalism itself, expressed through routines, processes, values and organisational needs, articulate necessarily contingent representations of war within the discourse of
professionalism. Furthermore, rather than an expression of journalism’s capture and exploitation by ideology, modern war journalism is an expression of the internal logic of the discipline and it describes war in accordance with this logic. Thus, the discursive approach to professionalism provides the potential for critical insight into journalism that goes beyond those offered by the sociological, cultural or institutional perspectives which see journalists as constrained by external forces. Indeed, much of the existing criticism of journalism concentrates on critiquing the quality of journalism’s normative function rather than concentrating on the discursive processes through which the normative function of professional journalism necessarily produces certain forms of knowledge.

In summary, this chapter critiques three significant approaches to understanding the influence of professionalism in journalism. It argues the re-conceptualisation of professionalism presented by this thesis provides a fruitful line of critical inquiry. To this end, this chapter demonstrates the shortcomings of previous theoretical approaches to understanding war journalism, before the discussion moves to more detailed description of the thesis’ theoretical posture, outlined in the following chapter.

2.2 THE SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

Early studies of news sociology sought to understand the political, social and political attitudes of the press corps. This research sought to understand the extent to which social variables influenced news production. Such studies were primarily conducted through empirical quantification of the demographics of journalism. Central to this research perspective is the nature of journalistic professionalism, a concept that has been widely identified, but its definition and meaning have remained elusive. Johnstone et al (1972) conducted a benchmark study of the constitution of professionalism amongst American journalists. The study provided a detailed, descriptive analysis based on a rigorous quantitative methodology. Their study drew attention to the multifarious aspects of journalistic careers and training that inculcate professionalism, such as age, educational background and occupational experience. The authors show clearly differences exist in conceptions of professionalism and identified a greater willingness for participant journalism in those urban, well-educated journalists.
Johnstone et al (1972) however provided little means to quantify the impact professionalism may have had on news production and merely described the demographics of American journalism and the tensions that exist therein.

Assessing the development of professionalism amongst British journalists, Christian (1980) and Boyd-Barrett (1980) describe British professionalism as incomplete. Professionalism coincides however, with the ongoing, wider changes to British society and economy, such as the decline of the industrial economy and the rise of the service sector, burgeoning commercialism and the development of the tertiary education sector. As such, professionalism was argued to be a form of journalistic modernisation which paralleled wider socio-economic processes of development. Journalists however, remain not entirely in command of their occupation, as do other professional groups and are constrained by journalism's institutional and legal context. Elliot (1978) describes this commercial and organisational dynamic of the news industry, detailing the attempts to fashion a professional ideology as characterised by the tension between corporate and individual interests. The result is a form of journalistic “status anxiety” (Elliot 1978; 172) among journalists for whom autonomy is prized, but whose practice is structured by organisational and commercial imperatives. Professionalism however ameliorates any sense of journalistic anxiety, reinforcing the notion journalists control the media and operate autonomously. Later, and in the Australian context, Henningham (1990; 1995; 1996) published widely on the topic of news professionalism, describing in detail the political and social demographics of the Australian news corps, in a manner similar to that of Johnstone et al (1972). Henningham’s (1995) survey of Australian political journalists found them committed to the liberal ideals of professionalism, along with being more elite (in terms of university education and socio-economic background) and more left-leaning politically than their counterparts in the broader journalism community. In other studies (1996a; 1996b) Henningham found the acceptance of professional norms and identities, such as membership of professional associations and a commitment to the central professional values of objectivity, widespread among Australian journalists.

Dunn (2004) has argued that Australian journalism is merely a ‘quasi’ profession that does not display all the characteristics of professionalism. This is a theme common
to much scholarship in this area. Dunn, however, employs a rigid notion of professionalism in her assessment. For Dunn (2004) professionalism must include conventional signifiers such as a coherent body of skills and corporatist ideology, alongside established esoteric knowledge, an ethos of public service and an established ethical framework as defines the traditional professions, such as medicine or law. Whether or not journalism actually demonstrates these features is the subject of ongoing debate (Hartley 1996; Reese and Cohen 2000).

The studies described above identify a generalised professional attitude or ideology among journalists. However, they are conceptually and methodologically weakened by their uncritical, instrumentalist use of the concept of professionalism. Notably, Johnstone et al (1972) adopt a position derived from an older tradition of American functionalist/behaviouralist sociology, in which professionalism is shown to be related to social factors, such as ethnic identity, class background, education, political persuasion and so on. Johnstone et al (1972) found education levels to be particularly important in determining a participant ethic amongst professional journalists. Although these studies establish the existence of a professional ideology and culture in journalism, it remained for other scholars to investigate the social and political meaning and the consequences of professionalism for journalism. I consider the scholarship reviewed above as important first steps in analysing professionalism.

Interest in the nature of journalistic professionalism was paralleled during the 1970s and 1980s by a critical sociological concern for the effect of these previously identified professional practices. The effect of norms, organisational constraints and cultures, routines and values on news production was investigated. Central to this research was the earlier sociological notion that people play a significant role in constructing their own reality (Berger and Luckman 1967; Goffman 1986). Much research in this period was directed towards understanding the relationship between news practices, often understood as ideologies, and news products. This scholarship sought to understand how journalists actively shape the world they report, rather than simply reflect it.

Tuchman (1972; 1973; 1978) argued that news, far from being a neutral, objective reflection of the world, is instead a contingent, bureaucratic construction
dependent on routinised processes of control and typification designed to handle the daily glut of potential news items. For Tuchman the practices of objective professionalism classify and typify the chaotic events of the social world, serving to, “construct and reconstruct social reality by establishing the context in which social phenomena are perceived and defined” (1973; 129). Further, objectivity, journalism’s central legitimating ethic (Schudson 1978), is a “strategic ritual” (Tuchman 1972), insulating journalists from accusations of bias or distortion. In later work, Tuchman (1978) argues practices of professionalism construct reality from the perspective of the institutions in which they are embedded, which is ultimately conservative and reproductive of the social status quo. Although this is understood as an ideological effect of news professionalism, for Tuchman (1978), following the phenomenological tradition, such constructions also offer social and cultural resources with which people negotiate their own lived experiences. Nonetheless, Tuchman’s research firmly establishes bureaucratic, organisational and professional norms of journalism as sites of ideological production that, ultimately, constrain understanding (Tuchman 1978).

In other important research of this period, Molotch and Lester (1974) developed a typology of news events, again demonstrating that rather than reflecting the world ‘as it is’, news is shaped by those with the power to do so – journalists, significant public figures and, increasingly, public relations professionals. Similarly, Altheide (1976) found in the production of television news, “the world of commonplace occurrence is not approached with uncertainty, but is instead conceived and then moulded through news procedures in order for it to be reported on”. In both studies, the norms of objective professionalism are illustrated as a conventionalism that induces an uncritical approach towards news production processes and professional norms, resulting in a “taken for granted” perspective (1976; 176).

Studies such as these displaced the notion of news as a neutral, uncomplicated reflection of social reality. While the professional ethos of journalism maintained a “naïve empiricism” (Tuchman 1978) towards the social world, this critical sociology noted the contingent and bureaucratic nature of news production. Here, journalistic professionalism was identified as an ideology, in so far as it obscured the real processes of news production.
Born of the American sociological tradition, these studies were based on ethnographic, participant-observation methodologies. These researchers spent extended periods of time with journalists and within news institutions, observing and noting their work practices and attitudes. This approach emphasised the practical nature and consequences of professionalism and the very clear impact of bureaucracy on daily news production. These studies extended the view established by Johnstone et al (1972) – that professionalism has some effect. However, although authors such as Tuchman and Altheide identified a professional ideology, the broader cultural contexts from which this ideology emerged went largely unexamined. The American sociological tradition, from which these studies descended, was inclined to view journalism phenomenologically, that is, as social resources for making sense of the world in a taken-for-granted or ‘natural’ attitude (Schultz 1973). This may in part be explained by the prominence of behaviourism within American social science and the relative infancy of the critical tradition within the American context.

Gans (1980) developed the critique with a notion of a wider ideological and cultural context for journalism, seeking to understand the values that journalists brought to bear on their ostensibly neutral, professional work. This work merged two perspectives on professionalism. The personal, political and cultural values and attitudes of American journalists, as noted by Johnstone et al (1972), were analysed in the context of the organisational and bureaucratic norms and routines of news production. Gans (1980) identified a journalistic “para-ideology” in which “enduring” mainstream cultural values ensured journalistic output served to maintain the American social, political and economic status quo through their daily employment in news production.

The findings of these critical sociologists have been reinforced by the work of later scholars analysing the social production of news. Both Schudson (1978; 2003) and McNair (1999; 2006) provide clear accounts of the historical development and the contemporary state of social aspects of news production. Streckfuss (1990), Zelizer (1993), Soloski (1997), Reese (1997) and Deuze (2005) have all detailed the operation of professionalism, its socio-cultural context and its specific effects on news production. Reese (1997) in particular details the routinisation of professionalism in his discussion
of the controversy of a self-professed socialist who, through careful exploitation of the neutral norms of professionalism while working at the Wall Street Journal, was able to pursue a news agenda sympathetic to American socialism.

Gitlin (1980) studied the effects of such professional norms and practices on real world political activities in his analysis of media coverage of the Students for a Democratic Society movement of the 1960s. Gitlin demonstrates how the mass media, in exercising professionalism, marginalise and stigmatise radical groups and alternate political viewpoints, and that professional practices and norms, “produce fields of definition and association, symbol and rhetoric, through which ideology becomes manifest and concrete” (Gitlin 1980; 2). Here the connection between professional ideologies and wider cultural norms is explicitly made. Gitlin’s study emphasises how those features of professional news practices identified in other studies define and shape events through their systematic framing techniques and how enduring values reinforce status quo, conservative and essentially uncritical perspectives. Importantly, Gitlin’s work is explicitly aware of the role the media and journalistic practices contribute to the maintenance of cultural hegemony – placing journalism within the wider context of social and cultural power structures and ideological domination. As such Gitlin’s study represents a powerful and sophisticated critique developed from the sociological perspective. For Gitlin (1980; 10), as for Gramsci (1971):

Those who rule the dominant institutions secure their power in large measure directly and indirectly, by impressing their definitions of the situation upon those they rule and, if not usurping the whole ideological space, still significantly limiting what is thought throughout society. The notion of hegemony at work is an active one: hegemony operating through a complex web of social activities and institutional procedures. Hegemony is done by the dominant and collaborated in by the dominated.²

Importantly, Gitlin’s study develops the critique of professionalism advanced by American sociologists and connects American scholarship to developments occurring simultaneously in Great Britain, where the emerging field of cultural studies was actively

² The question of hegemony is further addressed in the following chapter.
analysing, critiquing and drawing attention to the role played by the media in the reproduction and maintenance of ‘the dominant ideology’.

2.3 THE CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

The cultural perspective on professionalism in journalism is primarily concerned with how journalism reproduces and legitimates cultural norms and accepted social meanings. Within British scholarship during the 1970s the media increasingly became the subject of critical inquiry as many authors identified its role in reinforcing dominant ideological cultural assumptions. Several studies criticised the media’s stereotyped and sensationalised portrayal of marginal social figures such as muggers (Hall et al 1978) political activists (Murdock 1981) drug users (Young 1981) and gangs (Cohen 1981).

Where American critical sociologists concentrated their analyses on the practical aspects of news work and only later connected these with broader cultural concerns, the British cultural studies tradition directly connected media institutions to the dominant ideological structures of society. For cultural critics, the media constructed a representation of social reality consonant with ideological interests – as Hall (1977) argued, the media had an “ideological effect”. Whereas the American tradition of critical sociology had developed from a behavioural science and liberal tradition, content to demonstrate the media’s role in generating social and cultural knowledge, British cultural studies was avowedly neo-Marxist, initially influenced by Althusserian structural Marxism (Hall et al 1980).

The cultural studies research program self-consciously rejected behaviouralist models of media production and effects, along with positivist methods. Rather, cultural studies focused explicitly on the ideological role of the media and the media’s complicity in ideological meaning construction. The leading cultural studies institution of the time, the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (BCCCS), defined the media as,

A major ideological cultural and ideological force, standing in a dominant position with respect to the way in which social relations and political problems were defined and the
production and transformation of popular ideologies in the audiences addressed (Hall 1980; 117).

The BCCCS’s study of the crisis of street crime in the 1960s and 70s clearly placed professional journalistic practices, values and norms as complicit with a wider political and ideological project of coercion, state power and control (Hall et al 1978; 60). Although in this study the media were considered less as functioning as ideological agents and rather as a site of contest between opposed social forces (Curran 2002; 112) in a context of contested hegemony, elsewhere the direct ideological effect of the media was emphasised (Hall 1977).

The methods employed by British cultural studies scholars were necessarily diverse, as they strove to widen their critical inquiry beyond sociological understanding of production and to include all facets of cultural meaning production. During the 1970s work concentrated on the ideological role of the media and employed a variety of methodological techniques, including political economic, content and semiotic analysis attempting to capture the “expressive interconnections of the culturalist position” (Curran et al 1982; 27). Important work of this era (Hall et al 1978), however, did not completely resolve the emerging tensions between the structuralist position, that considered the media and journalists agents of ideological domination, and the Gramscian culturalist perspective which considered the media sites of contest over meaning (Curran et al 1982).

Operating within a more traditionally empirical framework than cultural studies theorists, the Glasgow University Media Group (1976; 1980; 1982; 1985) produced a powerful series of studies detailing the systematic, routine production of news as “a manufactured production of ideology” (1980; xviii). These studies merged the sociological concern for practical news work with wider cultural concepts of ideology, illustrating the fruitful results of a multi-perspectival approach to journalism analysis. Methodologically, the Glasgow University Media Group merged the cultural studies sensitivity for message and meaning construction taken in the wider social and political contexts, with a detailed concern for the professional attitudes and organisational norms of liberal journalism. However, the Glasgow University Media Group was explicitly
dismissive of theoretic or methodological approach that relied on economic determinism at its base (Althusserian Marxism\(^3\)). Pure semiotic analysis was also rejected as a *reductio ad absurdum* (GUMG 1976; 416) which foreclosed upon the possibility of social critique. In contrast the Media Group’s realist approach to semiotics relied heavily on content analyses, enabling, “a revelation of subtleties and refinements of ideological closure and imbalance by revealing [ideological] codes in operation” (1980; 417). However, these thinkers did not present a robust theory of ideology of their own, remaining uncomfortably between structuralist and post-structuralist conceptions.

In their close analysis of coverage of industrial affairs (1976), economic crisis (1980) and the Falklands War (1985) the GUMG found mainstream news to defer to, and uphold the perspectives of the socially, politically and economically powerful and that, “journalism…rooted in a specific set of explanations about the nature of social reality is unable to encompass or explore the rationale of alternative world views” (1980; 115). This approach towards critical media/journalism studies provides much to inform the present study in its emphasis on the constraining function of news professionalism. However, its insufficiently rigorous analysis of the central concept of ideology weakens its critical power. As noted above, the Glasgow University Media Group employed a largely unexamined notion of ideology.

In the 1980s the generalised crisis in Marxism (see Chapter Three) that arose from the critique of structuralist theory gave way to post-structural and postmodern theoretical positions that identified the plurality of cultural meaning and fluidity of social relations. These theoretical developments called into question the totalising notions of dominant ideological structures (Foucault 1978; 1980; Baudrillard 1983; Lyotard 1984\(^4\)) and sought to describe in theoretical terms the new era of post-Fordist production, consumerism and social and cultural plurality.

Following such theoretical developments, the structuralist notion of the media as an “ideological state apparatus” (Althusser 1994) was significantly weakened. In this context the cultural and media studies tradition became characterised by a fracturing of perspectives and a renewed interest in the power of audiences to interpret and

---

\(^3\) See Chapter Three for a more detailed discussion of the development of the critical concept of ‘ideology’, including its articulation by Althusser, as a structural totality.

\(^4\) For further discussion of this epoch see Chapter Five.
creatively use media messages, as they were theoretically no longer subjected to ideological domination. Rather than inculcating ideological world views or providing a competitive space for competing discourses, the media became understood by some as an enabling power.

Some scholars, such as Fiske (1987; 1989a; 1989b) celebrated the power of media consumers in a plural and democratic cultural environment to create their own meanings and to subvert those of others. This position is redolent of liberalist conceptions of individual sovereignty, in this case of intellectual sovereignty within a marketplace of ideas. Others, propelled by the theoretical displacement of the dominant ideology thesis, addressed the issues around audience reception and media effects studies and reconceptualised the audience as active and capable of producing meaning autonomously (Morley 1992). Notably, certain feminist authors argued women actively create and negotiate their own identities, in contradiction of models of female domination by mediatised patriarchal ideology (Zoonen 1991; McRobbie 1996). Others, such as Hall (1996; 42) maintained the neo-Gramscian view that the media provided a field in which opposed discourses competed for dominance, or hegemony, rather than simply reproducing solidified cultural norms. This view of journalism’s functional cultural role however tends to ignore the capacity of journalists themselves to influence the generation and flow of media messages – an aspect of media analysis emphasised by the sociological perspective. Nor does this view recognise journalism itself as a potential field of ideological contest. By contrast I seek to understand the extent to which journalists are able to exert agency within the news process. The analysis presented below illustrates that journalists possess significant capacity in deciding and, in effect, producing knowledge, yet do so in accordance with professionalism.

2.4 THE POLITICAL ECONOMY PERSPECTIVE
The role of media institutions in cultural production has also been of significant interest to journalism scholarship. In particular, critical scholars have sought to understand the structural and institutional relations of power of news organisations and the impact of commercialisation on news production. In this analysis the role of the journalist-as-
agent is subordinated to their function within a news organisation. Here, institutional needs and power take analytical and explanatory precedence with regards to professionalism. Institutional dynamics have been generally considered by critical scholars to be supportive and fostering of doctrines of professionalism. But as media institutions and political, commercial and military interests become ever more entwined these relations are considered corrosive of professionalism’s normative, democratic role. The dependence of media institutions on other nodes of social power, such as political and commercial interests, is held to further contribute to status quo reproductions and a reduced critical capacity of journalism. This section briefly reviews some of the significant contributions to this branch of media and journalism studies arguing that understanding the relationship between the media and other institutions is crucial for understanding professionalism’s role in cultural production.

In the 1970s and 1980s both British and American scholars influenced by Marxist and Frankfurt School (Horkheimer and Adorno 1973) analysis, began to critically reappraise the social and cultural position of large media institutions and to interrogate the role of state and private media as significant cultural producers. Murdock and Golding (1977) identified that disparities in access to and control of media resources reflected the persistent class stratification of British society. They stressed too the importance of understanding industrial and commercial control as a form of potential cultural control. And while they warn against simplistic, determinate explanations of media messages, Murdock and Golding (1977) note that concentrated media ownership and commercial operation automatically tends to exclude the commercially unsuccessful and avoids the controversial or tendentious. Garnham (1979) also cautions against reductionist Marxist interpretations and argues for understanding media organisations and businesses as economic and bureaucratic entities that resist simplistic analyses. Nonetheless, both Murdock and Golding (1977) and Garnham (1979) stress the importance of media institutions as ideological formations. In later work Murdock (1982) emphasises the manner in which commercial imperatives of media organisations generate cultural content that reduces social and cultural complexity. As a result, “the critique is incorporated into a diffuse kind of populism that can be easily mobilised in defence of the status quo” (Murdock 1982; 147).
Critical American political economy was also uneasy about processes of media-corporate conglomeration and concentration of ownership which accelerated throughout the 1970s and 80s. Both Schiller (1976; 1989) and Bagdikian (1983; 2004) have made considerable contributions to the analysis of media conglomeration and have persistently warned against the effects of highly concentrated media markets given the reduction in journalistic perspectives these processes are held to engender.

The potential effect on the quality of news journalism of highly concentrated media markets, dominated by corporate interests is illustrated in the significant work of Herman and Chomsky (1986). Herman and Chomsky (1988) propose the 'propaganda model' of media production, describing a media system that systematically avoids critical journalism, ultimately producing consent for the modern social, political and economic order. This work echoed many of the concerns of the British cultural tradition in identifying journalistic mechanisms and conventions through which inherently conservative ideology is reproduced (Hall 1977; Golding and Elliot 1979). This influential thesis and its radical functionalist interpretation of media organisations has been powerfully criticised however, as unable to account for the existence of counter-hegemonic media messages (Corner 2003). Nonetheless, the insight that media institutions, as part of the social, economic and political power bloc within Western nations, shy away from concerted social and political criticism remains powerful.

Recently critical political economy has maintained the criticism of mainstream media organisation and their practices. McChesney (2004a; 2004b) has criticised the conventions of professionalism and the organisations that sustain them as being structurally dependent on the legitimated public institutions of power, such as the state and government, the courts and business.

Importantly for this thesis the influence of commercial pressures, such as the need to produce journalism that is attractive to advertisers, are identified by critical scholars as having a negative effect on journalism’s normative function. In this view, throughout the anglophone west the public service ideals of journalism and the
Habermasian concept of a public sphere of debate and discussion have been progressively eroded by the dominance of commercial values.

McChesney (2004a) considers the unrelenting drive towards a massively concentrated media industry (in the US, but by extension Australia; see Chapter Five) and the commodification of news and journalism as the direct result of deliberate government policy. Such policy has purposefully pursued media regulation through free market mechanisms rather than through more formal statutory regulation. Such a regime deliberately supports commercial interests of profit making over public interests of information and knowledge provision. The direct result has been the growth of media businesses of unprecedented size, commercial power and cultural and political significance and an emaciated public sphere (Bagdikian 2004).

In Australia, the commercialisation and extreme concentration of ownership within media markets has also developed as a matter of government policy. Successive federal governments have promoted de-regulation as the preferred form of media industry organisation. Notably however, Australia, by comparison to the US, maintains the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), a significant public service broadcast service, modelled on the BBC. Nonetheless, the Australian media sector is heavily concentrated, although Street (2001) cautions against simplistic correlations between corporate power and political power in the Australian context. There is no clear dividing line separating the two and the image of the unscrupulous, manipulative and politically connected media mogul is popular, if not entirely accurate. Street (2001; 132) argues that the social power that stems from the media is manifold, unstable and divided variously between owners, managers, editors, journalists and is affected by external factors, such as public opinion. The relations of power within these corporate structures thus set the culture, terms and context in which media power is exercised. This thesis takes inspiration from Street’s (2001) conception. Thus, while the abilities and productions of journalists are not solely determined by their position with economic

---

5 For further discussion of this concept see, Habermas, J (1989) *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press.
structures, the relations of power that characterise media organisations are considered to exercise a significant influence on journalistic production⁶.

Hirst (2001) sees Australian journalists and their work completely enmeshed with corporate capitalism. The division of labour, standardisation of practices and advanced technology has left journalists, many of whom now belong to the “white collar working class” (Hirst 2001; 63) and, like other workers, ultimately expendable. Professionalism allows journalists to continue to see themselves as autonomous and encourages an uncritical attitude towards the relations of production that govern their work. This lack of critical self-reflection inevitably sustains status quo reporting (Hirst 2001; 63-64). In essence, while public service ideals are being steadily eroded by the encroachment of commercialism, journalists retreat into ‘head in the sand’ professionalism.

Many critical scholars argue the commercialisation of the public sphere has irredeemably corrupted its idealised socio-political function and that the commodification of news and information has fundamentally altered the role played by the media in liberal political theory. Within this conception, rather than serving the public interest and encouraging democratic participation by an engaged and informed citizenry, journalism can become a “alienating, cynicism-inducing, narcotising force in our political culture, turning people off citizenship, rather than equipping them to fulfil their democratic potential” (McNair 2000; 8). Others point to a rise of punditry, political communication and spin as damaging of journalism’s normative function (Louw 2005).

The advances of technology and the global reach of news services have made ‘real time’ and close, vivid and ongoing coverage of war possible. Nonetheless, the domination of the media by political and military public relations mechanisms and the commercially attractive possibilities offered by embedded and live battle reporting have been seen to enthrall audiences with ‘video game’ aesthetics and drama. The contributions of technology and access to deeper understandings of war have been questioned (Kellner 1992; Reese 2004; Louw 2005).

---

⁶ Further discussion of the Australian media context is provided in Chapter Five.
2.5 THE NEXUS OF THREE PERSPECTIVES

Thus this thesis positions itself at the nexus of three perspectives of media enquiry: the sociological perspective, concerned primarily with the production and organisation of news through professional practices and performed bureaucratically, the cultural perspective, concerned with the media as both a cultural producer and product, and the political-economy perspective, which understands media institutions as both politically and economically significant organisations. All three perspectives see the media as significant ideological forces within society. However I seek to develop the critique of professionalism and demonstrate new directions in which to proceed. Each of these perspectives conveys a particular understanding of the function of journalistic professionalism. This thesis seeks to achieve a synthesis of these disparate perspectives on professionalism and aims to provide a coherent understanding of the concept and its relationship with various aspects of news work, the wider culture and the institutions that house and nurture it. It is argued that the discourse perspective provides this way forward.

While the critical sociologists of the 1970s clearly identified professional practices as ideological, this concept was not rigorously defined, but was synonymous with values (Gans 1980) and a commitment to defensive work practices (Tuchman 1972). Rather than revealing the social world objectively journalism was ideological in that it obscured the processes by which reality was organised. This conception of ideology approaches the conventional Marxist understanding of ideology as false consciousness. For the critical sociologists, news and information so produced – as ideology – provides resources and material for understanding the social world (Tuchman 1978). The reality presented by professional journalism is socially constructed, yet provides the context for lived experience in the world, the practical reality of everyday life. Professionalism is ideological insofar as it does not make clear its bureaucratic, routine processing of reality into news. This thesis appreciates this insight, however this conception of ideology is insufficiently rigorous, presupposing an ultimate truth of social reality that is deformed by journalism or which could potentially be correctly transmitted by some reform of the practices of professionalism. By contrast, in adopting a discursive conception of professionalism and setting aside questions of social truth and validity, I
pursue instead, questions of how truth is constructed in accordance with journalistic and organisational norms and needs. These discursive practices serve to entrench professional journalistic power in relation to the production of knowledge and meaning.

The link between media messages and wider social and cultural values has been explicitly made by the cultural studies perspective. For these thinkers the practical aspects of news production were directly connected with the wider cultural, social and political values circulating in society. Journalists reproduced such cultural and political norms, as they were part of that culture, as much subject to ideological domination as other social agents. Here professionalism is a cultural norm that legitimates such meaning production. Initially cultural studies understood professional practices and media institutions as instrumental in maintaining the “dominant ideology” (Hall 1977; 321). Professionalism and the meanings that it creates thus contribute to the maintenance of ruling class dominance.

In producing cultural hegemony, the media, and the professionals operating within them, legitimate, sanction and classify the social world in ways broadly consonant with the dominant social and cultural codes (Hall 1977; 345) although they operate with relative autonomy from direct ruling class power. In any case, the media do not reproduce direct support for the dominant ideologies, as in a totalitarian media environment but “underwrite and underpin...the structured ideological field” (Hall 1977; 346).

I see much value in considering how cultural values and norms resonate within discourse and how such norms are amplified in their discursive reproduction. However, this thesis is cautious of seeing journalists merely as conduits for broad cultural and political ideologies. Rather I argue that professionalism predisposes journalists to certain political and cultural representations, such as the deferential treatment of those in positions of social power. Furthermore, journalists do not robotically reproduce dominant ideology, although each is located within a tangled web of social and cultural meaning or conceptual paradigms⁷. Journalists, I argue, possess the capacity to self-reflexively depart from or rigidly adhere to norms. Professionalism however provides

---

⁷ For instance the broad value-ideology systems of liberalism, Christianity and capitalism contribute significantly to the contemporary Western cultural paradigm.
the link between the personal, individualised world of experiences and the broader cultural and social context. Professionalism provides the idiom in which experience is expressed as news. A significant weakness in the cultural perspective on ideology, and by extension, professional journalism, is the imprecise analysis of the nature of the process by which journalists become recruited either into ideology (from Althusser) or hegemony (from Gramsci). The discourse perspective, rather than seeing journalism as subject to over-arching cultural norms, sees journalism as pragmatically organised and originating in contingencies. There exists no ideological essence to journalism, rather modes and forms of enunciation and articulation that reproduce professionalism and inculcate journalism’s public legitimacy. Cultural ideology does not impose itself more or less successfully on sites of social meaning construction, such as journalism. Rather, for journalism cultural norms of truth, facticity and independence are important resources it invokes as it reproduces itself.

The thesis also sees weakness in the conception of professionalism advanced by the institutional perspective (Murdock and Golding, 1977; Garnham, 1979; Herman and Chomsky, 1986). Here professionalism is considered as an organisational and commercial norm which structures journalistic behaviour. Changes in the press industry in the early twentieth century established objectivity, the cornerstone of professionalism, as the central journalistic ethic. The news media has effectively exploited this for commercial gain and public credibility since. However, as the institutional perspective powerfully argues, the organisation of journalism along such lines positions journalism as structurally dependent and consequently deferential to sources of official political, cultural and institutional power. As such professionalism is reproductive of conservative social, cultural and political ideology. Moreover, the institutional perspective draws attention to the manner in which commercial and competitive pressures leave media organisations, and by extension professionalism, incapable of resisting processes of commercialisation such as the development of 24-hour news cycles, technology intensive reporting, celebrity journalism and sensationalist, often superficial news. Such are cogent criticisms. However, the institutional perspective overlooks the power that journalists possess as agents within the news production process, and is too willing to conceive of media institutions as monolithic and ideologically dominant. This
perspective de-emphasises the potential for counter-hegemonic journalism and the capacity of journalists to resist organisational pressures. This thesis however does not dismiss the importance of media organisations altogether; rather it urges caution in attributing determining power to them, as to any other influence. The notion of news organisations as powerful discursive formations that manage professionalism through such techniques as the allocation of resources and interventions by management into journalistic practice should be retained however.

Thus, I contend that the approaches to professionalism in journalism described above provide insufficient insight into its operation. All three perspectives tend towards conceptions of journalism as dominated by ideology — professional, cultural or institutional. By contrast I conceive of professionalism as a discourse; an internally coherent, self-organising, self-justifying and self-perpetuating regime of truth. As a discourse, professionalism, rather than providing access to the objective social world brings into existence facts, subjects, events and issues through their articulation as news. That is to say, professionalism provides the concepts with which to describe and represent social reality. Phenomena are 'made real' by their being processed into news in accordance with this vocabulary. The understanding and operation of discourse employed by this thesis is more fully explored in the following chapter. This chapter now turns to a discussion of the literature on war journalism in an effort to demonstrate how a discourse approach usefully contributes to an understanding of the production of war journalism.

PART TWO

2.6 WAR JOURNALISM

This section establishes the rationale of the thesis’ approach to war journalism and locates the thesis within the field of war journalism studies. This section critically reviews recent literature concerning war journalism and argues the discourse perspective has the potential to provide new insight into the field of war journalism studies. Conceiving of war journalism as discursive provides the theoretical means with which to understand war journalism and the relationship between the military and the media beyond the ‘paradigm of dominance’, which places journalists in a structurally
subordinate relationship to the military and political authorities. This paradigm is a prominent feature of much war journalism literature. Also prominent in the war journalism literature is the manner in which media representations of war reproduce cultural values, norms and orthodoxies – an echo of broader culturalist approaches to media studies.

This review shifts the critical focus away from journalists as dominated, ideologically constrained actors. Instead I seek to conceptualise professional journalists as possessing the capacity to influence the construction and production of news. I argue an analysis of how professional journalism makes the Iraq war ‘real’ for news audiences is a more fruitful form of analysis. Thus, this section demonstrates how a discursive understanding of the practice and function of war journalists opens up new ways of understanding and being informed about war. As the thesis emphasises the impossibility of constructing knowledge from any position outside discourse, this re-conceptualisation shifts democratic concern for establishing the truth or otherwise of wartime experience. In this thesis instead of seeking objective knowledge, I seek to understand methods of knowledge creation.

2.7 DOMINATION

The domination of journalism by military and political interests is a prominent theme in recent war journalism scholarship. From this perspective war journalism reflects government and military interests and indicates the weakness, and at times unwillingness, of journalism to resist official perspectives. This literature directly contradicts journalism’s normative role, as an independent, objective critic of power. This tradition in war journalism studies informs the present argument, as I seek to understand the dynamics of war journalism beyond domination.

Hallin (1986) demonstrates that rather than contributing significantly to Vietnam War opposition, the Vietnam press corps simply reflected divisions that existed in elite opinion. This view contrasts with the image of Vietnam journalists who have been valorised in popular culture as embodying critical, courageous professionalism. Hallin (1986) proposes a theoretical model to illustrate his argument in which debate over military policy and war coverage is primarily conducted through the culturally specific
frames of reference, or ‘spheres’ of legitimacy and deviance. Journalist’s coverage is ‘indexed’ to the range of elite opinion, and criticism of military and political power may only occur within a ‘sphere of legitimate controversy’. Through professional practices, such as objective treatment of fact and deference to official sources, journalists, rather than fulfilling their normative role as ‘watchdogs’, function as uncritical conduits for military and government communications. This relationship between the media and military-political institutions has been further developed by Wolfsfeld (1997) and Robinson (2002a) in their respective studies on the effect of media coverage on government policy. However, Hallin’s (1986) critique of professionalism did not extend beyond illustrating journalism’s dependence on existing political institutions and cultural knowledge.

The literature concerning the Falklands War examines the dependence of the media on the military, which resulted from the strictness of coverage regulations. This dependence is held to be reproductive of official perspectives and, consequently, of ideology. The British Ministry of Defence (MoD) established the system that has become standard in controlling media access and information during times of conflict. During the 1982 Falklands War journalists were organised into ‘pools’, confined to various naval vessels, and only able to report the war subject to their respective press officer’s approval. Information was systematically censored, suppressed and delayed. These measures both minimised the impact of bad or distressing news and also promoted the MoD as the only real source of reliable and accurate information (Knightley 2004; 481). Although this press management policy was criticised by some voices in the British media at the time (Harris 1983) ill-preparedness for dealing with this novel situation contributed to the media’s general compliance (Jesser and Young 1997; 272-273; Knightley 2004; 481). Given its success in limiting critical inquiry and in encouraging pro-war nationalism, the system tested during the Falklands War became the template for managing the media in future limited conflicts (Jesser and Young 1997; 277).

The Falklands War produced two important studies of the social production of war news. In their critical series analysing mainstream reporting, the Glasgow University Media Group (1985) attacked both the handling of British journalists by the
MoD and journalist’s complicity in fostering pro-war feeling. The Glasgow University Media Group’s study pointed to the professional practices of war correspondents that permitted their exploitation, such as reliance on military information, protection and transport. The Media Group combined a close analysis of news with broader institutional and cultural contexts, providing a powerful criticism. Their critique is weakened however, by their insufficiently nuanced conception of ideology – an issue this thesis seeks to redress. Similar to the conclusions drawn by Hallin (1986), the Media Group argue the media are generally complicit in the reproduction of dominant political ideologies – in this case nationalistic British conservatism. This notion of ideology is redolent of the Marxist concept of ‘false consciousness’. This positioning journalists as unwitting dupes in the military’s management of information, unable to resist domination is problematic however as it extinguishes journalistic agency.

Other scholars, such as Tumber and Morrison (1988) paid close attention to the experiences and perceptions of Falklands War correspondents, seeking to demonstrate their degree of freedom from the dominant ideology of British nationalism. Tumber and Morrison (1988), illustrating the extent to which journalists were active agents in their negotiation of their war experiences, argue that professionalism does not necessarily serve journalism well during wartime; objectivity and independence being irreconcilable with the need for protection by the military and the brutal realities of death and destruction (1988; 103). Elsewhere coverage of the Falklands War has also been powerfully criticised as being heavily and willingly censored and ardently pro-British (Jesser and Young 1997; Knightley 2004). For these critics professionalism possesses no capacity to resist military perspectives. Tumber and Morrison’s study does however point to the importance of attending to journalist’s own experiences in reporting conflict and seeing them as part of a larger system. They write, “to understand the creation of news, as distinct from social relationships as demonstrated by the news, it is essential to get to grips with people as operating within a system rather than operators of a system (Tumber and Morrison 1998; x).

In scholarship concerned with the media’s performance during the Gulf War, 1991 the dominance thesis continues to be emphasised. Studies of Gulf War media performance emphasise the extent to which media management strategies appeal to
the weaknesses within journalistic professionalism for their efficacy. Pursuing these criticisms this scholarship emphasises the ability of the military to dominate journalists and the reliance of journalists on the military (Kellner 1992; Zelizer 1992; Nohrstedt et al 2000; Reese 2004). These authors suggest that war resonates through powerful cultural understandings and that professional journalism during the 1991 Gulf War was zealous in its reproduction of pro-war ideology through these culturally established modes of understanding.

When American-led coalition forces began to build up in the Persian Gulf in 1991, the exclusionary tactics used in the Falklands and other limited conflicts were practically unworkable. In fact, overt censorship was not required given the military’s total control over means of access, communication and transport (Jesser and Young 1997; 280). Once more the pool system was employed, severely restricting the ability of journalists to independently report from the war zone (Young 1992; 74-75). Those journalists who chose to go it alone or remain in Baghdad during the conflict were labelled traitors and accused of threatening the success of the military operations (Knightley 2004; 492-494).

Much of the reporting of the conflict came from official military news conferences and reports that downplayed any of the bloody, violent and horrific aspects of war and focused on the role of technology to enable the coalition military to fight a ‘surgical’, almost bloodless war (Thussu 2002; 204). Although it was revealed after the war that only seven percent of ordinance dropped on Iraq was laser guided, ‘precision’ weaponry (Philo and McLaughlin 1995; 149), the world’s media reported the changed nature of war – that ‘smart bombs’ could pinpoint targets of military value, while leaving civilian populations unaffected and Western soldiers unexposed to risk. Daily combat images and the video game aspects of the war kept journalists mesmerised and inattentive to the doctored statistics and fabricated success rates of many of these weapons (Knightley 2004; 496-497). Indeed, much of this information was transmitted during minutely detailed and stage managed press conferences where journalists were, “spoon-fed – like animals at the zoo and the press officers were the zookeepers who threw us a piece of meat occasionally” (Hackworth, in Young 1992; 77). As Kellner (1992; 134) has argued the combined forces of official news management and overly
credulous journalists meant networks, “picked up every rumour and piece of disinformation, instantly turning it into ‘news’”.

For these authors, the 1991 Gulf war illustrated well the shortcomings of the modern media organisations and their heavy reliance on the military for access to the battlefield, to sources and to credible information. Those journalists who tried to report from outside this system were blacklisted, excluded and demonised. The military too proved itself expert at handling and controlling the media. Wolfsfeld (1997; 198) writes, “...the Gulf War offers one of the clearest examples in recent history in which the authorities were able completely to dominate the press”. The Gulf War was a great success for the military and its attempts to co-opt the media and dominate the flow of information about the war, allowing it to manipulate and mould the media’s understanding of war.

Following the 1991 Gulf War the question of what influence professionalism has on war reporting arose. Zelizer (1992; 67) called the Gulf War a “critical incident” for journalists in which satellite and digital technology first challenged existing reporting practices. For Zelizer (1992) this new era displaced the archetype of the independent war reporter, replacing it with a news-form based on immediacy and drama, but also one criticised for privileging visual, made-for-TV aspects of war coverage. Kellner (1992) criticises journalists for becoming utterly dependent on the military for protection and information. This criticism resurfaces in the literature on during the Iraq invasion, 2003. Kellner (1992; 2004) sees such closeness as corrupting the normative role of the media by inculcating a military logic into media coverage or a “militarisation of consciousness”. This criticism is echoed by Reese (2004) in discussion of the Iraq invasion, 2003. In showing how journalists enter into routinised, symbiotic relationships with military sources, Reese (2004) suggests war becomes known through military frames of reference, anchored in familiar cultural understandings of war, such as honour, duty, sacrifice and bravery. Here journalism itself becomes ‘militarised’ (Reese 2004). For Reese (2004) developments such as the formal system of embedding journalists with military units and the de-contextualised, yet compelling coverage so produced provides evidence of militarisation. This is an important critical insight which the thesis seeks to expand upon, by demonstrating the extent to which not only is
journalism militarised, but a converse process takes place. Through the humanisation of soldiers and the telling military stories, which programs such as embedding encouraged, a *journalisation* of the military takes place, in which military perspectives, values and needs are normalised through journalism.

Several authors have articulated criticisms of the military-media relationship and have identified the norms of professional practice as deeply problematic in a war environment (Ward 1998; Carruthers 2000; Tumber and Prentoulis 2003; McLaughlin 2003). Others have highlighted the technological and informational aspect of news practices and how they shape war reporting (Tumber 2004; Cottle 2006; Tumber and Webster 2006), rather than emphasising the power of the military to dominate journalists. For example, as others have done, Tumber (2004) criticises embedded journalists in Iraq for becoming socialised and habituated into military life, resulting in uncritical journalism. Carruthers (2000; 158) calls the military-media, symbiosis which has been a feature of recent conflicts, a “ritualised and symbolic display of shadow boxing”. These critics however approach professionalism from a normative perspective lamenting the adoption of military perspectives by journalists. These authors consider the normative function of journalism to be corrupted and its weaknesses, stemming from its reliance on established, official institutions, exploited by the military. This thesis, by contrast, views such aspects features of war journalism as necessarily related to the discursive requirements of professional journalism. That is, domination necessarily results from the pursuit of normative professionalism. While this thesis values the insights describe above, it is considered useful to extend our conception of professionalism in war beyond its social organisation and to consider the cultural and institutional context of war reporting.

### 2.8 CULTURE

The cultural perspective clearly identifies and critiques the cultural context of war as important within the study of war journalism. The degree to which professionalism deploys and is deployed by cultural and ideological forms is prominent. Hallin (1986) demonstrated media coverage of the Vietnam War to be operating largely within the acceptable cultural sphere of ‘legitimate controversy’. Rather than leading the critique
of America’s involvement in Vietnam, the press framed the war in culturally resonant terms, for example as a campaign against communism within the culturally acceptable American martial tradition. Several authors support this criticism, considering journalists to quickly compromise their professional dispassion for patriotic reporting during times of war (Jensen; 1992; Zelizer and Hall 2004; Reese 2004). Zelizer (2004) identifies the manner in which the imagery of war reduces its complexity to culturally resonant forms and depictions of conflict, such as patriotism, sacrifice, humanity, the nation-state and fairness. As Zelizer argues, the representation and visualisation of war in such a way reinforces a “strategically crafted depiction” (2004; 218) that potentially undermines an accurate, transparent understanding of war. During the Gulf War (and later, Iraq, 2003) new technologies facilitated strategic depictions, allowing journalists to broadcast live from Baghdad rooftops, the decks of Coalition warships and from desert bases. Television journalism was now capable of providing rich and fascinating coverage, and often returned journalists to the centre of the ‘war show’ (Zelizer 1992; 70). Such live, rolling coverage allowed the characterisation of the journalist as archetype and the human face of the mythical war story that appealed to commercial values and community interest, yet provided little information (Reese 2004; 249). The Gulf War possessed an ‘illusory’ quality (Kellner, 1992; Gerbner, 1992), resulting from the vivid, novel images broadcast and published throughout the war and partly resulting of the integration of military logic into the larger issues and public debate (Reese 2004; 249).

Pedelty (1995) explicitly details the cultural context of professionalism, arguing that the ideology of professional Western war correspondents must be understood specifically in terms of cultural practices and norms, obscured by objectivity. Pedelty warns that to ignore this, “is to fall prey to a sort of vulgar idealism whose generalisations obfuscate rather than define the complexities of contemporary power” (1995; 6). For Pedelty (1995; 172) journalists do just this, their “self-conscious non-reflexivity” a form of wilful ignorance of their complicity with larger cultural and political ideologies that pattern their work, such as support for American neo-liberal expansion and military activity. The thesis takes considerable inspiration from this argument and seeks to develop the criticism further.
The role of journalists reproducing cultural norms in the context of the Gulf War is addressed by Kellner (1992). For Kellner (1992) mainstream cultural understandings of war and its meaning, as described above, constitute a hegemonic discourse, that is reproduced through media and journalistic professionalism, crystallising around themes, such as patriotism, heroism and Western righteousness. Lewis (2004; 297) argues public support for the Iraq War 2003 was in part effected by the media’s coverage, “by the ways in which the media reproduced certain pro-war assumptions and by the exclusion of more critical forms of coverage”.

Tumber (2004) argues that the rigidities of professionalism become loosened during war, as the personalised experiences of journalists subsume objective, detached journalism. Such coverage generates raw and emotional news, that while of high interest and dramatic impact often expresses a perspective habituated to military logics. Indeed, echoing Pedelty (1995), Tumber and Prentoulis (2003) argue the meaning of professionalism is becoming ever more ambiguous as objective, neutral methods produce seriously compromised journalism (Kellner 1992; Pedelty 1995; Reese 2004; Boyd-Barrett 2004).

This cultural perspective on war journalism is quick to identify the role journalists play in reproducing cultural assumptions and norms concerning war, such as the righteousness of American militarism – a feature of modern war journalism recognised and explored by this thesis. The question of power however, is left largely unaddressed by this scholarship and a discussion of the ability of journalists to resist reproducing cultural ideology is absent from the literature. Rather journalists are commonly seen as agents for the reproduction of Western political and cultural stereotypes. While recognising the contribution of the cultural perspective, I conceive of professionalism as a discourse that dominates the journalistic field and that by definition obscures any journalistic complicity in reproducing dominant cultural meanings. In this conception the professional discourse articulates a sophisticated self-awareness of its own limitations, but nevertheless persists with pursuing a normative professional role in which limitations arising from professionalism are left unaddressed.
2.9 EMBED WITH THE MILITARY: IRAQ 2003

The 2003 invasion of Iraq represents a significant milestone in the development of war journalism. During the invasion, many of the features of war journalism outlined above were vividly expressed. While journalism in the post-September 11 political environment has been criticised for not defending its own professional standards (Downie and Kaiser 2003; Mermin 2004; Miller 2004) the Iraq War threw this debate into stark relief. The Iraq War became the most covered conflict ever (Carlson and Katovsky 2003; xi). Media outlets poured millions of dollars and their most advanced technologies into their coverage, and provided news consumers with rolling 24-hour news, real time broadcasts and slickly produced news specials, supplements and expanded editions. These features of war reporting became standard during the Iraq War, rather being innovations as they were during the Gulf War (Zelizer 1992). A concomitant development has been the ongoing refinement of news management and media containment strategies. As we have seen these strategies have evolved throughout the post-Vietnam era (Jesser and Young 1997; Knightley 2004). During the Iraq War they found their most sophisticated expression.

The centrepiece of this news management effort, alongside a sophisticated public relations campaign, was the institution of the system of ‘embedding’ journalists with military units. Although the idea is not novel, embedding became a central feature of media access to the Iraq War, involving far more journalists and proving much more controversial than ever before. Debates over the merits of the embed system have become the defining features of the coverage of Iraq and consequently of the scholarly discussion of Iraq War coverage. The embed system was at once criticised for symbolising the co-option of the news media by the military (Miller 2004; 90) and hailed as a break-through in close-up, detailed coverage of military operations (Bernhard 2003; 87). Of the 2000-plus journalists who covered the Iraq invasion and war some 600 were embedded with US and British forces (Carlson and Katovsky 2003; xiv). The remainder operated as independent journalists, under no obligation to US or British authorities, but significantly less safe than those afforded the protection of the units with whom they travelled. These two methods of reporting have opened up a wide debate amongst journalists and media commentators, some independent journalists accusing embedded
journalists of being military stooges (Schechter 2003; 90). Whilst many embeds relished the experience to travel with military units and were generally positive about the arrangements, many others expressed reservations (Carlson and Katovsky 2003).

The main concern of the US authorities in devising the embed system was a concern to circumvent negative media perspectives and to encourage in-depth and positive coverage of the American and British armed forces. The US Department of Defence policy is clear:

We must organise for and facilitate access of national and international media to our forces, including those forces engaged in ground operations, with the goal of doing this right from the start. To accomplish this, we will embed media with our units. These embedded media will live, work, and travel as part of our units with which they are embedded to facilitate maximum, in-depth coverage of US forces in combat and related operations (US Department of Defence 2003).

With this policy the US military sought to avoid the criticisms that had followed its previous heavy-handed media policies and to draw the media closer, encouraging identification between the embedded journalists and the military units with whom they travelled. As Bryan Whitman, the US deputy assistant secretary of defence for public affairs stated, journalists were to embed,

…so they can develop relationships, so that they can provide the very deep and rich coverage that you get by being with a unit…Besides facilitating the type of access that they want to [sic], we know that any time a reporter can spend an extended time with a particular unit, he or she gets to understand what that unit’s mission is about; they can report more accurately on their activities (Whitman 2003).

Many journalists embraced the Pentagon’s embed scheme with enthusiasm (Carlson and Katovsky 2003). It was felt that such closeness and seemingly unlimited access to ‘the story’ was an unprecedented, positive concession to the media. Much of the Western media however, generally assumed an uncritical posture in relation to the war and the coalition forces. Profiles of hometown heroes, images of battle and
compelling close up footage of the military featured prominently. Those with a broader view of the war, of strategy, historical context and underlying issues were to be frustrated by the limitations of embedding. Research conducted by The Project for Excellence in Journalism found that:

The embedded coverage...is largely anecdotal. It's both exciting and dull, combat focused, and mostly live and unedited. Most of it lacks context, but is unusually rich in detail. It has all the virtues and vices of reporting only what you can see (PEJ 2003).

Critics of the embed system condemned the exercise as fundamentally obfuscating the realities of war. Although this conflict was not the first to be called a virtual war, Oberg (2005) argues in Iraq the manipulated, virtual reality produced by embedded coverage represented a deliberate separation of news from actual reality. Scholars are ambivalent about embedding's efficacy and especially concerned about the closeness that embedding fosters between journalists and the military they are covering (Tumber and Palmer 2003; PEJ 2003; Reese 2004; Seib, 2004). While this thesis is sympathetic to the virtual war argument, it sees rather this representation as not virtual, but 'made real' and produced through its articulation in professional news discourse. In this sense the discourse makes war ‘real’ in specific, dramatic and compelling ways.

According to Kellner (1992) and Reese (2004), the routinisation of the military-media relationship further contributes to the militarisation of consciousness and journalistic independence is fundamentally compromised. Tumber (1988) has identified these same phenomena in the UK media’s coverage of the Falklands War. The closeness and willingness of the media to cooperate with the military, plays a powerful role in normalising military attitudes and logic for the wider public. The media establish definitions and reason in the wider culture and add to their taken for granted quality in a spiral of amplification (Hall, in Reese 2004; 249).

It is this privileging of military perspectives that are the most important criticism of the embedding system. Although coverage may have been lacking in context and rich
in descriptive detail it is the normalisation of the logic of militarism that is most affective of the public mind. Boyd-Barrett (2004; 30) calls the embed experiment the, “logical conclusion and pure expression” of a tendency in the media towards ethnocentric and sanitised coverage.

Embedding offered unprecedented access and possibilities for coverage. However, the meaning of conflict and combat was impossible to assess as questions over the causes and rationale for war were marginalised by action (Boyd-Barrett 2004; 28). This is confirmed by the Project for Excellence in Journalism’s (2003) research that found embedded coverage included little or no interpretation or analysis, that coverage was predominantly live and unedited, that soldiers were generally the only sources and that graphic material was avoided in favour of the dramatic. Seib (2004; 60-63) writes that rarely were the public reminded of the connection between what was happening and the reasons for war. Embedded coverage avoided contextualising the conflict and encouraged a disassociation in viewer’s minds of what they were viewing and the consequences of that military action. Thus, argues Seib (2004; 39), “what was occurring would have been viewed as just one more ‘reality’ program, watched with practiced neutrality for a short while until boredom set in and viewers switched to something else”.

These criticisms of embedding tend to unite critical perspectives already encountered in relation to coverage of previous conflicts. Through the institutionalised system of embedding, professionalism is further exploited and dominated, consistent with the journalistic experience of previous conflicts. The literature generally characterises the military as powerfully establishing and maintaining this system. The participation of journalists in embedding is granted only upon military sufferance. Embedding also inculcates a sympathetic attitude amongst journalists. In this criticism, either the military successfully dominates journalists and achieves its aim of favourable coverage, or journalists who participate in the system of embedding are corrupted by the experience and their professionalism suffers as a consequence. That the interests of professionalism and the military are coincident and that these interests necessarily
produce problematic journalism - as is this thesis’ contention – is not considered in the literature.

The role of the journalist in war is fraught with ambiguity and complexity. Normatively, professional journalists are attempting to tell the story of the war by gaining access to the battlefield, witnessing the action and collecting the facts of the situation. This activity is potentially valuable. However as is clear the media are also compromised by the propaganda role they are encouraged to play, alongside their cultural role in reinforcing ideology. Although this is antithetical to, and indeed hidden by, the ethics of professional journalism, a theoretical understanding of the social function of journalism makes these roles clear. The very mechanics of war reporting; the gathering of information, the processing and the packaging are subject to an array of influences (Taylor 1997; 120) which act to restrict the scope of any reporters view. The circumstances of battle, geographical and temporal constraints on individual journalists as well as differing communications capacities and media strategies employed by military authorities, contribute to a partial, incomplete view of events, often labelled the fog of war. The real experience of war is complex, confusing and brutal, in which the participants themselves rarely have a full understanding of what is happening (Taylor 1997; 121). The claims of a news report to be revealing the reality of a situation must therefore always be weighed against the many factors that contribute to that report’s contingent construction. To look at the media’s coverage of war, the world is not revealed ‘as it is’ but as a map of the broad preoccupations, interests and values of society (Carruthers 2000; 17) articulated through its journalists.

2.10 CONCLUSION
This chapter has provided the rationale for the discourse approach to war journalism pursued by this thesis. Specifically it has critically reviewed the concepts of professionalism and professionalism-as-ideology within the literature. This chapter delineated three major approaches towards these concepts: the sociological, cultural and institutional perspectives that variously describe the nature and effect of journalistic professionalism. The sociological perspective has been criticised for employing an insufficiently nuanced conception of ideology in its criticism of professionalism. For the
sociological critique of professionalism professional practices and concepts obscure the ‘reality’ of journalism, tending towards a conception of professionalism not dissimilar to the Marxist notion of false consciousness. Secondly, the culturalist perspective was critically reviewed. Problematic for this perspective is the tendency to see journalists as mindlessly reproducing the ‘dominant ideology’ and consequently dominated by larger cultural ideological formations. Lastly, the institutional perspective emphasises the extent to which journalists are functional in the political economy of journalism, producing debased forms of journalism in the interest of the organisational, often commercial masters. In conclusion of this section it is argued that a discursive understanding of professionalism provides a fruitful means with which to think of professionalism outside of these restricted approaches.

As the following analysis will demonstrate professional discourse regulates how a legitimate professional identity must be constructed, as certain journalistic norms and values are sanctioned and other practices are disavowed. In the context of the present study, these discursive controls operate to produce war journalism in accordance with professionalism, to make war real. In this conception, professional war journalism, rather than providing an objective view of complex political, military and social affairs, demonstrates the constraint of journalism within the regime of professionalism.

On the basis of my research I argue that professionalism is a hegemonic discourse within journalism that legitimates forms of news work and methods of understanding the social world. Professionalism necessarily invokes and produces normative cultural and professional understandings and invites exploitation by military-media managers cognisant of its norms. Nonetheless, professionalism provides an ultimate defence of journalism practice and a crucial legitimating ethic.

Furthermore, this thesis argues that professional journalists consciously pursue objective, independent practice, unaware of the deeper cultural values smuggled into their representations, yet aware of professionalism’s limitations. They understand, for instance, its reliance on sources, its pretensions to neutrality and its reduction of complexity – yet they stay committed to professionalism in a peculiar state of professional denial, what Pedelty (1995; 172) has identified as “self-conscious non-reflexivity”. This thesis re-conceptualises this criticism, arguing professionalism in this
sense operates as a ‘fantasy’ (Žižek 1989) for journalists, that, while structuring their relation to the reality of their experience, permits them to overlook the recognised shortcomings of the professional system.

Having provided this critical review of approaches to understanding professionalism in journalism, this chapter moved on to a critical discussion of how professionalism has been used in the literature concerning war journalism specifically. This chapter has illustrated the extent to which thinking about war journalism emphasises the notion that military interests dominate journalism consistently and the ideological role played by journalists in the representation of war. Lastly, this chapter specifically argued that analyses of professionalism in war journalism may constructively benefit from the use of the professionalism-as-discourse methodological and theoretical approach. The theoretical context of this thesis, in which these concepts are more fully examined, is the focus of the following chapter.
CHAPTER THREE - THEORETICAL CONTEXT

PART ONE

3.1 INTRODUCTION
This chapter outlines the theoretical approach adopted by the thesis in analysing the influence of professionalism on war journalism. In this section the theoretic perspective this thesis applies to the problem of professional war journalism is explicated. This chapter will proceed by providing a brief genealogy of the concept of ideology before outlining the thesis’ conception of discourse and its approach to discourse analysis. The usefulness of discursive concepts for the current analysis will be demonstrated. Of important influence on this thesis’ theoretical framework has been the discourse theory of Michel Foucault. My study takes much theoretical and analytical inspiration from both Foucault’s archaeological and genealogical approaches to historical and social analysis. Key aspects of these theories are examined below and their utility for the present argument is demonstrated. I argue however, that Foucault’s approach can be usefully enhanced with the incorporation of aspects of Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse-political theory.

By combining Foucauldian discourse analysis with later, post-Marxist conceptions of discourse, the thesis moves beyond discursive ‘rarefaction’, for which Foucault’s theory has been criticised (McNay 1994). This thesis’ position is that discourses are both fundamentally engaged in political projects and ultimately contingent. These theorisations are applied to professional journalism. I argue that the combination of a Foucauldian conceptual framework with post-Marxist discourse theory that centres on questions of hegemony provides a unique theoretical perspective which permits at once a conception of professional journalism as an institutionally constituted ‘regime of truth’, yet as an ultimately contingent discursive project.

3.2 IDEOLOGY
It is necessary to briefly clarify the understanding of the concept of ideology presently employed. Until this stage in the argument, a normative conception of ideology has been un-problematically used. Indeed, in much of the journalism studies and media sociology scholarship this central analytic category has until very recently not
undergone critical reappraisal as it has elsewhere\(^8\) (Tuchman 1972; 1978; Molotch and Lester 1974; Altheide 1976; Gans 1979; Gitlin 1980; Reese 1997; Soloski 1997; Bennett 2005). Ideology has undergone considerable critical theoretical review in the fields of social and political theory however, and it is to this that we must briefly turn.

As a descriptive term, ideology has signified a system of understanding the correspondence between reality and thought. Ideology, connoting a certain falseness or deception, has, in this sense, often been contrasted with ‘science’— where science is held to yield ‘truth’ of social and natural realities. For a statement, idea or policy to be labelled ideological means that it is disconnected from the conditions of objective reality. As Eagleton (1991) notes, in the post-Enlightenment era ideology came to be seen as that which diverts the empirical and rational human capacities from progress towards an ultimate socio-political and economic human state. Indeed, the history and development of the various critiques of ideology have in the main been attempts to find an objective point outside ideology from which to reveal ideological conceptions (McLellan 1995; 1)

It is in this sense that Marx and Engels wrote of ideology. As Eagleton (1991; 71) comments, “Marx and Engels inaugurate the major modern meaning of the term whose history we are tracing”. For Marx and Engels (1964) the ideas that characterised a society during any given epoch were directly connected to and reflective of the dominant mode of production and the social relations thereof. The material conditions of life establish the social and cultural conditions of existence. And while they considered humans able to generate their own conceptions, beliefs and understandings of the world, these were directly consequent of their social and economic position:

Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-process …The phantoms of their brains [ideas] are also necessarily sublimates of their material life process, which is empirically verifiable and bound to material premises (Marx and Engels 1964; 37-38).

\(^8\) For Gans (1980) for example ‘ideology’ is synonymous with ‘values’, such as capitalism, Christianity and the Law that structure journalist’s conceptualisations of social reality.
This conception inaugurates the ‘base-superstructure’ model which characterises conventional Marxist social analyses – that the ‘superstructure’ of cultural and social life, such as institutions and beliefs, are directly conditioned by the economic basis of society: in Marxist analysis of capitalism, by the private ownership of the means of production. Ideas, as reflections of material conditions, are thus subject to control by those social forces controlling the means of production and the distribution of wealth. In early Marxist conceptions, ideology directly reflects the material conditions of existence, directly reflecting the structural conditions that characterise the capitalist system. It is these structural conditions that inculcate the ‘fetish’ of capital, in which social relations are mis-recognised as material relations (Marx, 1976). Ideology is in this sense an ‘effect’ of capital (Eagleton 1991; 84), a notion already encountered in this thesis discussion of the cultural studies media analysis. Social illusions, as represented by ideological conceptions, and commonly understood as ‘false consciousness’, stem therefore from the real contradictions and illusions of capitalism – the concentration of capital accumulation and commodity fetishism for example\(^9\). *Ideology*, can be dispelled through *scientific* analysis, which is how Marx conceived of his political economy. It follows therefore that ideological changes can only be produced through the activity of changing the social structure (Eagleton 1991; 72) – for Marx, the practical work of revolution.

It also follows that social ideas – ideologies – are vulnerable to control and domination by those social groups that control the material basis of society, in Marxist theory, the bourgeoisie. While Marx and Engels never explicitly stated a theory of ideology within their critique of capitalism, their understanding of ideology as a reflection of socio-economic relations is clear. Thus:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production (Marx and Engels 1964; 60).

This understanding of ideology was not elaborated by Marx and Engels. While their analysis concentrates on the connection between material and social relations, later thinkers have pursued the notion that ideology is cultivated by social groups. Simply, we begin to understand the attraction of the concept of ideology in analysing media production and consequently why the critical use of ideology has been widespread within media studies and media sociology.

Briefly, this economic determinism ultimately restricted the power of conventional Marxist analyses in accounting for the circulation of ideology. Later Marxists, such as Lukacs (1971), sought to theorise ideology as produced through a dialectical relation between social reality and thought. From this perspective ideology is understood as bourgeois class consciousness adopted, or naturalised, by the working class, who remain unaware of their objective social position as exploited by capitalism. For Lukacs (1971), inverting Marx’s precept, rather than objective relations determining consciousness ideology determines what can potentially be understood as objective. Thus social relations are reified and importantly for Marxist theory, economics, rather than remaining separate from ideology, is potentially ideological within the contemporary forms of objectivity. The claim of theory and science to be outside ideology is thus jeopardised as all forms of thinking can potentially be contaminated with ideological thought. Criticism therefore, from a position of ‘scientific understanding’, such as Marxism claimed, is significantly problematised. For later theorists the object of revolutionary thought and action was refocused from the means of economic production to the means of ideological production – the social institutions and systems that produce and inculcate bourgeois ideology.

3.3 HEGEMONY

Following Marx and Engels, Gramsci also saw ideology as a product of structured social relations. However, where Marx and Engels considered the economic ‘base’ of society determinate of the ideological and cultural ‘superstructure’, Gramsci followed Lukacs’ conception of ideology as emanating from the ‘superstructure’. With the introduction of the theoretical concept of hegemony (1971) Gramsci theorised the ‘superstructure’ as autonomous from the economic ‘base’. Rather than a direct result of economic
structures, ideology, a pure realm of disembodied ideas (Howarth 2000; 89), “organise[s] human masses, and create[s] the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle etc” (Gramsci 1971; 377). Following Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985; 67) interpretation of Gramsci, ideology:

is not identified with a ‘system of ideas’ or ‘false consciousness’ of social agents; it is instead an organic and relational whole, embodied in institutions and apparatuses, which welds together a historic bloc around a number of basic articulatory principles.

Gramsci’s ‘hegemony’ describes social relations in which government and domination of the working class is achieved through their acceptance of capitalist relations. Here, following the theoretical innovations provided by Lukacs, ruling class hegemony is sustained through the inculcation of ruling class - bourgeois - culture and values amongst the working class. For Gramsci however, the apparatus of the state and social and cultural institutions serve to extend and preserve the hegemony of the ruling class. For later media analysts, such as British cultural studies scholars, Gramsci’s concept of hegemony provided much theoretical inspiration. It continues to do so for this thesis, although it is understood as discursively constructed, rather than bluntly ideological.

Rather than seeing the operation of ideology as Marx and Engels did, as representing the determination of consciousness by material reality, Gramsci understood hegemony as the, “whole range of strategies by which dominant power elicits consent for its rule” (Eagleton 1991; 116). Gramsci therefore extends the analysis beyond the economic realm, to all aspects of culture, social practice and history. This conception is clearly useful for those interested in the media’s cultural and political function. When applied to the study of journalism, the concept of hegemony permits the critical analysis of conventional journalistic forms and practices, without requiring recourse to some notion of a fundamental economic basis of the industry. Furthermore, a notion of hegemony assists in conceptualising professional journalism as, on one hand hegemonic within the journalistic field, but also as supporting and reproducing larger cultural hegemonic forms, such as liberal capitalism, and in the case
of war, Western militarism. The specific use of this concept is returned to below, as it has been revisited by later post-Marxist theorists (Laclau and Mouffe 1985), who have incorporated the concept of hegemony into broader discourse theory.

3.4 STRUCTURAL MARXISM

Ideology was sustained throughout the twentieth century as a central concept in Marxist analysis. During the 1960s and 1970s ‘structural Marxism’ gained influence, with Louis Althusser as its most notable theorist. Structuralist thought conceives of social positions (class, gender, race) as being defined within a social structure – as structurally given in relationship to one another. In Althusser’s thought ideology locates social subjects within the social structure; ideology *interpellates* subjects or ‘hails’ them into certain social positions (Althusser 1994). For example, certain ‘positions’ or identities, such as ‘working class’, are constituted by ideology. Structuralism rejects, as did Gramsci, ideology as a ‘false consciousness’ arising from within subjects – Althusser (1994; 121) criticises Marx’s notion of ideology as “a pure illusion, a pure dream…whose status is just like the dream…before Freud”. Rather structuralism posits a material existence that determines the subject; ideology is not a ‘false’ representation of reality, as its source is material reality itself (Larrain 1979; 154).

Althusser’s theory of ideology becomes ontologically problematic however. Two criticisms here are pertinent – the first, Althusser’s theory of ideology has difficulty accommodating social practices that are not directly related to production, and secondly, it posits a notion of ideology as pre-existing, a-historical and inherent to society – not, as Marx stipulates, emanating from real and contradictory socio-economic relationships. In removing the capitalist ‘base’ from his theory, Althusser’s ideology becomes total, foreclosing on the possibility of transcending capitalist social relations and incapacitating subjects for any constituting role through political struggle (Lovell 1980; 245). Thus, although Althusser provided a compelling account of how individuals are subjectified by ideological structures, there exists little hope in his theory for an emancipatory politics which can free people from ideological subjectification.

Ideology therefore, as an analytic category, has been deeply problematised by theoretical development and its utility within Marxist and neo-Marxist theoretical
frameworks is questioned. Although an understanding of ideology as ‘mode of thought and practice’ may have some descriptive use, for the purposes of this thesis ideology as a Marxist analytic concept bears little further utility as an analytic category. The problems for media analysts here are obvious, as journalists come to be understood as without agency and constrained within a-historical ideologies, such as professionalism.

Foucault (1980) outlines his critique of the concept of ideology concisely, arguing the concept is ontologically naïve as it refers to its opposite – truth, which Foucault’s discourse theory fundamentally rejects. Nonetheless, as outlined below, the theoretical exhaustion of ideology as an analytic category does not foreclose on the possibility of social and political critique. Indeed, pursuing a critical analysis of journalism that seeks to understand the hegemony of ‘professionalism’ is considered a valuable empirical exercise.

Rather than a concern for the falseness or otherwise of social theory and reality later theorists have concentrated on the extent to which language, and the conditions that characterise the operation of language, makes certain understandings, or meanings, possible. In particular structural understandings of language as discourse inform the early discourse theory of Foucault (1972; 1994). The role of the state and institutions in constructing subjects through discourse features in later Foucauldian (1977; 1981) analyses, and in the social and political theory of Laclau and Mouffe (1985) which demonstrates how discourses are mobilised in pursuit of political projects. This understanding provides analysts with very sensitive and insightful means of analysing political and social relations outside of ideological formations. Only here can ideology be reintroduced theoretically, as a means of understanding the techniques by which discursively constructed political projects are advanced. As Žižek (1989) has described, ideology operates, not as fetish, but as fantasy in which ideological conceptions are recognised ironically, not as illusion, yet acted on as if people were unaware – what Žižek (1989; 32-33) calls a double illusion. As this thesis’s pragmatic approach to understanding professionalism adopts the discourse theory of both Foucault and Laclau and Mouffe as its central analytical methodology, it to this branch of social theory and philosophy that we now turn.
3.5 DISCOURSE

Simply, the analysis of discourse is concerned with the analysis of language, and meaning produced through language, as a social act of meaning production. That is, discourse, as an object of study, contains shared social meanings. Discursive analysis seeks to understand the social conditions and contexts of meaning production, rather than to interpret and understand meaning, in and of itself. However, as will be demonstrated the conceptual understanding of discourse has been radically widened in the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe (1985). While Laclau and Mouffe expand their conception of the discursive to include the entire social realm, it is nonetheless through language that this realm is apprehended and constituted. For Laclau and Mouffe (1985) there are no extra-discursive social meanings available and no ‘truth’ or non-ideological knowledge possible – all meanings are constructed through language. It is in this sense that war is ‘made real’ through news discourse.

The study of discourse seeks pragmatic understandings, beyond descriptive analyses available through positivist science. Language in this scheme is no longer an abstract set of rules or utterances providing a clear and uncomplicated representation of reality or experience, but a medium of meaning negotiation and construction (Wood and Kroger 2000; 4). For scholars of discourse, language is the key component or connection between a physical world of external reality that is empirically unknown and the world of lived experience (Lovell 1983; 17). Similarly for this thesis, it is the language of journalism and its uses that are centrally important. For scholars of discourse positivist science and its obsession with factual, independently verifiable knowledge is profoundly compromised by language. Indeed, as language constitutes the building material of the social world, it is the necessary object of analysis if one is to understand social behaviours beyond their elementary description. In this conception language is considered action, given that through our use and deployment of linguistic and interpretive abilities, the social world is rendered knowable and through language use, certain meanings can be brought into existence. It is through our use of language that meanings, thus socially useful knowledge, are pragmatically created. This thesis, for example, is specifically concerned to understand how both conceptual and practical
language use constructs and makes war, and war journalism, ‘visible’ (Foucault 1991), ‘real’ and known.

In pursuing this research interest, one is led to question the self-perception of journalists and their systems of professional organisation, theory and practice that constitute their social function. The central journalistic value or ethic (ideology) of objectivity, for instance, can now clearly be understood as discursively formulated. Objectivity, as an arrangement of words and ideas relating to journalism organises and orients journalists, both theoretically and practically, towards their world. This discourse provides journalists with a framework of intelligibility that facilitates the fulfilment of their normative socio-political function. It is argued that there exists a discursive formation of professional (war) journalism that is constructed by, and in turn constructs, those journalists and their practice as war correspondents. The notion that discourse is constructive has its origins in the view of the relationship between discourse and knowledge attributed to the social theory of Foucault and which will be demonstrated as usefully expanded by the political discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe (1985).

PART TWO
3.6 FOUCAULT AND JOURNALISM
Only recently have researchers begun to attend to journalism as a discursive formation in its own right and to consider the implications of Foucauldian theory on media production (Louw 2001; Nolan 2004; Andrejevic 2008). In a study of journalist’s conceptions of defamation laws, Dent (2008) has proposed conceiving of journalism as a ‘discursive formation’, in which the dominant discourses concerning what it means to be a journalist - the “truth of journalism” (Dent 2008; 200) - are contained. Similarly, Howarth (2001) has proposed a Foucauldian approach to the analysis of political ideology, which offers useful theoretic and methodological advice to the present task of applying Foucauldian techniques to the analysis of journalism. However shortcomings that are relevant to this thesis are also identified. Howarth (2001) argues Foucault’s archaeological method risks rarefying discourse into a form of linguistic idealism and Foucault’s disavowal of the ‘truth’ or ‘anteriority’ of discourse poses problems for this method’s critical intent. As noted below, Foucault’s discourse theory has been criticised...
for ‘slipping’ into deterministic conceptions of power and domination (McNay, 1994). Howarth (2001) proposes the enhancement and the extension of Foucauldian theory through the incorporation of theoretical innovations provided by the post-Marxist discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe (1985) and this thesis takes considerable inspiration from this proposal.

Firstly however, Foucault’s conception of discourse and related understandings of theories of truth, knowledge and power will now be outlined and critically assessed. This thesis’ critical methodology finds specific utility in Foucault’s (1972) archaeological method and discourse theory. This theoretical basis is briefly discussed before discussing to his genealogical approach in which issues of power/knowledge are more fully explored.

3.7 THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF PROFESSIONALISM
In his archaeological work Foucault is concerned to write an intellectual history of modern thought un-reliant on notions of the historical progress of knowledge and truth. Importantly Foucault’s history is freed from emphasis on a Cartesian, a-historical subject or human consciousness that is outside discourse and the sole origin of meaning (McNay 1994; 52). In doing so Foucault constructs a specific historic-analytic method that privileges the rules and conditions of knowledge formation of a given historical period – establishing the possibilities of discourse, thus of meaning. Archaeology is the analytic method that describes the discursive conditions that ‘permit’ the formation of knowledge. Foucault (1991; xi) calls this general historical condition the positive unconscious of knowledge. Initially, this underlying structure of knowledge-possibilities was termed the episteme (Foucault 1972), but was later reconceptualised, less as a rigid cultural system of rules that determined knowledge and meaning and as a system of discursive regularities (McNay 1994; 66). This second conception, termed the archive, is more an enabling system that permits the circulation, dispersion and fluctuation of discourses, in line with Foucault’s later conception of power as a productive and creative force. As Mills states:
The archive of a given period is composed of the totality of discursive formations or ensemble of statements which constitute a given field of knowledge, for example, grammar, medicine or political economy (1997; 66).

Comprising the archive at the most basic level is the statement (Foucault 1972). Statements are the elementary unit of discourse, from which larger discursive strategies expand and are not any grammatically correct expression, but rather any expression that carries knowledge. Taken together statements form larger discourses. Importantly statements take their meaning from the discursive context in which they arise, as simple utterances can potentially hold many meanings (Mills 1997; 60). Simply, statements contain truth-claims within them. Discourses, formed of statements, are institutionally sanctioned, profoundly influencing the behaviour and thought of individuals. Where Foucault (1979) illustrated this in his analysis of nineteenth century sexuality, this thesis points to the disparate statements, enunciations of journalistic professionalism that coalesce into the discourse of professionalism, delineating regularities of journalistic discourse – in effect what can legitimately be said by journalists – concerning either themselves or their production of social knowledge.

Following Foucault, discourse analysis is then the analysis of the arrangement of statements into discursive formations. This methodological approach begins to provide entry points into understanding the discourse of professional journalism. One is able to ask; what concepts are employed in constructing professionalism and what effects do these have on our understanding of journalism? Why is it that certain concepts are employed and others excluded or left unstated? What identities begin to be constructed through discursive statements?

This general arrangement of statements, or discursive formation, provides the conditions of possibility for what can and cannot be said or considered truthful for a given period, context or location. As Foucault (1972; 38) offers:

Whenever one can describe, between a number of statements, such a system of dispersion, whenever, between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices, one defines a regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functions,
transformations), we will say, for the sake of convenience we are dealing with a discursive formation.

Foucault offers a method for understanding the rules of formation that are the conditions of existence for a given discursive formation, but carefully emphasises the non-subjective, non-teleological nature of his analytic method that rather than generating a positive catalogue of statements, objects and discursive orders seeks to explore the contingency with which subjects and objects are formed and with which they exist, in keeping with his desire to demonstrate the discursive rather than subjective nature of history (Foucault 1972).

Foucault’s method begins with objects. But rather than attempting to describe the fixity of those objects of discourse, Foucault understands objects as produced by discourse, radically altering a conventional understanding of the connection between words and things (Foucault 1972; 48). Foucault neatly forecloses on the possibility of “interpreting discourse with a view to writing a history of the referent” (Foucault 1972; 47) and instead suggests an interpretive method that analyses the “relations that characterise discursive practice” (Foucault 1972; 48) in order to understand the conditions that enable the appearance of objects, rather than an attempt to understand discursive objects as ‘things in themselves’. In relation to the analysis of war journalism discourse, a contingent, discursive relationship between the ‘reality’ of wartime events and issues and their representation as ‘news’ will be demonstrated. The significant questions concerning the analyst then are not so much concerned with what is reported as news, but rather how and why certain aspects of reality are attributed meaning and the effect this process of construction has on public understandings.

Foucault’s analysis of discursive formations then describes the methodological steps taken in analysing the concepts that illustrate the unity of a particular formation and of the strategies in which these concepts are deployed. In the context of this study, the discursive formation of professional journalism is held to be comprised of and given coherent unity by central concepts; fact, reality, and truth, or propaganda for instance. Concepts such as these are central for journalists concerned with producing a truthful account of war and executing their normative role in monitoring the use of political and
military power. Simply, concepts provide the logical relationship between statements (Howarth 2000; 53) that form rules of discursive production. Yet concepts are not to be understood outside discourse, “…one describes the conceptual network on the basis of the intrinsic regularities of discourse” (Foucault 1972; 62)

Lastly, analyses of strategies of conceptual deployment within discourses illustrate discursive formations as “field(s) of possible options” (Foucault 1972; 66). Within the context of the constitutive regularities, discourses

…give rise to certain types of organisations of concepts, certain regroupings of objects, certain types of enunciation, which form according to their degree of coherence, rigour, and stability, themes or theories (Foucault 1972; 64).

Foucault’s ‘themes or theories’, produced by discursive strategies can be understood as larger conglomerations of concepts that cohere into the knowledge or theory of a given discursive field. It is possible to identify journalism as a discursive field or formation (Dent 2008), in which professionalism serves as a unified theory or knowledge providing it with both practical and theoretical coherence. Importantly, conceiving of strategies as produced and potentially contested within complex conceptual systems encourages an understanding of sedimented knowledge, not as produced through teleological human development, but through the systems of relations and possibilities of discourse. As Foucault explains:

Just as one must not relate the formation of objects either to words or to things, nor that of statements either to the pure form of knowledge or to the psychological subject, nor that of concepts either to the structure of ideality or to the succession of ideas, one must not relate the formation of theoretical choices either to a fundamental project or to the secondary play of opinions (1972; 70).

A form of analysis is thus enabled in which the redundancy of the category of original and unified subject is demonstrated and the contingency, discontinuity and the dispersion that may determine subjectivities is made clear. Analysis then, of the general arrangement of statements and the enunciative modalities that exist within
these arrangements begins to describe the discursive formation and the regularities of discourse contained therein. Consistently articulated features of professional journalism, such as ‘news values’ or practices, such as ‘objective’ reporting provide sedimented regularities within journalism, the norms and conventions which this thesis explicitly seeks as its objects of analysis.

While this form of analysis may begin to trace the configurations of discursive formations, this method has been criticised as privileging ‘the discursive’ as prior and ultimately determinate of the non-discursive (McNay 1994; 71). As such, the analysis will tend to emphasise the anteriority of discourse over the socio-economic or historical contexts of discourse. In this sense discourse becomes rarefied, implying a formal principle of discursive regulation. Although Foucault developed his method to surmount this ontological problem, others, such as critical discourse theorists noted above, and importantly Laclau and Mouffe, depart from Foucault’s distinction between the discursive and non-discursive. For Laclau and Mouffe (1985) all social knowledge exists within discourse, a position which will be explored more fully below.

Foucault’s archaeological understanding of discourse developed a notion of discursive formations and regularities that establish the boundaries of what can and cannot be said or thought within a given historical period. In the context of this thesis, for example it is possible, as will be shown, to delineate discursive formation of contemporary war journalism. However, as noted, a conception of a unity of discourse such as this tends towards a totalising, structural framework in which meanings become fixed. Power, in this sense, is not accounted for besides the rigidities of structural frameworks. Foucault’s anti-essentialist approach sought to avoid - by simply ignoring - the theoretical problems associated with structuralism, such as structural determinism, and from this perspective archaeological analysis alone is unsatisfactory. In the later work of his genealogical period, a theory of power is introduced, providing a conception of power relations that permit the contestation of discourse, and thus of discursive frameworks, knowledge and meaning. The analytical tools provided by this period of Foucault’s thinking are now considered, as they permit the analyst to begin to illustrate the contingency and incompleteness of discursive regimes.
3.8 GENEALOGY AND OBJECTIVITY

In his genealogical work, Foucault enunciates a theory of power, permitting an understanding of discursive regimes within which a ‘microphysics of power’ operates to produce discourses and, consequently, knowledge. The introduction of power as an analytic consideration deepens our understanding of discourse from a rigid, structural form of regularities to a dynamic, productive field. Foucault’s conceptualisation of power and knowledge as inextricably linked provided his thought of this period with its most innovative and forceful insights. For the purposes of my argument, it is necessary to demonstrate how an interest in power animates the previous analytical steps before demonstrating how a Foucauldian discourse perspective can be deepened with a radical reassessment of his conceptions. It is noteworthy too that while some attempt to apply Foucault’s archaeology to journalism have been made (Dent, 2008), little theoretic or analytic energy has been spent on analysing journalism with reference to Foucault’s genealogical concepts.

With the archaeological method Foucault runs the risk of ‘rarefying’ discursive practices (Howarth 2000; 65-66; McNay 1994; 86), creating an ontological problematic in which objects are literally produced through discourse (Foucault 1972). In this sense, social relations, economics, institutions and politics are all subservient to discourse as productive of subjectivities and meaning.

Foucault addresses this theoretical problem with the introduction of a theory of power and a conceptual innovation, which merges and binds notions of ‘power’ and ‘knowledge’. For Foucault knowledge is never created and never exists outside of relations of power, arguing, “…truth isn’t outside power, or lacking in power”, but “a thing of this world” (Foucault 1980; 131). Here, Foucault fuses meaning production (discourses) with power relations that structure society, providing an analytical scheme that powerfully exposes the domination of aspects of the social world by forms of power/knowledge. Foucault (1977; 1979) is thus able to demonstrate the relations of domination and power that through discourse produce social relations. As Foucault (1979; 100) states, “it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together”. Here, then, Foucault is not concerned to uncover essential meanings and definitions of knowledge, but rather to provide a means of understanding how certain types of
knowledge and truth are produced and under what conditions. This is an especially useful means of conceiving the various relations and forms of knowledge that serve to produce war journalism through professionalism. In particular, the addition of power/knowledge into theoretical conceptions permits the illustration of journalistic professionalism as a structured field of power relations that purposefully constructs and advances particular meanings, and forecloses on the possibility of alternatives. With regards to this thesis’ stated analytic concern, genealogy has a number of methodological implications. Genealogical analysis of journalism is sensitive to those forces which serve to organise, distribute, constrict or enhance the dispersion of professionalism during war and to how power and its effects are borne by professionalism itself. This analytic concern is particularly interested, beyond the immediate organisational, geographic or sociological context of journalism, in attending to the broader historical and cultural processes that have born journalistic professionalism, not in search for origins, but for conditions of emergence of discursive formations.

Genealogy is the examination of power relations that characterise discourses and a critique of these discourses with regards to their social and historical contexts - a critical function absent from archaeology. Thus, this method is able to begin to offer analyses and criticisms of the dominatory effects of power, as well as enlightening the theoretical blind spots within archaeology. Genealogical analyses of power, regulation and control produced celebrated studies of the modern prison system (1977) and contemporary sexuality (1979). While Foucault sought to understand the controlling, dominating developments and uses of power/knowledge, he also rejected a notion of power as purely repressive and uni-directional (McNay 1994; 90). Rather, power is understood as circulating through society, never controlled or completely dominated by any one group or interest.

This thesis is cautious however, of pluralist liberal conceptions of power, such as those alluded to by Foucault. Rather I understand discursive power as aggregating within powerful social formations – the institutional power of professional journalism and the news organisations that administer it, to take examples from this study. As will be shown, in the current analysis it is possible to discern the effects of power on journalists
as they function within the administrative regime of professional war journalism and are produced as administratively ‘useful’. Foucault (1979; 140) wrote of ‘bio-power’, in which discursive forces are linked directly to social, administrative and regulative function (Howarth 2000; 78), especially in the reproduction of efficient and productive populations.

Although power/knowledge in conceived of as a disciplinary regime, discourse also contains within it the possibilities of resistance to domination. However although a microphysical analysis may yield examples of resistance, in Foucault’s work how individuals can resist and exert power to produce other forms of knowledge and discourses is unclear. For, while discourses of sexuality may produce forms of sexual expression or penal regulation may produce forms of penal subjectivity, a profusion of discourse does not necessarily liberate subjects, although in Foucault’s conception, it may contain the possibilities of liberation. Similarly, a profusion of discourse concerning war and war journalism does not necessarily lead to novel forms of subjectivity or understanding.

Thus, Foucault’s conception of power/knowledge tends to ‘slip’ from a positive, productive conception of power to an essentially dominatory model in which countervailing power is uncertain (McNay 1994; 100). Consequently, an interest in the productive capabilities of journalistic discourse is threatened by an explanatory role that may be attributed the economic and political powers of media owners and the political regimes within which they operate. Although power may produce a multiplicity of effects, ultimately, in Foucault’s scheme subjects, or ‘bodies’ (journalists), become irresistibly subjectified by modern, disciplinary society, by a spectral, dominatory force. To innovate a potentially more illuminating theorisation of contemporary journalism therefore remains a central concern of this thesis.

Nevertheless, Foucault’s discourse theory remains influential on this study. The conception of history, social relations and knowledge as based not on ideology but on circulating, discursive flows of power/knowledge and his principles for describing and analysing discursive formations are particularly useful. The Foucauldian theory of power, however, relapses into dominatory forms, escape from which is theoretically unclear, although posited within a microphysical understanding of power relations. This
thesis seeks to extend Foucault’s insights into the normalising regulatory function of power/knowledge, on one hand by borrowing from his discourse analytic methodology, and on the other by integrating his conception of power with the later discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe. It is to a discussion of these discourse-theoretical conceptions that the argument now turns.

3.9 LACLAU AND MOUFFE’S DISCOURSE THEORY

The discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe builds upon Foucault’s work, with a continued theoretical interest in the exercise of discursive power and potential domination. Laclau and Mouffe however make significant critical developments in their theory; most importantly in their conception of the discursive. Whereas Foucault considered discursive relations as separate from other forms of relations (productive, political, institutional, and technical), Laclau and Mouffe (1985) expand their understanding of the discursive realm to incorporate all social meanings – in other words the discursive in Laclau and Mouffe becomes co-extensive with the social. As Laclau and Mouffe state:

2. Our analysis rejects the distinction between discursive and non-discursive practices. It affirms: a) that every object is constituted as an object of discourse, insofar as no object is given outside every discursive condition of emergence; and b) that any distinction between what are usually called the linguistic and behavioural aspects of a social practice, is either an incorrect distinction or ought to find its place as a differentiation within the social production of meaning, which is structured under the form of discursive totalities (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; 107).

This development has profound effects on the potential for political and social change. Where Foucault usefully describes the contours and power relations that comprise discourses, Laclau and Mouffe theorise discourse less as a dominatory system of power relations but as a contingent, contestable hegemonic project. Thus, while an ultimate reality is granted, access to that reality, and consequently all social meaning, is possible only through discourse. For Laclau and Mouffe (1985) all meaning is ultimately contingent and potentially all signifiers are constantly subject to slippage.
Antagonism, as the political contest of meaning, fundamentally characterises the social, provides the logic from which political projects may be initiated and in which meanings may become sedimented as hegemonies. Here Laclau and Mouffe (1985) reinsert politics into their theory, identifying certain political actions, through which contest may occur and which contain the possibility of human emancipation. In this sense Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse theory is useful in illustrating the limits, contingency and internal dynamics of the discourse of professional journalism. Specifically, journalism can be understood less as rigid, dominatory system of discourse and immanent power relations, and more as an ultimately contestable political project seeking to hegemonise fields of social knowledge production.

3.9.1 ARTICULATION

Central to this discursive scheme is the process of articulation, or the way in which a discourse is structured and socially impelled. This organisational concept differs from Foucault’s archive as it includes a sense of dynamism; while a discursive formation may have certain bounds or configurations, these are not necessarily rigid. The limits of the social imaginary fluctuate with the fortunes of the various socio-political projects that compete to dominate social meaning production. For example, professionalism is concerned with the advancements of certain concepts such as appropriate skill, knowledge and ethics. Yet professionalism also physically organises and defines journalists, arranging them within legitimate organisations and engaging them in sanctioned activities associated with newsgathering. Importantly however, the ultimate contingency of meaning prevents the stable, fixed imposition of meaning, rendering the discursive formations of journalism vulnerable to those meanings and identities excluded as illegitimate – the ‘other’ of professional journalism. The identities of journalists, their practices and legitimacy are consequently ultimately fragile and in need of ongoing discursive cultivation, should they avoid negation by contrary discourses – such as military propaganda, accusations of bias or non-objective, ‘crusader’ or amateur journalism. As the thesis’ demonstrates, new meanings, such as those resulting from technological, social or political change, can lead to the articulation of new definitions within professional journalism.
Theoretically however, this expanded notion of the discursive and the competitive
dynamics of discursive articulations mean society as a whole becomes an impossible
object of analysis. The social is overflowing with surplus potential meanings which are
never exhausted by any particular discourse (Howarth 2000; 103). That is to say,
notions of truth and objectivity are ultimately contingent, as such. Rather than existing
in a one to one correspondence between meaning and social reality, there exists a
multiplicity of possible meanings to be invoked through articulation, leading to a fluidity
and contestation of identity and knowledge. Even when successfully hegemonic, no
politico-discursive project (such as liberal journalism, or military propaganda, for that
matter) can completely extinguish oppositional articulatory forces, as it is against them
that a given discourse is defined. Indeed, it is this field of surplus meaning that is
termed the discursive, signifying the realm of potential meaning. As Torfing (1999; 92)
clarifies, the discursive is not a fixed differential identity within a discourse, but rather is
discursively constructed within a “terrain of unfixity”, providing both the condition of
possibility and impossibility of the partial fixing of meaning. For Laclau and Mouffe
(1985; 111) this field of surplus meaning is the field of overdetermination and provides
the theoretical conditions for counter-hegemonic articulations.

However, although the impossibility of fixed meaning has been theoretically
established, partial fixations through articulations are necessary, otherwise coherent
systems of relational differences break down and coherent meaning becomes
impossible. As discourse circulates, seeking to dominate the discursive, meaning
condenses around privileged discursive points, or nodal points (Laclau and Mouffe
1985; 112). These points are rich, privileged signifiers that link chains of meaning and
signification, strategically articulated and employed by discourses to extend and expand
their dominance of the discursive.

3.9.2 ANTAGONISM
The notion of social antagonism illustrates the discursive dynamics through which
identities and meanings are pursued, contested and constructed. For Laclau and
Mouffe (1985) and Laclau (2005) antagonism constitutes a fundamental category of
socio-political action. Antagonism occurs between discourses and the social formations
that they constitute due to the impossibility of discursive success in producing fixed, total social identities.

Discursive antagonisms are fundamental to the contingency of all identity. The inability to fix meaning prevents the realisation of a certain identity, and to the construction of an ‘other’ - an antagonising force outside the discursive formation that contradicts or negates identity and which represents the antagonism or failure of fully realised identity. In this thesis, professional identities are threatened by and defined against the antagonising force ‘outside’ professionalism – military officials, public relations operatives or non-conventional journalists, for example. Identity is precarious and contested between forces ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ social and political formations, within or beyond the discursive frontier (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). As Torfing (1999; 124) describes, antagonism implies a constitutive outside in which a “radical otherness…constitutes and negates the limits and identity of the discursive formation from which it has been excluded”. During the Iraq invasion journalists were faced with an antagonising force, or ‘other’, in the form of military media managers, who sought to control and potentially manipulate professional journalists, restricting the realisation of their professional identities. In response, central nodal points of professionalism are re-emphasised and those who act to prevent professionalism from occurring are condemned. Ironically, professionalism itself forbids the expression of journalistic opinion – meaning military media managers are critiqued, yet practically little changes due to the professional reliance on military sources and information. In this sense antagonism describes the limits to identity and the boundaries to discursive formations – ensuring the ultimate contingency of knowledge.

The concepts of equivalence and difference (Laclau 2005) here become theoretically important, describing the processes or techniques by which discourses reach their limits. Equivalence is an articulatory practice that dissolves differences of identity within discourses, permitting the unity of intra-discursive identities, defined against a negative, outside identity. By contrast difference seeks to construct differentiated subject positions in order to marginalise contrary discourses by dividing oppositional equivalences (Howarth 2000; 106-107). As Laclau and Mouffe (1985; 130) state succinctly, “the logic of equivalence is a logic of the simplification of political
space, while the logic of difference is a logic of its expansion and increasing complexity”. In this study, these concepts are used to describe the logics by which discursive concepts are articulated either within or outside professionalism.

3.9.3 HEGEMONY

Hegemony, as noted, is a concept signifying political or moral-intellectual leadership and is an exemplary form of political practice (Howarth 2000; 109) produced through articulatory practices. In Laclau and Mouffe’s theory, hegemony is de-coupled from notions of fundamental subjects or origins of meaning. Rather, hegemony can only take place because of the open and incomplete character of society – it is the uncertainty of the discursive that allows articulatory practices to institute ‘nodal points’ or ‘concepts’ (Foucault 1972) which act to partially and contingently fix meaning in an organised system of differences (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; 135) such as professional journalism. In this sense hegemony is the practice of extending discursive formations, through articulation, into a position of social dominance in a context of antagonistic forces and which always involve relations of power and repression.

The concept of hegemony is centrally important for this study. This thesis conceives of overlapping realms or levels of hegemony within and throughout society. For example, professionalism hegemonises social meaning production within journalism, but professionalism itself is subject to the broader more general cultural and political hegemony of Western liberal capitalism. Through hegemony, and the theoretic concepts that contribute to its production, professionalism in journalism is understood not simply as an ethical or qualitative standard, but as strategic dominance of a discursive field. It is within journalism itself that the expansion and extension of discourse can be identified as taking place, as previously unfixed elements, such as privileged aspects of war journalism (embedding, Centcom) are articulated as within professionalism.
3.10 IDEOLOGICAL FANTASY

The theoretical re-articulation of the concept of hegemony permits the re-introduction of the previously abandoned concept of ideology. As noted above, both Foucault (1980) and Laclau and Mouffe (1985) critique the notion of ideology as presupposing an ultimate truth that is an accessible object of knowledge or objective category of analysis. As established in the above discussion, discourse theory holds the social is not a structural totality, but a field of discursivity, characterised by an excess of meaning, leaving society as a unitary, stable object impossible (Torfing 1999; 113). For Laclau (1990), following Žižek (1989), the expansion of the discursive to incorporate all social meanings implies that extra-ideological reality is always already ideological. Rather than in the Marxist sense of its use, ideology should then be maintained to describe the misrecognition of contingent, precarious nature of any identity, meaning or knowledge as fixed, fully realised or stable. As Torfing (1999; 114) suggests:

The ideological consists precisely in those forms that seek to construct society and social agency as decidable discursive forms within a totalising horizon that projects on to a particular discursive form an impossible fullness and transparency.

Ideology here is the will to totality. It is the urge of a discourse to exert itself as hegemony (Laclau 1990; 92) and in this sense is synonymous with Foucault’s (1979) notion of a discursive ‘will to truth’, and consequently as an aspect of all discourse.

Žižek provides a useful conception of this re-constituted ideology with his psychoanalytic notion of ideological fantasy. For Žižek (1989) people may be aware of ideology and treat it with distrust or irony, but nonetheless act according to those representations. As Žižek (1994; 316) writes:

The illusion is not on the side of knowledge; it is already on the side of reality itself, of what the people are doing. What they do not know is that their social reality itself, their activity, is guided by an illusion…what they overlook, what they mis-recognise, is not the reality but the illusion which is structuring their reality, their real social activity…the illusion is therefore double: it consists in overlooking the illusion which is structuring our
real, effective relationship to reality. And this overlooked unconscious illusion is what may be called the ideological fantasy.

This reintroduction of ideology continues to enhance my analysis. The use of ideology here is not synonymous with the Marxist concept. Rather, *ideological fantasy* does not describe a misapprehension on the side of knowledge, but describes the structuring of social reality itself. In this conception, ‘reality’ is not illusory; rather, subjects are conscious of the construction of their social experience, yet act as if they were not. As Žižek (1994; 316) writes, "…even if we do not take things seriously, even if we keep an ironical distance, *we are still doing them*". Žižek (1989) uses the example of the fetishisation of money, known to be just paper, yet treated as if it possessed real value to illustrate this point. Likewise, I demonstrate that journalists at times articulate a consciousness of their limitations, of the questionable ontological status of objectivity as a central journalistic tenet, yet continue to pursue professional strategies structured around this illusion, what Pedelty (1995; 172) calls “self-conscious non-reflexivity”.

PART THREE
3.11 DISCOURSE THEORY AND PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

The thesis adopts an interpretive analytical approach with the aim of generating an understanding of professionalism as a discourse and the conditions within which this discourse exists and operates. The techniques and strategies by which professionalism enunciates and articulates, and the effect of these articulatory practices on the formation of knowledge are of particular interest to this thesis. Analysis necessarily begins with the basic elements of discourse, statements and discursive practices that establish the discursive formation (Foucault 1972) and more broadly the concepts, strategies and articulations which advance professionalism and produce a coherent professionalised narrative of war within the journalistic field of discursivity (Laclau and Mouffe 1985).

Central to understanding the strategies and articulations that characterise professionalism is an appreciation of power relations that striate the journalistic field. Specifically, the means by which power is deployed within statements of journalistic
discourse to produce truths and to attempt to close or suture unstable discourses is crucial. Through these strategies, which establish and legitimate professional knowledge it is possible to identify professionalism as a hegemonic project, seeking to totalise its journalistic field of discursivity.

3.12 USING THEORY

I employ a pragmatic, interpretive approach to answering the research questions which are posed in Chapter Four. As this section has made clear through its detailed discussion of theoretical considerations, a conceptually grounded analysis that integrates insights from contemporary social theory and empirical observations is the most appropriate analytical method. From this position the rigorous, close textual analyses undertaken by critical discourse practitioners, for example, is considered inappropriate. Rather a thematically organised, interpretive method, guided by theoretical considerations and the problematisation of professionalism is employed. Thus methodologically, the analytical steps taken by this thesis are less a method in a mechanistic sense, but rather an approach or orientation, that seeks theoretically informed answers to the research questions outlined below.

Following Foucault, this thesis seeks to analyse the “general system of the formation and the transformation of statements” (1972; 130) that occur within the discourse of professional journalism. However, where Foucault’s analyses were primarily historical, constructing archives from many decades and centuries of cultural production, the subject matter of this thesis is the comparatively very brief, albeit intense, Iraq invasion in 2003. In this sense the archive is not an exhaustive, historical compendium, but rather a less expansive collection of statements drawn directly from the Iraq invasion itself, in the form of news reports and interview data.

Next the processes, methods and articulations of power relationships within the discourse are addressed. Here the strategies and techniques employed by journalists and news organisations to fuse and deploy power and knowledge are analysed. In keeping with Foucault’s (1977; 1981) contention that power is omnipresent, the various locations of power and the forms of its expression, both in news organisations, the

---

10 For a detailed discussion of Critical Discourse Analysis methods see Fairclough (1995a; 1995b)
military, within the press corps and amongst the public are analysed. Specifically, strategies and techniques of knowledge formation that legitimate, normalise, discipline, exclude and produce meaning and identity are analysed and their effects evaluated.

3.13 CONCLUSION

This chapter has addressed the theoretical and analytical considerations of this thesis. Important in establishing the thesis’ theoretical orientation was the provision of a brief genealogy of the concept of ideology. Ideology has been a central concept in social scientific research and in social theory, and this chapter has outlined its origin, developments and ultimate inadequacy as a useful analytic concept. This chapter has explained how discourse has superseded ideology in attempts to understand modern social relations. Specifically, I have presented and critically assessed the discourse theory of Foucault (1972; 1977; 1981) and demonstrated how these insights can be enhanced through the introduction of concepts drawn from the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe (1985). Before detailing the thesis’ analytic strategy a brief review of previous uses of ideology/discourse analysis was presented, demonstrating the novelty of my approach. Finally, this chapter has outlined a theoretic-analytic strategy that harnesses useful aspects of both discourse theories and demonstrates how these conceptions can be usefully employed in answering the central research questions by providing an array of concepts with which to interrogate the data. It is necessary now to move to a more detailed discussion of other methodological considerations and these are addressed in Chapter Four.
CHAPTER FOUR - METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION
This chapter outlines the general methodological approach to the research and presents both the central research questions and the research paradigm (Kuhn 1996) within which this thesis operates. The discussion covers the issue of the purpose of the methodological approach and the nature of the information so produced and interviewing from a non-positivist perspective. Following this, the specific consideration of data selection, organisation and treatment as evidence is discussed. The thesis seeks interview material as its data in the first instance and this is supported by provision of much ‘news data’, drawn from articles, broadcast transcripts and news databases. This body of material is described and discussed and the number, form and location of interviews conducted for the research outlined. Finally, potential shortcomings or problems with the methodology are identified and briefly addressed.

4.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS
This study’s primary research question is what effects did professionalism, understood as a journalistic discourse, have on reporting of the Iraq invasion 2003? As stated above and more fully explored in the following chapter, professionalism constitutes a commitment to journalistic norms, which have specific effects in the production of war news. In this thesis’ conception, professionalism can be identified as a framework of statements and concepts providing coherence to both journalism practice and identity. Here, the central theoretically informed research questions are stated:

1) How did professionalism emerge historically? How can professionalism be understood and conceptualised in the contemporary period?
2) How can professionalism as articulated by journalists and editors be understood? What concepts/claims underpin journalism’s assertion of professionalism?
3) How does professionalism produce and influence journalistic practice, and in what forms?
4) How do relations of power construct professionalism and how does professionalism express power relationships?

5) To what extent can professionalism be considered a hegemonic project and by what means is this hegemonic intent made visible?

6) Finally, what possibilities exist within this understanding of professionalism for alternative discursive frameworks of interpretation and understanding to emerge?

Professional news production potentially places limits on the range, depth and breadth of knowledge production, as knowledge created outside professionalism is potentially compromised and considered illegitimate. This observation may carry significant implications for our understanding of war, and encourages us to reflect upon the desirability of the liberal, professional paradigm in producing socially useful knowledge. The relevance and utility of this approach is demonstrated by focusing on the Iraq war, 2003 – an important historical event of enormous political controversy, in which the media are heavily implicated.

4.3 PARADIGM – CRITICAL QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

This project is engaged with the broad traditions of journalism and media criticism outlined in the literature review. Specifically, this thesis positions itself at the nexus of three critical projects: media sociology (Tuchman 1972; 1978; Schudson 1978; Gans 1980; Gitlin 1980; Soloski 1997; Reese; 1997; Deuze 2005), media cultural studies (Hall et al 1978; GUMG 1976; 1980; 1982; 1985; Pedelty, 1995) and media political economy (Murdock and Golding 1977; Garnham 1979; Herman and Chomsky 1988; McChesney 2004a; 2004b). The thesis draws upon each of these traditions, yet it seeks to develop a new approach to the study of war journalism. The thesis does this by deploying concepts drawn from discourse theory in the analysis of professionalism in the context of war journalism. Specifically, the thesis employs theoretical concepts drawn from Foucault (1972; 1977; 1980; 1981), Laclau and Mouffe (1985) and Žižek (1989) in the analysis. The incorporation of discourse-theoretic concepts into the analysis of professional journalism sheds new light onto the problem of professionalism in
journalism and permits understanding journalism outside of purely sociological, cultural-ideological or institutional contexts. My approach permits understanding professionalism in war journalism, both in practice and journalistic identity, as discursively constituted and constructed. When journalism is understood in these terms, the contingency of professional norms, practices and identities, and thus knowledge, is made clear.

As the following chapter outlines in greater detail, the thesis understands the normative, professional commitment to objectivist and positivist forms of knowledge creation highly problematic. Centrally, the thesis holds that commitments to objectivist knowledge creation, such as those commonly associated with professional journalism, serve to mask the processes by which knowledge and ‘facts’ about the social world are created. Addressing this problem is the central critical imperative of the thesis.

Positivism\(^\text{11}\) is an essentially modernist doctrine of objectivist science, which this thesis considers naive. Logical and empirical positivism seeks to enhance understandings of the (social) world through quantifiable experimentation, observation and description. For journalists, independently verified ‘facts’ concerning the social world are of primary importance in producing their accounts. For positivists, and objective journalists, reality exists ‘out there’, waiting to be apprehended through the application of (pseudo-) scientific techniques. Such techniques form the basis of professional journalistic practice (see following chapter). The ambiguity that necessarily results from linguistic representations, for example, is not considered. This orientation entails a philosophical commitment to facts and absolute conceptions of truth and meaning. The positivist approach is considered fundamentally inappropriate for this study. Given my commitment to principles of contextualised, socially and culturally constructed knowledge and an interest in constructing a critique of contemporary journalism, a positivist approach is rejected.

The thesis’ critical perspective, informed by Foucault (1972; 1977; 1980; 1981), Laclau and Mouffe (1985) and Žižek (1989), is not neutral and passive, but socially and

---

\(^{11}\) Notably, liberal journalism is avowedly positivist, conceptualising the social world as directly knowable through sense experience, primarily the direct witnessing of events or the reporting of eye-witness accounts – that is, the establishment of ‘truth’ through methods of verification. This thesis is both a criticism of professional journalism specifically and positivist science generally.
politically motivated, seeking to problematise and/or rectify social issues. The passivity and neutrality of positivism (ostensibly also of professional journalism) is considered problematic (Neuman 2000; 76).

Like positivism however, this thesis’ critical perspective is realist. Whereas the thesis holds reality to be culturally, historically and materially constituted, positivism sees external reality as adhering to independent laws (Neuman 2000; 77). Furthermore, following Foucault (1972; 1977; 1981) and theorists such as Derrida (1978) and Laclau and Mouffe (1985), this position rejects any notion of an ultimate reality or truth that can be ‘known’ absolutely – the central implied ontological assumption both of positivist science and objectivist professional journalism. Rather, multiple possible meanings exist within conditions of radical contingency and overdetermination (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). That is to say, multiple truths, identities and subject positions are possible and are activated, at a fundamental level, through language use in ongoing processes of naming and definition.

Presently a methodological concern for achieving truths and falsehoods is set aside, in favour of an interpretive and thematic approach to the data, through which preferred interpretations emerge. The research goal is to provide an interpretation of the social world and to contribute to social change, rather than establish scientific truths. The treatment of data and of evidence differs fundamentally from positivist approaches. My critical approach is rooted in interpretive analysis that seeks to ‘read’ and offer interpretive understandings of social phenomena, in this case journalistic articulations and performances of professionalism. ‘Facts’, in an empirical sense, should be understood as contingent and context dependent (Newman, 2000; 77-78).

A reflexive acknowledgement of the purposeful construction of the research is central to the thesis. This understanding of the research makes the narrative construction of the data, assembled and analysed in certain contingent ways, explicit. The selectivity with which interview subjects and data material is organised and analysed is acknowledged and this treatment of empirical material accords with the thesis’ critical intentions towards professional journalism. Central to the methodology is a purposeful and wilful critique of professionalism and a desire to problematise normative aspects of professional journalism. This critique draws attention to limitations
and contradictions that inhere to the professional model. The identification of these professional shortcomings has the potential to improve journalism’s practical and theoretical basis. The research seeks to illuminate the existence of certain forms of socially and politically dominant forms of naming and definition – the hegemonic professional discourse of journalism. And it seeks to demonstrate how professionalism permits the entry of dominant, totalising discourses into public knowledge. A primary research goal is to demonstrate the ‘closing’ of journalistic discourse and the rigidities of the journalistic form which results. The possibility for re-articulating and re-defining professional journalism is identified.

My methodological approach to analysis combines interview material with public news discourse. Analysis of this material indicates within professionalism, as observed in interview, certain points or concepts or identities which allow the ‘overcoming’ of the conventional professional identity or practice which dominates news reporting. Good research, in this sense, aspires to “break away from fixed forms of subjectivity” (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2007; 274). An explicit research goal is the encouragement of greater self-reflexivity amongst journalists and to encourage foregrounding the processes, contingencies and conditions of journalistic constructions, so as to make these considerations an integral part of journalism itself. These suggestions for journalism are reflected in the research methodology which seeks to foreground both its own contingency and its stated political and disciplinary aims.

4.4 THE PURPOSE OF THE METHOD

The thesis holds that the understanding of journalism presented here offers, on the basis of the research findings, new insight into the limitations and contradictions of contemporary professional war journalism. That is, the research exposes the discursive formation of professionalism, and thus illuminates shortcomings, contradictions and exclusions which characterise journalism as theory, identity and practice. Through this analysis, and through comparison with the public news record, aspects of journalism practice and subjectivity which are contradicted, distorted or which result in limited possibilities of useful public knowledge, are illuminated. The method of the thesis is to
use the discourse observed in interview to problematise, examine and interpret the public record (news reports).

By drawing attention to the power of professionalism within war journalism this approach produces an empirical basis from which, on one hand, to provide a timely critique of contemporary journalism. On the other hand, this approach permits theorising the potential for alternate forms of journalism that do not rely so heavily on professional norms. Journalism, therefore, that forecloses on meaning and knowledge through totalising articulations and enunciations, is to be criticised, as is the discourse that gives rise to such reporting. The closure of journalistic space, or allowing the closure of journalism by others, is to be condemned. The totalising intent and limiting effect of professionalism in journalism is thus the target of this thesis’ critical energy.

However, the expansion of public knowledge through journalism and the democratic capacity to inform inherent in journalism is valued. The discourses, norms and practices of journalism that make possible or encourage a variety or multiplicity of interpretations and meanings are thus to be encouraged. As the analysis will show there is much that is subjective and experiential in journalism which may serve the public good more favourably than the idealised professional norm of objectivity and associated practices. An analytical method that enables the identification of creative or open aspects of professionalism is thus considered centrally important.

For this reason the thesis’ method seeks an account of journalist’s experiences of war and war journalism through interviews. In the interview process an account of war journalism is constructed which contains both direct statements of values, norms, concepts and discursive strategies, set alongside experiences, insights, judgements and idealisations concerning their practice and experiences. These enunciations are used to problematise the public record, illuminating exclusions, absences and contradictions and to identify where journalism may benefit from the articulation of a more experiential, subjective knowledge. This is not to state a preference for relativistic, or even subjective, knowledge. Rather, this method provides criteria of value to be applied to journalism. These criteria are the extent to which journalistic norms serve to illuminate and articulate into public knowledge something local, unknown, repressed, unofficial, under-reported, and excluded or outside normal experience. In this sense, a
normatively experiential or subjective journalism, insofar as it usefully expands public knowledge, fulfils meta-professional norms of serving the public good, yet transcends the limitations of normative professionalism.

Furthermore, this research approach is opposed to foregrounding dominant discourses and official perspectives, such as realities defined in the interest of military and political power. Such definitions are always strategically crafted accounts and their prominent reproduction in the public record is not considered an expansion of knowledge. This is especially so during war, when official perspectives actively seek to close down differing interpretations of wartime reality.

The purpose of the method is therefore to provide an analytical scheme, which, informed by the thesis’ theoretical perspective, permits this analytical and critical energy to be used effectively. Emerging from this approach to journalism analysis is the possibility of a ‘new professionalism’. My analysis of contemporary war journalism indicates much within professionalism that is to be valued and maintained, however I also show journalism to be highly contingent, and this contingency is de-emphasised by professionalism. And there is much in professionalism that the research identifies as disciplining and restricting the possibility of useful forms of knowledge. Rather than seeking to control, limit or dominate the production of news discourse through professionalism, or through undisguised ideological reporting, ‘new professionalism’ champions a reflexive, open, multi-perspectival and non-total news form. This new professionalism should be committed to the expansion of knowledge, rather than its limitation or closure, and consequently cannot commit to potentially limiting regimes, such as professionalism. The admission of techniques of literary journalism, ethnography and of experiential knowledge alongside verifiable fact in professional journalism has the potential to greatly expand understanding, especially during wartime, when facts are in notoriously short supply. The value of this thesis’ method therefore, and of journalism generally, should not be the conclusive truth of its empirical observations. Rather this thesis is committed to providing practical, pragmatic insights, and to illuminating limitations within existing journalism.

A journalism which follows the suggestions presented here, however, will not necessarily become merely relativistic and narrowly subjective. Without a firm
epistemological base, such as currently provided by professionalism, an ‘anything goes’ relativism in journalism is acknowledged as one potential outcome. Without firm normative concepts of objectivity and independence at the heart of journalism, arguably any practice involving public knowledge formation could be construed as journalistic. In the absence of professionalism, one may argue, journalism risks degenerating into ill-informed or wilfully ideological speculation.

The danger of abandoning professional norms and the degeneration of professional journalism into openly ideological Fox News-style journalism (which several of the interviewees in this project both flatly reject and caution against encouraging) is always potentially a problem. Such degeneration, however, is held to stem from poor ethical commitment to norms of honesty and fairness, rather than from self-reflexivity and a modified professionalism – if one wants reproduce certain ideological positions in journalism, one can do so professionally (Reese, 1997). As this thesis makes clear, professionalism provides no protection from ideology, and indeed, professionalism disguises ideology well. Heavily ideological journalism must be criticised for its problematic commitment to ethics, rather than for its lack of professionalism. A simply more professional approach to journalism therefore, does not provide an adequate protection from ideological journalism. Rather, more awareness of the construction of social knowledge, both on the part of journalists and audiences is desirable. One method of achieving this is through removing from journalism the camouflage of professionalism and laying bare the contingencies, conditions and pragmatic circumstances that shape journalism production. A potentially more open, democratic, diverse and self-aware journalism can thus be conceptualised from a critique of journalism’s present professional norms.

4.5 INTERVIEWS AND DISCOURSE

As its main source of primary data this project analyses telephone and face-to-face interviews. These were conducted directly with a selection of journalists reporting for mainstream Australian news organisations from the Persian Gulf region during the 2003 Iraq invasion. Also interviewed in person were a selection of editors and producers who had direct professional relationships with these journalists. In total sixteen news
professionals participated in this study and were interviewed in a conversational, non-structured manner either by telephone or face-to-face, in both private and professional settings. It should also be noted that this group of Australia’s most experienced foreign correspondents, working for ‘premier’ news organizations, constitute a robust group of interviewees. These journalists, as professionally trained interviewers themselves, participate in the research as knowledgeable, articulate, thoughtful and autonomous speakers. In this sense the interview data is not pure, unconscious professional discourse. Rather it is professional discourse which is constructed entirely in the interviewee’s knowledge of their responses being analysed by an academic researcher.

In-depth interviews therefore provide access to a professional discourse. This discourse consists of journalists’ and editors’ on the record statements concerning their understanding of journalism and their experiences in reporting from Iraq and which complement the public record of news reports. The contingency of this discourse is recognised. Access has not been granted to the one, single and total professional discourse, but rather to one form of professionalism, produced for research purposes. It is the central methodological intention of this research to compare this professional discourse, as observed in interview, with professionalism evident in the public news material produced by these journalists. On one hand, through this method it is possible to construct a discursive formation of professional journalism, in which concepts, discursive strategies and enunciations that serve to regulate and discipline journalism are identified. On the other hand, this method provides a means of observing how conceptual frameworks and professional narratives both shape the public record and are influenced by it, as well as providing an ‘alternate’ account of Iraq war journalism. This account can be used to perceive salient aspects of the Iraq invasion experience which were absent, emphasised or excluded in the public material, for instance. A critical consideration of the effect of professionalism on public knowledge is thus made possible.

An analysis of the interview disclosures of journalists and editors is held to provide insight into the regulatory power of normative professionalism. This method seeks to illuminate those aspects of journalistic subjectivity that are subject to domination by the discursive regime of professionalism and to identify the extent to
which professionalism ‘closes’ the identity and practice of journalism. Finally, through this method those aspects of the professional identity upon which may be constructed a more open and reflexive journalism may be identified. The central body of evidence that this thesis seeks to analyse is therefore composed of both interview material and the public record of news journalism produced by those journalists during the Iraq invasion period. The starting point for the critique of professional journalism is not a political position on the correctness or otherwise of the Iraq invasion, but rather an unambiguous commitment to critique, disclosure and openness in the process of public knowledge formation.

It is necessary to add an important qualification however. As noted, interviews do not provide direct access to the internal ‘truth’ of human experience or in this case to professional discourse. Rather, it must be acknowledged that the presence of an academic researcher must necessarily influence the production of interview data and this is considered an inescapable reality of interview-based research. As Alvesson and Skoldberg (2007; 193) write:

> How interviewees appear or represent reality in specific interview situations has less to do with how they, or reality, really are (or how they perceive reality out there); rather, it is about the way they temporarily develop a form of subjectivity, and how they represent a reality in relation to the local discursive context created by the interview.

Thus interview data is to be understood as produced in a collaborative effort between the interviewee and the researcher. In the context of reflexive, critical research the perspective of the researcher, in designing the research methodology, planning and conducting interviews and directing the interview process is not problematic, but an integral aspect of the research process. Similarly, the contingency and selectivity of interviewee responses and narrative constructions are acknowledged as contingent, yet nonetheless they provide us with a narrative which illuminates contingencies in the public news record. Thus, any claims on a systematic or neutral line of interview inquiry, or on the purity or ‘truth’ of interview responses, are both impossible and inessential. This reflection upon the research methodology highlights a similar dilemma
for practicing journalists, who, while professing objectivity and independence, for example, necessarily select and exclude aspects of reality in their production practices. Importantly however, this insight does not invalidate knowledge so produced, but rather highlights the importance of consciously reflecting upon the process of representation, both academic and journalistic. As Alvesson and Skoldberg (2007; 194) make clear:

> How representations are made is always in some sense arbitrary, since there is no unambiguous relation between language and ‘extra-linguistic’ reality. Even descriptions and analyses that could appear good for some people – the emancipatory, for instance, or the apparently innocent (allegedly neutral) – are thus always potentially problematic.

In this thesis, therefore, the rationale of an interview based methodology is based on an intention to on one hand stimulate the reflexivity of the journalists involved and on the other to construct an account of journalists’ experiences of war that may be read thematically alongside the news journalism that has been both individually and collectively produced. The production of this account of war journalism, separate from news material, provides the possibility of insight into the public record. The analysis of these accounts yields an understanding of the contingency of news journalism constructions.

One must therefore be mindful of what is being achieved through the analysis of interview data. While it is important to abandon the presumption that interview data can provide us with some kind of privileged insight into deep human and social realities and ultimate truth of experience, interview data can yield revealing insights into the localised, idiosyncratic and highly nuanced creation of knowledge, as the present data is acknowledged to be. The value of this knowledge and generalisations drawn from interview data are contingent on the strength and credibility of the analysis.

### 4.6 PARTICIPANT SELECTION

The primary data in this study is comprised of transcripts of interviews conducted with a selection of Australian foreign correspondents who reported from Iraq during the war of 2003 and some of their editors and producers. Sixteen Iraq war journalists and editors
were interviewed in total. Within this number were three journalists who reported from Baghdad both during and after the initial invasion. Two more were stationed at Central Command, the Coalition media centre established outside the Qatari capital, Doha. Two of the interviewees were embedded journalists who travelled with military forces and one reported from Iraq as a ‘unilateral’ journalist and who travelled independently, accompanied by a photographer and interpreter and another reported from the Kurdistan region of Northern Iraq. Six editors and producers were also interviewed. These interviewees were included on the basis of their being directly involved in the collation of Iraq war news either as senior editorial staff (Foreign editor/Editor) or as executive producers of radio news programs, the ABC’s AM, PM, and The World Today flagship daily news and current affairs shows. Five of the interviewees were interviewed a second time as the richness of their accounts warranted further discussion. The interviews were conducted both by telephone and face to face. Interview length varied from approximately twenty minutes to up to an hour with the average length around half an hour. The interviews took the form of a conversation over a range of topics including the journalist’s and editor’s professional conceptions and their specific experiences of Iraq and the production of Iraq war news. While these discussions were conversational I ensured that areas of specific interest, such as professionalism, were covered in all interviews. Specific questions about certain events were directed solely at those journalists and editors who had specific knowledge or interest in them, such as News Ltd’s Peter Wilson’s experience of being arrested by Iraqi soldiers. The first round of interviews took place in May and June 2006 and was followed by a second round in November and December 2006. The interviews conducted with editors and producers were partly conducted in these periods. A further research trip facilitated the face to face interview of editors and producers in Sydney and Melbourne, Australia in December 2007 and January 2008.

Interviewees were purposively selected for participation in this project on the basis of several considerations. Firstly, the prestige, agenda setting news organisations in Australia (for the purposes of this study, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation,

---

12 As opposed to other qualitative sampling methods – see Neuman 2000; 195-221; Sarantakos 2005; 151-175
Fairfax Media Limited\(^\text{13}\) and News Limited\(^\text{14}\) and the journalists who reported for these organisations from Iraq and the Persian Gulf region were identified and selected for inclusion in this study. Certain specific news locations, from where journalists were stationed or from where they reported have been identified. These include broadly – the Iraqi capital Baghdad; the Central Command (Centcom) near Doha, in the Gulf state of Qatar; as an embedded reporter with Coalition forces; in Northern Iraq (Kurdistan) and as an independent, unilateral reporter in Iraq\(^\text{15}\) - locations determined as much by organisational needs or resource-use considerations, as by objective news criteria. The experiences of journalists in or around these areas of Iraq were to be deemed relevant to the purposes of this study.

Another consideration concerns the data available to supplement the first hand interviews. The rationale guiding interviewee selection was in part informed by an understanding of the news coverage available, and the form it took. For example, much television coverage of the war was produced, and this live-action, 'on the ground' TV footage provided the defining imagery of the Iraq invasion. However, analysis of TV footage was considered technically too difficult and time consuming, given the discourse perspective's concern for meaning construction, the deep complexity of television imagery and the volume of television footage generated during the three week military campaign. Nonetheless, the prominence of television journalism and the technological advances that have ushered this prominence do bear upon the activities and understandings of non-television journalists and this is referred to in the analysis. Thus, only radio and print news data was sourced. Such data is readily available on news databases and on news organisation websites as transcripts, in the case of radio broadcasts. Digital news was not considered for use in this study as news organisation websites are held to generally publish reproductions of that news available elsewhere – in newspapers, for example. In any case, this news material is intended to provide only examples of news discourse and it is not the intention of the thesis to provide a comprehensive analysis of Australian Iraq War news. Also, in terms of ownership, the

\(^{13}\) Fairfax Media Limited publishes the two largest daily metropolitan broadsheet news papers in Australia, the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Age* (Melbourne).

\(^{14}\) Australian subsidiary of Murdoch controlled News Corporation.

\(^{15}\) It should be noted that news 'happened' in these location in part due to the presence of news crews in these 'newsworthy' locations.
Australian media market is one of the most concentrated in the world (Triffen 2002; Barr 2000). The state broadcaster, the ABC, provides a degree of balance against the heavily concentrated private media sector. In this context the only publications of a serious, international news focus and national impact are the two Fairfax papers the Age and the Sydney Morning Herald and the News Limited publication The Australian. Other high circulation metropolitan and regional publications in Australia are considered ‘tabloid’ format papers, such as the Courier-Mail, Daily Telegraph and Herald-Sun, and thus excluded. Much Fairfax and News Limited material is syndicated through the other group publications, for example during the study period much duplication occurred between news published in both Fairfax papers, and News Limited reporting was circulated widely through the group’s papers. Thus the pool of potential data within the Australian context is small.

Only journalists who worked for News Limited, Fairfax Limited or the Australian Broadcasting Corporation were considered for involvement. Not only are these organisations considered the premier national news services, but their inclusion also allows a comparison between rival print organisations and between media – print and broadcast\(^\text{16}\).

Given the relatively small size of the Australian press corps it was intended to conduct interviews with between ten and fifteen journalists, the final number determined by availability. For the purposes of comparison it was also considered useful to interview editors from each of the news organisations, providing hopefully a deeper and more complex picture of the construction of war news. It was intended there should be symmetry to the data – with one journalist from each organisation providing an account of each location. In any case, during the period of study few organisations had more than one reporting team at any one location, seeking maximum possible coverage for their available resources.

The process of gathering interview data using working journalists has proved irregular. Although almost all journalists approached in this project were enthusiastic, their work schedules and physical locations dictated availability. As a consequence some interviews were conducted relatively early in the research process, whilst the later

\(^{16}\) Further discussion of the Australian media sector is provided in Chapter Five.
interviews may have taken place weeks or months later. Consequently, the later interviews are supported by a greater depth of research and background material, and this is noted. Also noted are absences of significant figures in Australian journalism, such as Fairfax chief correspondent Paul McGeough, from the sample. Also noted is the absence of female voices within the data. While the Australian press corps remains predominantly male, middle class and white (and especially so in the case of the foreign press corps) the female journalists considered appropriate for this study declined to participate. This is a notable weakness in the data, as is the absence of non-white voices. Future research into professionalism and war journalism would benefit from the inclusion of these voices. Although most reporters were more than willing, some were unreachable as they were on assignment overseas and others firmly uncooperative. This sampling method, with purposive and illustrative concerns in mind, rather than an interest in representation or statistical validity is considered appropriate for this study as it provides a depth of context and a variation of perspective that as noted is considered highly in the interpretive scheme.

The interview data was then transcribed into hardcopy text, presented here in the appendices. Transcription was intended to render each conversation as naturally as possible into written form – so as to allow an authentic analysis. However, it should be noted that, in the interests of time and manageability, transcription did not pay as close attention to the minutiae of utterances as a more narrowly linguistic analysis may have. It was considered sufficient for the purposes of this study to observe the general structure and content of the interviews.

4.8 POTENTIAL PROBLEMS
Qualitative research is based upon the deployment of conceptual and interpretive skills, however it is susceptible to many potential problems which need to be identified and taken into account in the final analysis. ‘Error’ (misinterpretation, false interview responses, poor interview style or technique) may be more difficult to define in qualitative research than positivist science, yet there remain many factors that may affect the research. These can be managed throughout the research process through processes of revision and reinterpretation, although arguably never entirely eliminated.
Importantly rather than being considered potential sources of distortion and error, such ‘problems’ are conceived as inherent tensions that exist and help to define qualitative, interpretive research. Issues such as selectivity of data and the interpretation of evidence must be understood in the context of the research aims, which have been outlined above. In seeking to problematise professionalism and construct an account of war which highlight the absences and exclusions of mainstream war journalism, selectivity and interpretation become necessary tools in the analytical process and should be embraced as such.

The problem of bias frequently enters discussions of qualitative research (Sarantakos 2005; Neuman 2000; Kvale 1995; Minichello et al 1991). Bias is the effect of subjective perspectives and beliefs in the research process. With regard to interview-based research, bias can be said to stem from either the researcher or the interviewee, or both. In accordance with the method spelt out above, the issue of researcher bias is one to be considered and managed but does not compromise the integrity of the research project. The absence of objective, empirical fact is embraced by the interpretive method, which views positivist methods with suspicion. Regardless of what political stance or posture is assumed by the researcher, the value of one’s results is to be judged, like validity and reliability, on the accuracy and coherence of one’s theory and method. One’s case is to be argued rather than proven, and to be supported by an interpretation of the evidence.

Other more mechanical issues pertaining to bias in interview research exist too. These include errors and irregularities arising in the interview process. Interview respondents may be misleading, forgetful or make errors and omissions due to an array of motivations. As interviewer, the researcher may omit relevant questions, ask questions in the wrong order, he/she may neglect to pursue fruitful inquiry or may misunderstand the respondent. An interviewee may intentionally mislead the research, for whatever reason\(^\text{17}\). As has already been discussed, the present interview methodology is not strictly concerned with the accuracy or ‘truth’ of interview responses,

---

\(^\text{17}\) This specific likelihood should be noted, as this research project is necessarily dealing with issues relating to professional reputation and status.
but rather interested in constructing a body of data that may be used to illuminate contradictions and shortcomings of professional practice.

4.9 CONCLUSION
This chapter has outlined the methodological approach to data collection/creation undertaken by this thesis. It has also added to the theoretical considerations outlined above, detailing a cohesive analytic strategy that will be purposefully deployed below.

Firstly this thesis’ central research questions were introduced and the general theoretic concepts that guide this research reiterated. This chapter then moved to a discussion of the qualitative research paradigm, within which this project falls. Specifically, the contrast between conventional positivist approaches and pragmatic, constructivist research has been emphasised. In this section the importance of reflexivity and the notion of discursive and subjective openness have been emphasised.

The purpose of the thesis’ analytical and interpretive method was then outlined. Specifically, the thesis is concerned with offering a critique of the journalistic practice of public knowledge creation. The thesis seeks to do this by using interview material to construct a discursive formation of professional journalism, with which to illuminate the public record of news material. This second account, of war and war journalism, serves to illustrate the existence of absences, exclusions and contingencies in the public record. A diagnosis of the effect of professionalism on war journalism is then made possible.

In accordance with this approach, the perspective, values and political or social posture of the researcher must therefore be reflexively acknowledged and written in to the research. The role of the researcher as author is acknowledged (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2007). Where a positivist researcher, akin to a firmly objectivist journalist, seeks to objectify their work, a critical social scientist maintains an entirely different relationship with research, understanding themself to be a part of the research process and engaged with the social and political context. Nonetheless, the critical perspective still appeals to notions of procedure, evidence, authenticity, credibility and forceful analysis to establish their work’s validity. Relativism is also to be avoided. All or any interpretations of the empirical observations should not be accorded the same weight or
value. As noted, in this context, those interpretations which unfix or unblock subjectivities and displace dominant discourses are preferred over fixed identities, political positions or approaches. It should be made clear that in the present research an intentionally critical approach which problematises professional norms and news practices is employed with the purpose of identifying and addressing potential shortcomings in contemporary journalism.

Discussion then moved to issues relating the selection and organisation of this study’s data. Firstly, an understanding of interview data was introduced, with reference to the theoretical posture of this thesis. It was argued that interviews should be considered a location of knowledge production, rather than the site of pure knowledge ‘discovery’. The relationship between interviews and discourse was also briefly outlined, emphasising the construction of knowledge that takes place during the interview process. These constructions are considered valuable as they provide both an alternate account of Iraq invasion experiences and an understanding of the contingencies of professionalism. As professionalism is highly contingent it may also be amenable to progressive rearticulation.

This chapter then described the rationale that guided the selection and organisation of the data. In particular the sample of interview subjects was described and justified with reference to their membership of the Australian quality, national press corps.

Lastly, potential problems that arise from this methodology have been identified and addressed. Specifically, issues of error, distortion and bias have been raised. It is important to understand these issues in the context of the research aims and the value of the thesis is held to depend upon the strength of its interpretations and argument, rather than on its fidelity to positive truths. Having outlined the methodological consideration of this study, the following chapters present the thesis’ research findings.
PART TWO – HISTORICAL AND CRITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

CHAPTER FIVE - THE EMERGENCE OF PROFESSIONALISM

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides the historical and cultural context for the emergence and development of professionalism within journalism and sets the context for the following discussion of professionalism in war journalism. In doing so this section illustrates contingency of professionalism and demonstrates how it has become ‘sedimented’ as a hegemonic discourse in journalism. This chapter also provides a discussion of the critical debate that has surrounded questions of professionalism, objectivity and ideology in journalism. This chapter moves through three stages, initially providing an analysis of the historical emergence of professionalism and the slow development of this concept, before moving to a critical discussion of professionalism and then finally placing professionalism within its contemporary cultural and journalistic context.

I argue subsequent to professionalism’s nineteenth century emergence, professionalism became hegemonic within journalism, although it has been powerfully criticised. Professionalism persists as the central journalistic ethic, yet has been criticised as inadequate and inappropriate for pursuing journalism’s democratic ideals and accused of latent conservatism. Indeed, critics see professionalism as the most significant obstruction for journalists to realise their democratic potential, and here this thesis concurs (McChesney 2003; 2004a). This chapter provides a historical genealogical account of journalistic professionalism in order to fully contextualise the following discussions of the ‘archive’ (Foucault 1972) of professional war journalism and the manner in which relations of power characterise and regulate contemporary war journalism.

This historical account identifies crucial aspects of the development and the socio-political and cultural conditions that ushered the institutionalisation of professionalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I argue that, rather than symbolising the teleological development of liberal values and political ideology,
the formalisation of journalistic professionalism was part of journalism’s incorporation and subsumption within the emergent, hegemonic ideology of liberalism. The ‘professionalisation’ of journalism coincided with the ‘massification’ of media audiences and the need for a standardised, reliable and saleable news ‘commodity’. Following the account of the incorporation of journalism into the hegemonic liberal capitalist system, I begin to analyse the effects of this incorporation on the production of knowledge. The analysis briefly critiques the normative function of professionalism, as it operates within the broader liberal system.

After critically discussing the function of professional journalism, this chapter provides an account of the cultural and economic conditions of professional journalism in recent decades. This era is understood as the postmodern period, in which older cultural and economic assumptions have been displaced in favour of an economically rationalist model of economic de-regulation, globalisation and individualisation. Significant cultural and economic changes have been wrought by postmodernism – later conceptualised as period of re-regulated neo-liberal globalisation – and journalism has been profoundly affected. On one hand, socio-cultural criticisms during the 1960s and 1970s drew attention to the conservative and establishment supporting function of professional journalism. On the other hand, economic de-regulation and rationalisation has led to the commercial penetration of the cultural sphere, the concentration and conglomeration of media businesses and the increased commodification and consumer orientation of the news media. I argue ‘professionalism’ as a normative occupational ethic, is incapable of coping with the onslaught of neo-liberal news media commodification. Rather, professional journalism needs to be conceptualised, not as a fragile vestige and weakened institution of normative liberal political values, but as already within the current neo-liberal hegemony of economic globalisation. The rearticulation and emphasis on ‘traditional’ professional, liberal values by contemporary journalists, rather than re-asserting the normative journalistic role, which is able to provide democratic critique, merely fails to acknowledge the role played by professional journalism within the contemporary forms of hegemony, such as Western militarism.
5.2 THE EMERGENCE OF ANGLO-PROFESSIONALISM
The emergence of the professional discourse and the objective method is a relatively recent development, in the context of the history of the press. This emergence however, should not be understood as a teleological achievement within the development of Western liberalism. The professionalisation of journalism, and the turn towards the neutral, objective method of reporting that persists as the guiding occupational ethic (Schudson 1978) today, results from certain particularities and contingencies of cultural and commercial developments of the late nineteenth-century specific to the Anglophone world. Rather than being a successfully realised, integral liberal articulation, the journalistic discourse was subsumed within liberalism during the late nineteenth century. The preference for ‘objectivity’ and the professional ethos, must be considered as enunciations of modern preferences for, and faith in, science, rationality, administrative function and control, rather than as a natural, pre-existing or transcendent form and method of knowledge generation or indeed as descending from the philosophical origins of liberalism (Siebert et al 1956).

Briefly, it is necessary to provide some historical context of the development of Anglo-journalism and press culture, before paying closer attention to changes that occurred in late nineteenth-century. The early, pre-professional phase of journalism stretches from the earliest produced letters and pamphlets of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries through to the early 1800s. In this period the ability to communicate information and ideas through printing emerged as a radical challenge to established social and political orders, as printed material profoundly altered the possibility and effectiveness of communication. In this sense the development of printing and publication, and eventually ‘the press’ as such, must be considered as coincident with the wider cultural-philosophic turn towards liberalism that gathered pace over this period (Siebert et al 1956; 42-43). The subversive potential of the new printing technology and publication was perhaps most dramatically realised with the 1517 publication of Martin Luther’s 95 Theses sparking the Protestant Reformation. Henceforth, ‘news’ became increasingly viewed not only as the transmission of information, but also as a political instrument permitting the increased flow of knowledge and ideas (McNair 1999; 29).
Throughout this early period printing and publishing remained controlled by the state through various regulatory measures. The modern concept of press freedom did not yet exist. In an era of largely unquestioned monarchical legitimacy, press freedom was an unforeseen consequence rather than a purposeful creation (Stevens 2007; 152). Nevertheless, the early press served as a means through which the rising capitalist class could agitate for political and economic reform, in which they held explicit self-interest. The absolute power and ‘divine right’ of the European monarchs were increasingly viewed as incompatible with the emerging Enlightenment ideals of economic, political, spiritual and intellectual freedom. The notion of a free press or ‘open market of ideas’ was quickly incorporated as a central aspect of the rising bourgeois political doctrine (McNair 1999; 30) – only through the free and uninterrupted flow of ideas, opinion and intellectual diversity could ‘truth’, knowledge and prosperity emerge. By the eighteenth century the transition from authoritarian to liberal principles of press organisation was complete (Siebert 1956; 44). The freedom of expression and of conscience were thus included philosophically, and later legally (within constitutional arrangements), within the body of liberal thought.

Whereas later the ‘professionalisation’ of journalism would require the renunciation of opinion and partisanship, and an avowal of neutrality in the press, in the early liberal period no such doctrine existed. As Smith (1978; 157) writes of early journalistic entrepreneurs, “[T]he preoccupation of the journalist lay quite outside the accurate reporting of facts; there were no facts more important, nor more urgent, than the fate of fictions; it was these that provided the revenue, the market and the intellectual compulsion behind the product”. The following brief discussion details the similarity of journalistic development in America, the UK and Australia, providing a simple comparison of journalistic development.

Sloan and Williams (1994) note that early Americans saw journalism and the debate it fostered as close to concerns of society. Rather than a product of reformist iconoclasm or the forces of reaction, the early American press found support from early colonial American political and religious ideology favouring individual inquiry and expression, that is, nascent liberalism. Increasingly American colonial society found newspapers and periodicals useful for both commerce and political expression, and
philosophical urges were often diluted by practical matters of public and political importance (Sloan and Williams 1994; 206). Generally, the press came to be regarded as a social and political necessity, not only lubricating the machinery of commerce, as it had done from its origins, but also fostering literacy and encouraging knowledge about an increasingly complex social and political system.

It was in England that during the nineteenth century the potential for mass audiences and massive commercial gain was first realised. With this however was begun a process of incorporating more radical press elements into the mainstream, slowly extinguishing non-conventional and marginalised press voices which had heretofore flourished. Previously, a high stamp tax forced a truly radical (and illegal) press underground. This vibrant political culture gave voice and identity to English dissenters, protestors and radical agitators; although it is argued that in reality its political demands called for nothing more radical than reform (Stevens 2007; 188). The abolition of the stamp tax however made legal, commercial publication more appealing for underground publishers. Consequently, the radical press was virtually destroyed as papers re-made themselves as proto-tabloids, featuring working class rhetoric, formulaic crime news and scandal, and competed with mainstream publications for audience and advertising, foreshadowing later American developments.

The early Australian press, developed from the British/American tradition, was transplanted into an embryonic colonial society in the early 1800s. The early colonial press was unremarkable and often forcibly Protestant and didactic, reflecting the role of the press in an often unruly penal society (Mayer 1964; 10). Deference to colonial governments and positions of power characterised early papers, in contrast to the voices of dissent heard loudly in early English and American papers. The Sydney Gazette (1803-42), published “by authority”, has been described as “fulsome flattery of government officials and inane twaddle in other matters” (Mayer 1964; 10). Throughout the nineteenth century however, the Australian press grew rapidly as developments in literacy, industrialisation and transport contributed to the creation of mass audiences.

The reputation of early Australian journalists was low and notions of professionalism absent from journalistic consideration. In a penal and frontier colonial society little value was placed on what would later become recognised as
professionalism. Little regard was shown for concepts of truthfulness or political independence. Indeed, the rising public esteem that early journalists enjoyed in revolutionary America, and later during the ‘new journalism’ period of the late nineteenth century, was notably absent in early Australia. Rather, the social status of journalists was, and remains, relatively low. Much of Australian press history and culture, both professional and otherwise, has been characterised by the banal. As Mayer (1964; 189) argues early journalists lacked education, self-respect and cosmopolitan experience and were generally treated with contempt. Journalists possessed, “no definite organisation, [or] profession at all” and represented “many specimens of moral obloquy, so many hopeless outcasts from all paths of reasonably sane and tolerable behaviour” (Mayer 1964; 190). A particularly evocative image is drawn of the ‘bush journalist’ or editor, working on the country papers of rural Australian towns and villages; such journalists represented, “a frowsy, unsanitary fragment, for the most part, of uninviting exterior and cheap morals and a yearning soul for spirituous and fermented liquors” (Mayer 1964; 197).

By the late nineteenth century the same distinctions between popular and ‘serious’ press existed in Australia as they did elsewhere. In 1900 Sydney’s Daily Mail achieved a circulation of one million with its populist, lightly entertaining product. While a ‘serious’ press existed (the Sydney Morning Herald began daily publication in 1840 and the Age began in 1854), notions of formalised professionalism had not yet emerged or formed, mirroring the American experience. Nonetheless, the new papers enjoyed a privileged position in colonial society, with little other indigenous literature available. The press industry enjoyed relatively light regulation. Publishers and journalists could either be punished or supported by government patronage and no guiding ethos of public responsibility existed. Rather, as Chief Justice Sir James Martin remarked, “the journalist publishes what he thinks will be profitable to him and the public pay him for his trouble” (in Mayer 1964; 465). It was not until well into the twentieth century that a more formal professional Australian journalism emerged.
5.3 EMERGING PROFESSIONAL CULTURE

As the discussion above makes clear, professionalism was an unknown concept throughout this early phase of journalism’s development. The following discussion details the cultural and economic conditions that ushered professionalism’s emergence. Earlier, no central guiding ethos guided journalism’s development beyond the desire for free political expression and, where possible, commercial gain. Rather, the establishment of the early press was the product both of technological and politico-cultural development and was appended to the nascent political philosophy of classical liberalism; while a discourse of press freedom was well established, professionalism remained unelaborated or articulated. Press culture however, changed markedly in the nineteenth century. The social changes wrought by the industrial revolution, such as industrial manufacturing and the growth of urban, working populations created the conditions in which a mass audience for journalism and news could be created. Consequently enormous commercial opportunity could be realised by those press owners able to exploit the maturing industry effectively. As the press industry became a mass industry and highly commercial, an occupational meaning was fostered among journalists who became ever more required to possess certain journalistic skills and to be able to produce evermore standardised journalistic fare.

The underlying reasons for the emergence of the professional doctrine of journalistic theory, practice and ethics at this time are debated, however analysts acknowledge the socio-political maturity that characterised late nineteenth century America and other societies as contributing powerfully to development of professional culture. Schudson (1978) sees the decline of partisanship and the rise of professional journalism with its roots in the Jacksonian era (1830s), and the liberal social consensus and political engagement that this period fostered. Baldasty (1992) emphases the commercial aspect of press development, arguing that newspaper owners traded political patronage for advertising revenues and promoted a non-political news, treating their readers as consumers rather than citizens. Kaplan (2003) holds that the political crises of the mid-1890s and the rise of the Progressive movement de-legitimised the established political parties and allowed the press to break with political allegiance,
follow commercial imperatives and seek public legitimacy through impartiality, technical expertise and fact.

Alongside commercial imperatives, central to journalism’s growing sense of occupational, if not professional ethos, was therefore the notion of public service and credibility. Within this public service ethos were knowledge, education and standards of quality and behaviour and independence were emphasised (Dooley 2000; 127). Although ideals of public service and independence may have been honoured more in their compromise than in meaningful realisation throughout nineteenth century, these were powerful discourses that captured public imagination in an era of expanding social and political complexity.

In the late nineteenth century, the ‘new journalism’, promoted by the first ‘press barons’, such as W.R. Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer, symbolised the growing maturity and professionalisation of the press. Spurred by commercial imperatives, this style of journalism moved away from both crude political propaganda and proto-tabloid populism, towards a more appealing and saleable ‘product’. Indeed, as was recognised at the time, the transition to mass audiences necessarily meant a transition from political, partisan and local news to standardised, moderated news designed to appeal to as broad an audience as possible. From its first incarnation, professionalism inculcated a mainstream, moderate and palatable journalism designed to entertain as much to inform. As Pulitzer argued, “what a newspaper needs in its news, with its headlines, and on its editorial page is terseness, humor [sic], descriptive power, satire, originality, good literary style, clever condensation and accuracy, accuracy, accuracy” (Pulitzer in Mott 1972; 440). This new style of journalism importantly fostered an interest in public affairs and society, and this was reflected in the burgeoning circulations of most nineteenth century papers. As Dooley (2000; 128) argues these developments help to establish “occupational meaning” both in the minds and actions of journalists but in the broader social structure too. This orientation was however explicitly an expression of commercial logic.

Although American journalism had long harboured a sensational bent the new sensibility was heavily criticised for its robust tabloidism, characterised by shamelessness in self-promotion, sensationalism, jingoism and publication of
unwholesome and salacious scandal in gritty detail. As Mott (1972; 442) comments, “exploitation of crime and scandal were here allied with the crusading spirit, and their crusades were often sensational”. Nonetheless, the new journalism, as promoted by Pulitzer, Hearst and others, symbolised an attempt to proceduralise journalism and to stabilise its body of practice, ethics and doctrine around core values that would add to its potential as a saleable commodity.

Crucial to the entrenchment of professionalism was the first crisis of modern journalism. This crisis took hold in the wake of the excesses of yellow journalism\textsuperscript{18}. Much of the ‘yellow journalism’ was blatant fabrication and dishonest, and this period was essentially a ‘race to the bottom’, as rival publishers attempted to outdo each other and increase sales through spectacle and exuberance in which smut, prurience and sex-crime sensationalism were taken to an all time high (Mott 1972; 524). The Progressive politics of the era however, expressed disillusionment with commercial and corporate power, particularly in the media\textsuperscript{19}. For a brief period muckraking journalism,\textsuperscript{20} and its excoriating social criticism, flourished, and an embryonic professionalism was extant. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the press came broadly under attack as part of the systematic, Progressive challenge to established social, political and economic structures (Kaplan 2002; 190). Indeed, by the early twentieth century, and as a direct result of the excesses of the ‘yellow’ period, the press was largely considered “corrupt and straightforward class propaganda” (McChesney and Scott 2004; 14). Neither the press’s commercial or political power could survive in face of a deeply suspicious public that had begun to treat news and journalism with contempt and disgust. This crisis of public confidence combined with the commercial imperative to sustain business would eventually lead to the establishment of modern, liberal and professionalised journalism in the post-World War I era.

Journalism in the late nineteenth century was, then, a contradiction. From the ‘penny press’ era of the mid-1800s onwards, the commercial press had emphasised democratic populism and legitimacy derived from public service. These values and

\textsuperscript{18} For further discussion of this period of American journalism see Joyce (1989) \textit{The Yellow Kids}, New York, Harper and Row.

\textsuperscript{19} For further discussion of Progressive era, see Hofstader (1962) \textit{The Age of Reform}, New York, Jonathan Cape.

\textsuperscript{20} For an account of this era of journalism, see Serrin and Serrin, \textit{Muckraking}, New York, New York Press, 2002.
attributes were supported both by an increasingly literate and politically sophisticated public, and by journalistic discourses celebrating and promoting political independence and public service of a mass audience. Pulitzer’s ‘new’ journalism in particular identified with values of accuracy and veracity in reporting, infusing his journalism with ideas drawn from liberalism and enlightenment science, yet motivated also by the desire for mass appeal and profitability. In this sense, by the late nineteenth century journalism could be publicly promoted as reason and science in action, yet it could also exist as a profit-earning commodity.

The development of an objective, professionalised method in journalism received impetus partly as a result of journalist’s experience of the First World War. Professionalism, in this sense was a response to the attempts by military managers to obfuscate and propagandise during war. The propaganda and information management strategies employed by the Great Powers led journalists to question the previously held assumption that, through perseverance and tenacity, the journalist could discover the ‘truth’ (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2003; 72-74). The First World War signified the death, in effect, of the naïve realism that had previously characterised the reporting of events. As Lippman (1922) foresaw, liberal democratic governments in the twentieth century would require the public relations and image-conscious communications industries to, “create consent among the governed”. News, it was argued, must therefore be constructed in accordance with an objective methodology which privileged factual information and dispassionate reporting, thus obviating the subjectivity of reporting and efforts of dissemblers (McNair 1999; 33). Empiricism was thus placed at the heart of the journalist’s practice.

5.4 PROFESSIONALISM HEGEMONIC
The following section details the establishment of professionalism as central to twentieth century journalism, before the discussion turns to a critical discussion of professionalism’s hegemony. From its emergence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, liberal, professional journalism was held in high public esteem. Hallin (1992) refers to the post-WWII era in particular as the period of ‘high modernism’ in journalism. Through the application of the objective method journalists were
considered able to pursue the public interest, reporting virtually unimpeded. Journalists, editors and publishers were able to restore public faith too, through enunciation of a professional discourse. With the establishment of the American Association of Newspaper Editors (1923) and the adoption of ethical standards of conduct, the growth in journalism education and professional courses and the sophistication of the commercial industry, journalism came to be both popularly and politically considered as an integral component of the modern, democratic system. A brief period of radicalism in the 1930s notwithstanding, this high esteem continued throughout the 1940s and the Second World War era.

Post-war, the trends that characterised press development continued, with widespread consolidation of the ownership and expansion of press empires. Of central importance during this era however, was the expansion of news services and creation of truly mass audiences through the technology of initially radio and then television (Mott 1972; 813). These were profound changes. Although the professional discourse did not undergo reconsideration, the introduction of mass communications technology profoundly altered the composition of the media industries. By the 1960s television was ubiquitous (later outside the US). The spread and popularity of new technology reflected the optimism of the post-war boom years, as consumer driven growth resulted in great social change, such as the development of suburban geography, rapid technological development, changing family structures and accelerated corporate ownership across industries, including publishing and broadcasting (Davies 1994; 131).

In this era, journalism had took on a firmly establishment cast (McChesney and Scott 2004) and was beginning to suffer criticism for its embrace of power. As noted in the post-war era, the disinterested, objective doctrine of professional journalism that Lippman had promoted became increasingly seen as insufficient in addressing the significant social and political issues of the day. Although journalists had gained prestige and power through their close association with political institutions and figures, their role in maintaining the status quo social structures were identified and questioned. This critique of professional journalism grew. By the 1960s, as the civil rights and anti-Vietnam movements were gaining momentum and widespread support, the mainstream press came to be seen as incapable of providing sustained political criticism and the
capacity to provide alternative narratives, analyses and interpretations from those expounded by official figures and sources. In this sense professional journalism came to be identified alongside the established liberal, socio-political institutions currently criticised. Professional journalism provided, “an effaced, deferential narration of the views of legitimate authorities from formal political society” (Kaplan 2002; 194) and symbolised much that was ill with modern liberalism. Through the institutionalisation of instrumental and technocratic power liberalism had become an inherently conservative, rigid and dominating force. In the terminology of the era, professional journalism became evermore considered an ideology, maintaining the legitimacy of liberal democratic systems.

PART TWO
5.5 THE PROFESSIONAL METHOD
This section deals specifically with the criticisms of professionalism that emerged in the later twentieth century and in response to the perceived ‘establishment cast’ of journalism, produced through the professional discourse and method. Professionalism is best understood as a purposefully created and reproduced strategy of legitimation within journalism, solidified in the early twentieth century. For instance, on one hand, the notion of objectivity is commercially saleable to consumers wanting accurate ‘news’ about social reality. On the other hand, it provides a moral grounding for journalists committed to ‘truth’. The power and legitimacy of these ideas grew throughout the first half of the twentieth century, consistent as they were with the emerging liberal international political and economic system. However, as many have noted (Tuchman 1978; Gans 1980; Gitlin 1980; Reese 1997; McChesney 2004a; 2004b), objectivity, as the central tenet of the professional discourse, works to obscure the processes, routines and values which influence the construction of news and thus the character of the public information that journalism produces. In attempting to eliminate ‘bias’ from the news, the discourse of objectivity is itself obscurant.

Objectivity is an articulation of faith in facts and their central importance in producing knowledge, and a disavowal of values in journalism. Not only does this discourse defend against charges of bias, but asserts that truth and factual information
can be established if ‘truth claims’ are subjected to rules and practices deemed legitimate by a professional community (Schudson 1978: 7), that is, subjected to discursive controls. Similarly, objectivity has been described as bringing the techniques of social science to journalism – seeking truth through the rigorous methodology of the scientist (Streckfuss 1990; 975). As such objectivity is the central legitimating ethic in professional journalism.

A loose body of doctrine has grown around the notion of objectivity, focusing on fairness, balance, truthfulness and the importance of verification. These concepts have become fully integrated and articulated into the discourse. However, the discourse has never become fully ‘fixed’ and these concepts have never coalesced into standardised procedure or rules of evidence (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2003: 74-75). Nonetheless they continue to guide journalistic practice and provide its public legitimacy. Journalists and media organisations have however sought to codify the discourse and promulgated codes of ethics and standards of behaviour and practice. These specialised skills, knowledge and the ethos of public service are used as evidence to support journalism’s claim on professional status (Reese 2001; 175), although this claim continues to be contested (Ognianova and Endersby 1996; Singer 2004), illustrating further the incomplete fixing of professionalism as a hegemonic discourse. Objectivity is a journalistic virtue and professionalism a commitment to these ethics (Hausman 1992; 12) and although objectivity has been criticised as an unattainable and ultimately flawed method for generating knowledge, it has withstood these attacks to remain the central concept of modern, professional journalism (Schudson 1978; 9-10). Professionalism asserts what type of information is reliable, but it also symbolises an intellectual and political commitment to engage with the world from an ostensibly neutral, dispassionate perspective.

Critics have argued that objectivity, rather than ensuring an unadulterated and accurate picture of reality, actually masks the ongoing process of meaning and reality construction inherent in the news production process. Objectivity may be a commitment to facts, however ‘facts’ are themselves cultural constructs (Pedelty 1995: 7) and can only be communicated by the establishment of shared, contextual meanings. This notion has been pursued by scholarship concerned with investigating the values and
routines that determine the news (Tuchman 1978; Gans 1980; Gitlin 1980; Altheide 1980). The most powerful criticisms of journalism arose from the adversary culture of the late-1960s, when substantive political and social assumptions, such as capitalism, the law, organised religion and education came into serious question (Schudson 1978; 185).

Although criticisms of professional journalism were made as objectivity was ascendant, Hallin (1992) calls the mid-twentieth century as a period of ‘high modernism’ for journalism. In this period the public status of media institutions grew and there existed little controversy over the political role or ethical bearing of journalists (Hallin, 2000). It was a period of Cold War moral absolutes and stable relationships between the establishment and the press. Hallin (1992) argues that in the 1990s, when this economic, social and political stability began to break down, journalism did not emerge reinvigorated but had its remaining energy sapped by ever increasing news commercialisation.

Social science has attacked journalism’s epistemology as naïve, arguing journalism is incapable of examining the true nature of the social and political structure (Tuchman 1978; Gans 1980; Gitlin 1980; Reese 1997; McChesney 2003; 2004a; 2004b). Objectivity – in trying to avoid distorting values and bias in reporting, had for many become the greatest bias. The effect is a tendency towards status quo representations of reality, and away from critique and considered interpretation of issues and events. Objectivity is, to many critics, incapable of delving below the surface of ‘taken for granted’ reality to uncover values that should be open to question.

5.6 THE PROFESSIONAL IDEOLOGY

It is still a point of debate as to whether or not journalism can be classified as a profession (Golding and Elliot 1979; Soloski 1997; Reese 2001; Singer 2003; Dunn 2004; Tumber and Prentoulis 2003). It is unlikely however, that journalism will ever be formally considered a profession similar to medicine or law. Rather, entry into

---

21 This section employs the term ‘ideology’ descriptively, referring to professionalism as a set of occupational norms. This thesis has set out its critique of ‘ideology’ as an analytical category in Chapter Three. The use of ideology by the authors reviewed here must be considered normative, whereas in this thesis the term has undergone considerable theoretical reconsideration and has been superseded by the critical concept of discourse.
journalism remains unregulated and non-exclusive, articulating its democratic ideals, unlike the prestige professions which control entry through educative and examination processes. Nevertheless, the adoption by journalists of routines and conventionalised practices and conceptions which constitute the exercise of power within professional journalism can be identified and critiqued. This section details the criticisms that have been levied at journalism as a result, for critics - the ‘ideology’ of professionalism. As is clear from previous chapters, the thesis takes issue with the conception of professionalism as ideological, but nonetheless a discussion of these criticisms is necessary so as to identify several problematic aspects of modern journalism practice and function which the thesis rearticulates as discursive both in origin and character.

In an early study Johnstone et al (1972) report that the ideology of objective reporting matured in the first half of the twentieth century, although note that by the 1970s was beginning to be criticised as being socially complacent and neutral. Golding and Elliot (1979) discuss professionalism broadly, conceiving of it as a form of occupational control enacted by media organisations, rather than an expression of a conceptual system specific to the occupation. Likewise, Christian (1980) writes that the development of a professional ideology was a response to the changing structure and character of the British press, the most important change being the process of commercialisation, which sought a standardised, reliable product. Soloski (1997; 140), as we have seen, talks of the, “ideology of professionalism” that controls journalist’s behaviour.

Tuchman (1972; 660) has suggested that objectivity and the professional practices it symbolises are little more than a “strategic ritual” that protects journalists from the risks of their trade by providing a, “bulwark between journalists and their critics”. Tuchman rejects the positivist notion that the fulfilment of the normative, professional journalistic role necessarily leads to a, “mirror of society’s concerns and interests” (1978; 183). Rather, the news is a ‘frame’, a concept used to understand the, “principles of organisation which govern events…and our subjective involvement in them” (Goffman 1986; 10-11). News frames, deployed routinely, intuitively and ‘objectively’ constitute the ‘news net’ that orders and defines newsworthiness (Tuchman 1978; 21-22).
Professionalism then, is a product of the institutional, idiosyncratic circulation of power within news organisations and the daily, sanctioned routines of journalists, rather than a neutral set of norms and practices. Journalists, in their daily work, enacting professionalism, undertake ritualised behaviours and operate within institutional constraints to impose and apply meanings. News, as a product of this ongoing meaning negotiation, does not mirror society but, “helps to constitute it as a shared social phenomenon” (Tuchman 1978: 184). In attributing meaning to an event the news defines and publicly ‘creates’ that event.

A similar understanding of professional journalism is expressed by Gitlin (1980; 9) who writes, the media are, “a significant social force in forming and delimiting of public assumptions, attitudes and moods – of ideology, in short”. With regard to professional journalism however, the operation and effectiveness of ideology is reproduced through economic, political and social structures and is embodied by mainstream, commonsense understandings of the world. As Pedelty (1995; 7) describes, in liberal capitalist societies, “[the] dominant means of communication are rationalised in an obfuscational idiom of neutrality, independence and objectivity” masking the ideological nature of ‘commonsense’ or normal understandings. As Gans (1980) identifies, journalism operates completely within the hegemonic cultural and political structures in this non-reflexive manner, mitigating the possibility of fundamental social critique.

Several other thinkers broadly echo these perspectives. Altheide (1976; 24) writes that the, “organisational, practical and other mundane features of news work” encourage a perceptual method that fundamentally distorts events and occurrences. Altheide calls this the ‘news perspective’ and it is analogous to a news frame governed by objectivity. Gans (1980; 183) describes the “implied bargain” that journalists strike with the public. Invoking a detached, objective professionalism allows journalists the autonomy to choose the news in exchange for leaving out their personal and political values. By being conscious of the conventions of professionalism and working to fulfil them, journalists can remain unconscious of the deeper cultural values and political ideologies that colour their work (Pedelty 1995; 172).
Professionalism hides the connections between ‘the news’ and its economic, institutional and political contexts, while the media retains the appearance of an independent institution. As Bennett (2005; 188) writes, “as one reality comes to dominate all others, that dominant reality begins to seem objective”. In describing the professional ideology as a “journalistic paradigm” Reese (1997) argues that by assuming the appearance of neutrality and dispassion, press reporting becomes all the more ideologically effective. “In a large part”, writes Reese (1997; 425), “the media accept the frames imposed on events by officials and marginalise and de-legitimate voices that fall outside the dominant elite circles”. Soloski (1997; 143) agrees, but adds that while the news legitimises and supports the existing politico-economic system, a journalist’s selection of news stories does not reflect a conscious desire to report the news so as to maintain the status quo, but rather reflects the journalist’s position within the hegemonic system and central role the professional discourse plays within it. Similarly, McChesney (2004b) argues that the biases of professional journalism are built in and as a product of the objective model entwined with the process and structure of press commercialisation. For McChesney (2004b; 442), the conglomereration of media ownership has resulted in the increasing irrelevance of much journalism. The pursuit of middle class audiences has meant an extended class bias in the selection and tone of material, “that even at its best serves a propaganda function” (McChesney 2004b; 442). Pedelty (1995) agrees asserting that the ideological content of news texts largely reflects the concerns of shareholders, press owners and especially advertisers, who profit from news production. Professional news is then interpretable as a symbolic liberal capitalist world view, fundamentally supported by those who control and manage news production.

In pre-professional times an editor could claim the selection of a story represented their values, something unacceptable now (McChesney 2004a: 68), leaving an editor open to accusations of bias, as interpretation and analysis are contrary to the fact based neutrality of professionalism. Story selection based on official sources mitigates controversy, but allows those in positions of power great control over the news agenda. As journalists are loathe to antagonise their sources, reporting can often degenerate into simplistic repetition of “what sources said” stenography. Nonetheless,
official sources are to be safely reported upon without raising the ire of those who would accuse the media of bias. Also widely acknowledged, professional journalism is flawed in its focus on events or technical issues and the avoidance of processes or contexts in the news. In political reporting the focus tends to be on strategy or policy rather than the outcomes or implications of policy (Schudson 2003: 54). Issues make little appearance in the news unless associated with an event - unless something happens, editors have no ‘hook’ with which to justify a news story. Providing a meaningful context or explication of processes usually commits a journalist to a certain position, something forbidden by objective professionalism.

Scholarship has investigated these problems thoroughly, examining journalistic practices as they work to construct the news. For these scholars the journalistic product, rather than being an objective, unbiased representation of reality, news is in fact a complex and deeply nuanced product of institutional, ideological and social circumstances and as such operates to construct social reality (Molotch and Lester 1974; Altheide 1976; Tuchman 1978; Gans 1980) rather than reflect it.

It is important now to turn to an examination of journalism in the recent historical and contemporary era. Having examined the origins and development of professionalism journalism, and explored criticisms of its socio-political function, part three of this chapter describes how professionalism has been thrown into crisis by the cultural and philosophic developments of the postmodern age. The emergence of a neo-liberal socio-economic hegemony in the contemporary period is discussed and the consequences for professional journalism are explored.

PART THREE
5.7 JOURNALISM AND THE POSTMODERN ERA
From the nineteen-seventies until the nineteen-nineties a new era for professional journalism can be identified. In these years a widespread questioning of many modern cultural and economic assumptions took place. The assumptions and certainties that characterised the modern era of journalism were critically re-evaluated. In particular, given the criticisms outlined above, journalism’s role in sustaining the cultural and political status quo was attacked. In this postmodern (Lyotard 1984; Jameson 1991)
era a fundamental reorganisation and re-conceptualisation of global society and its philosophic underpinnings has occurred. The postmodern era has been characterised by scepticism and irony towards established conventions – in the present case by an assault on journalism’s modern, liberal meta-narrative (Lyotard 1984) as part of this wider critical project. Much that the modernist sensibility valued has been questioned and discarded by postmodernism. This ironic posture and a concomitant reconfiguration of economic and socio-cultural bases have impacted journalism significantly, most notably through the widespread profusion, commercialisation and conglomeration of the media industry. I argue however, that contemporary journalists do not reconsider their practice in light of these criticisms and cultural and economic changes.

As noted from the 1960s on, counter-cultural, identity, civil and international politics all contributed to a generalised questioning of the institutional, philosophic and cultural assumptions of modern society. Journalism as a social and political institution has been caught within these shifting sands of controversy, political philosophies and social change. A significant criticism, as noted above, held that journalism was guilty of sustaining moribund political and social institutions and was incapable of generating progressive critique (McChesney and Scott 2004). Professional journalism was widely criticised as becoming a part of the establishment it was charged with policing, and its public legitimacy was increasingly questioned.

The post-1960s era is also significant with regard to socio-political and economic changes. The most significant of these were the radical restructuring of the economic bases of many Western economies in neo-liberal form, and the slow decline and eventual implosion of the Soviet Union. These developments can be usefully described as the ‘rise of market liberalism’, or ‘globalisation’, which accelerated following the disestablishment of the Bretton Woods system of international currency and financial controls (Strange 1994; Stiglitz 2002). The expansion of market logic into spheres of society and culture that have heretofore remained outside capital ignited a vigorous critique of role of capital in modern, consumer driven and technologically dependent societies and the impact of capital extension into other, previously non-commercial realms. In this context post-modern intellectual activity sought to re-theorise modern
social reality and has had a profound effect on the understanding of social science, public policy, social identity and cultural production, including journalism. However, what was begun as a substantial critique of modernist structures of liberalism, the market and ideals of progress, had, by the end of the twentieth century, become a highly relativised celebration of diversity, consumerism and technophile popular (and often private) democracy. This profusion of discourse is however often emasculated of its critical politics and progressive potential. Like other areas within the cultural-political realm, journalism has been profoundly impacted by these broad economic, political and cultural changes.

The postmodern era has also been discussed, inaccurately, as the post-ideological period. The rise of neo-liberal globalisation, and the subsequent collapse of state socialism as a competing political and economic system, has led to much discussion of the ‘end of ideology’ and even the ‘end of history’ (Fukuyama 1993). The disintegration of the communist system and rise of Western, liberal hegemony obliterated antagonistic positions, leaving journalists frequently without a coherent frame of reference for interpreting the world. As Jameson (1991; 398) writes of this interpretive crisis, “conscious ideologies and political opinions have ceased to be functional in perpetuating and reproducing the system”. Rather, the Western interpretive framework became obsolete and consequently major conflicts in the 1990s, such as the Gulf War and the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, were interpreted superficially and crudely as a de-politicised heroic war of liberation (Gulf War) (Hallin 1994), as almost unintelligible wars of interethnic hatred (as in the wars of the former Yugoslavia, Africa) and as a ‘clash of civilisations’ (Afghanistan, Middle East) (Huntington 1996).

In this era the supposed collapse of ideology, the ascendancy of neo-liberalism and the expansion of technology and market logic have been generally seen as marking a ‘crisis of modernity’. Theoretical understandings of post-modernity identify, criticise and also celebrate the collapse of modern enlightenment narratives of human progress and stem directly from the above detailed context of late-capitalism. As Jameson (1991; 3) notes, postmodernity merges all discourse into a commercialised cultural sphere; “the new social formation in question no longer obeys the laws of classical
capitalism, namely the primacy of industrial production and omni-presence of class struggle”. Rather, the postmodern sensibility, driven by capital, has broken down previous categories of quality, acceptability and truthfulness into a highly relativised pastiche of aesthetics, culture and history.

In this context the certainties of modern professional journalism are unsustainable and in the postmodern era these have given way to an ‘anything goes’ ethic within the media, as evidenced by a highly commercial, tabloid and lifestyle focused media product.

For Baudrillard (1983) postmodernism was characterised by ‘hyperreality’ in which images and representations, appearing ‘more real than real’ refer to other forms of representation rather than to some unadulterated, objective and knowable reality. In this sense, Baudrillard (1995) made the provocative, and ironic, claim that the Gulf War did not take place, but was rather a ‘simulation’ of a war, the representation, through journalism, which precluded any critical interpretations, privileging the special-effects and technological wonder immanent in this new style of hi-tech, non-ideological warfare. Such questions, concerning the ability of social actors to represent ‘knowledge’ raise fundamental doubts of the ability of journalists to fulfil their normative role as ‘truth’ or ‘fact’ gatherers.

Others are less critical towards the expansion of capital into the cultural sphere. Rather, the neo-liberal market becomes a ‘cultural market place’ in which the production and consumption of media, culture and politics is radically democratised through market operations. Where postmodern and post-structural thinkers were often pessimistic concerning the possibilities of generalised, systemic critique these thinkers celebrated the postmodern cultural sensibility. For Fiske (1987) and Hartley (1996) postmodernity symbolises an era in which consumption is a practice de-coupled from ideology. Audiences, as consumers, are sufficiently powerful and creative to withstand the dominating effects of heavily commercialised and concentrated media systems. From this perspective the market is an emancipatory institution itself. Rather than imposing a socially and politically corrosive neo-liberalism, technology driven, global media markets deliver a cosmopolitan, radically democratic media culture, in which progressive forms of expression may be pursued. For Jenkins (2006) new media technologies, such as
internet publication, so quintessentially postmodern in form and content, encourage participation and collective, ultimately positive practices of production and consumption.

There are dangers inherent in both branches of postmodern theory. As Curran (2005) argues, post-structural relativism and nihilism can lead to a powerlessness and impotence of critical thought in the face of neo-liberal power. As noted, this can eventually lead to a radical postmodernism not dissimilar to a libertarian-pluralist view of a ‘semiotic democracy’ that, “enthusiastically embraced the central themes of sovereign consumer pluralism” (Curran 2005). Although postmodern theory began with timely criticisms of modernist liberal hegemony, its development is, “best summed up as a movement from the vanguard to the avant-garde, from collectivist to aesthetic politics” (Curran 2005; 135). This thesis, as noted, while recognising the cultural conditions described above and their impacts on professional journalism, nonetheless sees much value in adopting a theoretically informed, yet pragmatically realist position in analysing the discourse of contemporary journalism. Next, a brief account of the effect of the postmodern era on journalism and the media is offered, before turning the discussion to the contemporary cultural and economic conditions and journalism’s place within them.

5.8 JOURNALISM IN CRISIS
Thus, at the end of the twentieth century, professional journalism suffered from both an epistemological and socio-political crisis (McChesney 2004a). The Western media industry had changed markedly during the previous three decades. Several progressive trends can be identified, such as the increased involvement and visibility of women, and later, other previously marginalised groups and identities. In an era of ascendant neo-liberalism the content of news became broader in both representation and attentive to consumer demands and predilections. Although news agendas may have been democratised, critics argue such changes, especially in broadcasting, are driven by the expansion of the advertising industry (Schiller 1971) and much media content has been trivialised (Hallin 1994; McPherson 2006). These critics argue this has resulted in a democratic deficit and in emasculating journalism of its critical potential through a turn toward poorly conceptualised ‘postmodern’ principles, in which pluralism trumps serious content. Critical thinkers consider the turn towards easily digestible and simplified
programming and publication, problematic. A de-politicising tendency towards political corruption and sleaze are the outcome of broader moves that follow market logic to greater and greater corporate conglomeration and a consequent intense commodification of journalism and news production (Bagdikian 2004; McChesney 2004a). In this conception, news, considered so socially and politically valuable by liberal democratic theory, becomes simply another product, re-packaged, branded and promoted by values associated with the general entertainment industry, such as colour, info-graphics, image consultants and self-promotion, punditry, magazine talk shows, advertorials and sound bite news (McPherson 2006; 182).

By the 1990s the commercial media systems of Western, liberal democracies are widely considered to have been subsumed and debased by commercialism and popular, tabloid values. Some writers celebrate this tendency as offering greater representation in the media of anti-elitist values and diversity (McNair 2006; Hartley 1996; Fiske 1987). Others consider the extension into and domination of the 'mediasphere' by capital dangerously anti-democratic (McChesney 2004a, 2003; Hallin 1994). McNair (2006) identifies a central feature of this being the commodification of both news and culture more generally.

The 'commodification of news' refers to the process whereby 'news' is produced less as a social or public good, but as a commercial product to be privately consumed. In the postmodern era of professional journalism, McNair (2006; 96-97) argues that 'news-style' has become entwined in the corporate brand strategies of large media organisations, such as CNN, the BBC, Fox News and latterly, Al-Jazeera. Commodification also requires, and has succeeded in achieving, a post-ideological status for news products. In this context, journalistic values of professional objectivity are promoted as centrally important and much content turns away from critical perspectives and towards market-oriented, non-ideological journalistic forms such as talk show punditry and hyper-adversarial attack journalism often focused on political personalities and scandals rather than on substantive questions and inquiries. McNair (2006) locates the commodification of news, within a broader trend toward cultural commodification, characteristic of the postmodern era. ‘Objectivity’, while long a means
to compete in the cultural market place, in this scheme becomes simply a journalistic marketing tool and brand strategy no longer with connection to normative ideals.

Indeed, as McNair (2006; 90-96) argues, dissent and criticism too have become commodities in the capitalist system, yet paradoxically serve to legitimate the system by emphasising its tolerance of criticism. Many writers have celebrated these populist and anti-elitist views of the media system as democratic. Here the 'market' is emphasised as the mechanism that provides social, cultural and political pluralism, and importantly is responsive to consumer choice and preference (Hartley 1996; Fiske 1986).

From this perspective the erosion of class based identity, the rise of micro-politics (often concerned with identity) and the incorporation of labour and capital into a stable, market-based consensus is responsible for re-orienting attention away from systemic political, social and economic issues and encouraging the identification of audiences with consumer values, favouring entertainment and the imperatives of commercialism (Campbell 2004; Sparks 2000).

Several pertinent criticisms stem from this analysis and apply within the Australian context of journalism. Indeed, as globalisation proceeds apace, distinctions between media markets become increasingly irrelevant. The same corporate interests, commercial imperatives and discourses of professionalism are evident on a global scale as neo-liberal structures and media forms become ubiquitous. Concerns over corporate control of the Fourth Estate centre on the penetration and dominance of commercial values and interests within journalism, practices of self-censorship, co-option into non-critical systems and the limitation of critical self-inquiry, all of which are visible in this thesis’ analysis of Iraq War journalism.

The postmodern period of journalism’s development symbolises a period in which the both the political-economic structures and philosophic moorings of liberalism were slipped. The repudiation of Keynesianism and the demise of a systemic alternative to capitalism gave rise to a leaner, meaner (Castells 2000) neo-liberal capitalism and have had a profound effect on professional journalism. While the expansion of commercial values into the political and communicative realms has had the effect of producing a disillusioned and disenfranchised polity, the postmodern sensibility has fragmented political engagement into micro-issues of identity and
adversarialism, leading to an emaciation of, and withdrawal from, the public sphere as evidenced by the decline of Western civic engagement (Hallin 1994: 174). The generalised trend in the postmodern era is identified as one in which commercial values of entertainment take precedence over the public service ideals of liberal journalism. This is a de-radicalising effect and insofar as it is a result of collapsed class structures, individualism and pluralist consumer values (Curran 2002; 51), it is quintessentially postmodern. In this conception journalism becomes a “field of stylistic and discursive heterogeneity without a norm” (Jameson 1991; 17). For Bourdieu (1996) journalism has become a morass of consumerism, de-contextualised imagery and bland entertainment. Bourdieu takes issue with those who celebrate this media culture too, arguing:

Facility with the games of cultural criticism…is not universal. Nor is the ability to spin out elaborate ‘readings’ of the ironic or meta-textual messages cynically manipulated by TV producers and ad people. Anyone who thinks otherwise has simple surrendered to a popular version of one of the most perverse forms of academic pedantry (1996; 9)

This thesis will illustrate many of the features of modern professional journalism discussed above in the following chapters. These features, for which journalism has been much criticised, are clearly evident within contemporary war journalism, which is increasingly producing war as a commodity for the consumption of news audiences.

Journalism and the media, like virtually all other aspects of human experience, have been penetrated, and to a large extent dominated by, capitalist accumulative logic. The thesis argues that, in the context of neo-liberal globalisation and the destabilising effects of postmodernism, journalists rearticulate a ‘high modern’ discourse of professionalism, which recalls a more certain era both in global politics and returns journalism to the certainty and legitimacy of professionalism. Rather than reforming as a result of many of the criticisms of professionalism and adapting their method and practice to the neo-liberal reality currently faced, the rearticulation of a modernist, liberal discourse of professionalism illustrates journalism’s unwillingness to engage critically with contemporary socio-political realities and desire to remain uncontroversial, neutral, detached and wedded to commercial imperatives. Journalism demonstrates itself as
unaware of the extent to which it has been co-opted into the neo-liberal processes of accumulative logic. While the media conglomerates that dominate the industry provide clear evidence of journalism’s entwinement with capital, the journalistic product provides a somewhat more subtle example as the logics of consumption and entertainment come to dominate the content of serious news, such as the reporting from wartime battlefields.

In the contemporary era the economic changes and cultural dislocation and confusion represented by postmodernism have coalesced into a new period of hegemony; that of globalised neo-liberal capitalism. In the 1990s a ‘Washington Consensus’ (Stiglitz 2002; Nederveen Pieterse 2004) emerged among primarily Western, but increasingly global political elites, that saw neo-liberalism as the most beneficial and correct method of global administration (Frieden 2006). This consensus symbolically solidified the liberalising measures undertaken in the 1980s and the political ideology of neo-liberalism as a new hegemony. From the 1980s onwards the deregulation, marketisation, securitisation and individualisation of both economic and social processes had become the new political orthodoxy (Nederveen Pieterse 2004; 1) and socio-economic reality.

This neo-liberal hegemony has been critically described as ‘empire’ (Hardt and Negri 2000) in an attempt to conceptualise the unbounded, limitless reign of capital that subsumes all other aspects of human experience within its own accumulative logics. Although the accuracy of this characterisation is contested (Nederveen Pieterse 2004), it nonetheless draws attention to the new forms of hegemonic organisation and processes that dominate in our apparently post-political or ideological era. Indeed, within globalisation, it argued that political power is abdicated to liberalised global capital. As Harvey (2006) argues:

Neo-liberalism meant, in short, the financialisation of everything and the relocation of the power centre of capital accumulation to owners and their financial institutions at the expense of other factions of capital. For this reason, the support of financial institutions and the integrity of the financial system became the central concern of the collectivity of neo-liberal states that increasingly dominated global politics.
Although the power of finance capital can be seen as somewhat in abeyance since the onset of global financial turmoil in 2007, it is notable that political reaction has been primarily to shore up and stabilize the financial system rather than to initiate its wholesale restructure and discipline.

The era of neo-liberal globalisation is also characterised by the existence of a singular global power, the United States. In the aftermath of the collapse of communism no other military or economic power threatens the pre-eminent global position of the US. It has been a central political and strategic goal of neo-conservative American politics to maintain and expand American power and prevent the emergence of any economic or military rival (Donnelly 2000). Indeed, the contemporary era has seen the re-emergence of meta-narrative (Lyotard 1984) that provide a coherent socio-political vision, in the form of anti-terror, clash of civilisations discourse, which fits well with the re-confirmation of professionalism as the hegemonic model in journalism. It is argued here that the neo-liberal era become solidified with the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. These events provided the political moment in which to enact the dominating intent of the neo-liberal/conservative United States, which initially found expression in war with Afghanistan and ultimately with the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The commercial nature of the war, symbolised by the use of military contractors, the award of reconstruction contracts, sophisticated public relations campaigns and the central place of energy supplies, clearly identified global power as being both capitalist and militarist.

Re-regulation, following the breakdown of the post-World War Two socio-political consensus, according to neo-liberal and neo-conservative logics has been ongoing since the 1980s. This socio-economic reorganisation, following the turbulence surrounding policies of market deregulation, is expressed through the deliberate policies of marketisation and privatisation advanced by Western states and international organisations. As noted, in the media neo-liberalist modes have become predominant and hegemonic, through which the new orthodoxy flows. As Artz (2003) states, echoing Gramsci’s theorisation:
Capitalist hegemony needs parallel media hegemony as an institutionalised, systematic means of educating, persuading and representing subordinate classes to particular cultural practices within the context of capitalist norms.

Thus the neo-liberal media is one way in which hegemony is reproduced. As noted above, much of this fare systematically reproduces entertainment, consumer values, creating apolitical disengaged, “atomised, individualised entertainment culture” (Artz 2003; 19). Essentially, capitalist hegemony rests upon the inducement of global disengagement and the inter-class culture of pleasure based on continuous consumption (Artz 2003; 22), into which a commodified, critically emasculated and professional media culture fits seamlessly. The extent to which these aspects of modern media fare are characteristic of contemporary war journalism is the subject of the following chapters.

5.9 CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIAN JOURNALISM

Contemporary Australian journalism faces the same pressures faced by journalists globally, with regards to the technological changes that threaten to disrupt more traditional journalism practices. The general ongoing and largely irresistible processes of globalisation and commercialisation of journalism manifest themselves within a particularly Australian context.

The Australian media industry is unique with regard to its structure. High levels of concentrated media ownership and the promulgation of public media policy that has encouraged oligopoly within the commercial sector have long characterised the Australian media. The largest Australian media organisation however, is the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), the national, non-commercial public service broadcaster. Along with its large presence within the media sector, the ABC is also a central Australian cultural institution. The ABC maintains a significant position upon the Australian media landscape, not least due to its reputation as the benchmark provider of quality news and current affairs broadcasting (Lumby 2002; 325). It should be noted however that ongoing funding problems, legislative restrictions on new-media development and debates over cultural relevance have wounded the ABC, leaving a
cloud over its future in the medium term. The election in 2007 of a centre-left Labor federal government has yet to result in a substantive improvement in the ABC’s fortunes.

Mainstream Australian journalism is a product both of its heritage and history, as well as of its contemporary political, economic and cultural context. Although liberal, democratic values are said to persist and define Australian journalism, journalists and their organisations must also face the ongoing challenges of a globalising world and its attendant issues of multi-nationalism, corporatism and accelerated technological development (Van Druten 2006; 55-57). The report of the Australian Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) Ethics Review Committee and the adoption of the committee’s recommendations underline the centrality of the liberal, “Fourth Estate” values in Australian journalism. These ethical values can be found replicated within the institutional discourses of the large Australian media organisations covered by this study (Sydney Morning Herald 2006; The Age 2006) indicating the ongoing resonance traditional values have within the modern context. Arguably it is in part through reference to these values that these organisations maintain and cultivate their legitimacy as “quality” sources of news. The MEAA committee calls journalism “a public service and lubricant of democracy” and states, “seeking truth is at journalism’s core, as truth is one of the core goods of society” (MEAA 1997; 16).

Current Australian textbooks too, describe journalism in these familiar terms, couching the practice in the professional, liberal discourse (Hurst and White 1994; White 1997; Masterton and Patching 1997). Henningham (1990, x) sees the value in journalism as a “vital ingredient to democratic life” (Conley and Lamble 2006; 3) and argues “basic to the functioning of a free and fair society is a press which is free and fair…free from restrictions and/or improper influences from governments, Parliaments, bureaucracies, courts, business, unions and their own employers and peers”. However adding a touch of realism Henningham goes on to describe Australian journalism as “none of these things”, on one hand deformed by the political interests of government and the economic interest of proprietors and on the other frequently “unfair and irresponsible” (Henningham 1991; x).
This jaundiced view of Australian journalism is shared by Apps (1991; 70) who describes adherence to ethical codes constitutes a “paying of lip-service to the truth”. Although liberal, democratic and socially conscious values may not always be seen as at the forefront of Australian journalism in practice, especially in this era of “chequebook journalism” (Bowman 1990) and a deep public cynicism toward journalists’ ethics (Schultz 1994; 41; Conley and Lamble 2006; 3; Beecher 2005; 13), nonetheless discourses of professionalism are central to the institutional identities of Australian media organisations and as will be shown, to the identities of Australian journalists.

The established practices and institutions of Australian journalism are subject to the socio-political and economic changes wrought by a globalising world economy, social and political systems. For the Australian media sector this has meant incorporating new technologies into their business practices (for example diversifying and expanding into online news services) as well as both enacting and being buffeted by the trends towards a highly commercialised media market and evermore concentrated media ownership. In this context the professional identities and abilities of individual journalists to assert their professional vision become a crucial site of tension between the larger and converging interests of political and economic structures and the idealised and normative goals of journalism.

Under the liberal, democratic model, the press is responsible publicly for the maintenance and management of democracy and in the modern era ‘the media’ can be considered the pre-eminent institution of the Habermasian public sphere (Schultz 2002; 102-103). The commercial dominance of this sphere raises pertinent questions, which this thesis has identified, over the loss of diversity and loss of independence (especially with regards to news journalism), a potential consequence of an utterly commercialised and heavily concentrated media industry (Barr 2000; 6).

In Australia this tension between public and private spheres is symbolised most potently (if not politically, then publicly) by the issue of concentrated levels of media ownership and the potential that this holds for undemocratic practices and indeed, the corruption of liberal, ‘Fourth Estate’ values. Triffen (2002; 38) describes the “outstanding feature of contemporary [Australian] media as a whole is not just its commercial nature, but its sheer size and concentration…most of the Australian press
are in monopoly or semi-monopoly conditions”. This is both a widely acknowledged and lamented feature of the Australian media industry. Although the Australian media industry has a historical tendency towards oligopoly (Barr 2000; 3), the modern era has witnessed a massive concentration of media ownership.

The current structure of media ownership (at the time of writing) is a direct result of media industry reforms undertaken by the Hawke/Keating Labor government in the late-1980s. This structure is set to change once more in 2007. Under the changes to ‘cross-media’ and foreign ownership introduced by the Liberal government in 2006, ownership across industry sectors and national demographics will be dramatically liberalised, as will the current restrictions on foreign media ownership above a certain level of shareholding. As of 2002, News Limited, the Murdoch controlled media giant, controlled a massive 67.8 percent of all capital city and nationally produced daily newspapers in Australia, including the only national quality daily, The Australian. John Fairfax Holdings controlled 21.4 percent, including the quality titles the Age, the Sydney Morning Herald and Australian Financial Review (Schultz 2002; 111).

The changes to media ownership enacted by the Labor government of the late-1980s allowed significant concentration of ownership within one media sector. These changes directly resulted in the conglomeration of News Ltd and the Herald and Weekly Times Group (previously the largest publisher in Australia), the creation of television networks out of regional and metropolitan services and the destabilisation of Fairfax. This media policy has been widely interpreted as offering favours and benefits to ‘mates’ of the Labor government, specifically the Murdoch and Packer families (Schultz 1994; 25-26; Chadwick 1989). Cunningham and Flew (2002; 49) argue that a study of Australian media policy is in fact a study of the ways “in which the normative goals of media policy have been subverted by close patterns of interaction between Australia’s powerful media proprietors…and leading figures in both the Liberal and Labor parties”.

Australian journalism is widely considered to have deteriorated in quality over this period, as media businesses turn from a central focus on news and current events to a more broadly commercial concentration on “entertainment” (Lumby 2002; Beecher, 2005; 76). This is most evident in the rise and rise of reality-TV and infotainment in both TV and print throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. Both forms merge the “reality”
aspect and legitimacy usually associated with news and current affairs with an interest
centred on the “apparently banal aspects of everyday life” (Lumby 2002; 325). The
trends in news and current affairs are comparable and are characterised by a tendency
towards populist, sensationalist and dramatic, yet inconsequential topics. While this
trend is most evident on the commercial television networks, it can also be seen in the
proliferation of magazine/lifestyle subsections of news publications and on the strapped-
for-cash ABC with its increasing levels of cheap, appealing TV that avoids complex
questions of society. As Turner writes, the daily news agenda has shifted from serious
issues of politics towards crime and away from “information-based issues of social
issues and towards entertaining stories…and an overwhelming investment in the power
of the visual, in the news as an entertaining spectacle” (Turner 1999; 59).

The public service broadcaster and traditional guardian of journalism standards,
the ABC, has found itself in an era of declining funding and government hostility under
pressure to compete with commercial television and radio. Such a trend results in the
impoverishment of the ABC’s news and current affairs and the purchasing of externally
produced, but cheaper television programs. Jacka (2002) outlines the predicament of
public service broadcasting (PSB) in Australia, arguing that while the ABC maintains its
educative, comprehensive and democratic values it has been under constant political
challenge since the 1990s and suffering from funding decreases in real terms (Jacka
2002; 337). Importantly, PSB in Australia has been legally restricted from expanding its
broadcasting through digital multi-channelling and suffers a persistent shortfall in the
funding required to adopt digital broadcast platforms (Jacka 2002; 341).

This then is the context and culture in which Australian journalists exist and
operate, an understanding of which is important when considering the production of
Australian news. The Australian media industry itself is highly corporatised and
commercially driven. For many decades the industry has been controlled by extremely
wealthy and politically well-connected proprietors, the Packer and Murdoch families
being the most well known and visible of these. This situation has been actively
supported and encouraged by successive federal governments most obviously through
media policy that has allowed vast aggregations of wealth and media assets and
restricted PSB from developing new media capabilities. Many commentators
considered the media and its attendant policy issues as a crucial location of the widespread 'culture wars’ which have been raging in Australia for the last decade (Manne 2005) between conservative and progressive political and cultural groups\textsuperscript{22}. Nevertheless, the values of liberal democratic journalism persist within Australian journalism. Although this discourse may face considerable challenge to its relevance, from corporate ownership, resource paucity and trends towards “infotainment”, as will be shown, the discourse of professionalism and ethics of ‘Fourth Estate journalism’ remain central to the identity of Australian journalists. The enactment and impact of professional values on news discourse remains a central concern of this thesis and understanding of professional motivations must necessarily be contextualised by the economic and policy structures that bind the Australian media.

5.10 CONCLUSION
Professional journalism, as this thesis notes and will demonstrate in subsequent chapters, has not developed in order to cope with new socio-cultural and political orthodoxies. This chapter has outlined briefly the development of professionalism and its contingent emergence from specific cultural and historical conditions. This chapter has emphasised the powerful place occupied by the professional discourse, yet has also noted and examined several criticisms of professionalism. In general, professionalism has been identified as leading to ‘status quo’, conservative reporting. In particular, much criticism has been directed at contemporary news organisation incapable of combating the sophisticated PR campaigns waged by the administrations of neo-liberal states in relation to the Iraq war. Further, much of the professional news media has been criticised for not pursuing more critically the rational for war or providing a more critical appraisal of the military invasion of Iraq itself and instead opting in a large part for regurgitated press briefings from Centcom, the accounts of embedded journalists travelling with the invading forces and reliant on the use of de-contextualised, overly patriotic and dramatised coverage.

\textsuperscript{22} More specifically known as the History Wars, this political and cultural conflict has focused on differing interpretations of Australian history, experience and identity, with specific reference to colonial/Aboriginal Australian history. Two works central to the History Wars are Keith Windshuttle (2003) \textit{The Fabrication of Aboriginal History}, Macleay Press, Sydney and Robert Manne (2003) \textit{Whitewash}, Black Inc. Agenda, Melbourne.
This chapter has also outlined the problematic position occupied by professional within the contemporary era in relation to both contemporary power and philosophic-cultural critiques. I have argued that professionalism provides journalists with a means to avoid confronting these problems and to continue to articulate a ‘high modernist’ professional discourse.

It is the argument of this thesis that the liberal, professional model of journalism is incapable of resisting the commercial and ideological imperatives and power of the contemporary neo-liberal state to shape news coverage, especially in relation to war journalism. In retaining the professional model, in the face of fundamental economic, social, philosophic and political changes wrought by initially the postmodern period and latterly institutionalised by neo-liberal globalisation, professional journalism looks backwards continuing to invoke a body of doctrine inappropriate to the contemporary era. However, as a ‘strategic ritual’ (Tuchman 1978) professionalism serves journalism well, providing public and institutional legitimacy, as it did in its period of initial emergence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Professionalism merely reflects and reproduces status quo public knowledge, rather than critically and progressively interrogating contemporary political, military and economic issues.

Finally, this provided an account of the contemporary political, cultural and economic conditions that shape the Australian news media sector, placing Australian journalism in the wider context this chapter has outlined. This account has demonstrated the extent to which the Australian media are subject to broader trends within a neo-liberal globalised world, which has encouraged a highly concentrated commercial media sector. Furthermore the contemporary conditions of the Australian public broadcaster, the ABC, have been detailed. It is argued that the ABC has for a long period been under attack from a hostile government, emaciated by declining funding and embroiled in the so-called ‘culture wars’, all of which have affected its ability to offer powerful and critical news journalism.

The analysis presented in subsequent chapters serves to support this thesis, to provide a new and deeper understanding of Australian war journalism and to provide a theoretically innovative method in the analysis of professional journalism.
PART THREE – EMPIRICAL AND ANALYTICAL OBSERVATIONS

CHAPTER SIX – THE DISCOURSE OF PROFESSIONALISM AND WAR

PART ONE

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is the first of four chapters that deal directly with the analysis of interview and news data. The analysis proceeds in light of my stated theoretical concerns and conceptual approach drawn from a review of the relevant literature and a consideration of the emergence of professionalism and its contemporary context. Specifically, this chapter provides an initial analysis, identifying and delineating the discourse of professionalism as it is articulated in interview data. Consistent with the discourse theoretical approach of this thesis, this chapter seeks to “analyse the general system of the formation and transformation of statements” (Foucault 1972; 130) within professional journalism. Here a body of statements and concepts may be identified and the manner in which these statements ‘produce’ professionalism will be analysed. In providing this conceptual scheme of professionalism, this chapter identifies areas of inconsistency, contradiction or tension within the discourse. This analysis illustrates the extent to which professionalism can be considered a hegemonic discourse that successfully dominates the journalistic field. It also illustrates the extent of professionalism’s contestability and its incompleteness. Within these discursive limits the possibility of counter-hegemonic journalistic articulations is also considered. The discursive formation of professionalism is also analysed with regards to the concept of ‘articulation’, the active process through which discourse is constituted within the conditions of uncertainty that the earlier methodological comments have made clear. The following chapter deals more closely with the circulating power within professionalism which reinforces the regularities of the discourse.

This chapter proceeds by first identifying the broad discourses that comprise professionalism within the interview material produced for this study. The statement of discursive objects and their arrangement into coherent discursive strategies is
analytically central. The concepts (Foucault 1972), or nodal points (Laclau and Mouffe 1985) that serve to anchor the discursive strategies, and provide the conceptual basis for the larger discursive frameworks that comprise professionalism are also analysed. Here the process by which concepts and signifiers are articulated into equivalential chains (Laclau 2005) – in which disparate practices and norms of journalism are articulated and united as ‘professional’ – is analytically important. Furthermore, an analysis of the general arrangement of discursive formations necessarily brings to light the conditions of possibility and the bounds of acceptable, legitimate journalism. This conceptual plan of the discourse also begins to demonstrate professionalism as pragmatic and contingent rather than as ideological. This chapter demonstrates how the discourse of professionalism makes war visible and ‘real’. In this sense, journalism literally brings particular aspects of the Iraq invasion into existence in the public record through their statement and enunciation as news which accord with professional norms.

6.2 OBJECTIVITY

The first major strand of the professional discourse is the central discourse of objectivity. As previously discussed the conventional ideal of objectivity is characterised as a professional dedication to factual information presented in a neutral style (Schudson 1978; Smith 1978; Tuchman 1978), commonly stated as journalism that is fact-based, fair, balanced and accurate.

Objectivity is articulated in a variety of ways, illustrating the incomplete fixity of aspects of the professional discourse and a degree of discursive openness concerning its meaning. Rather than objectivity possessing one rigid and fixed meaning, this analysis shows it is possible to articulate this concept in a variety of ways. This discursive flexibility has a double function, on one hand the invocation of objectivity serves to provide legitimacy to a variety of journalistic practices. In theoretical terms this illustrates the unification of a variety of signifiers (journalistic practices and concepts) into a chain of professional equivalence and the exclusion of other aspects of information generation as illegitimate (Laclau 2005).

A rigid enunciation or articulation of objectivity may be described as ‘orthodox’. In this view the meaning of professional objectivity is fixed and is fundamental to
journalism. Objectivity is unproblematic, achievable goal, without which the credibility of journalism is imperilled. For some journalists, articulating a strict adherence to the tenets of objectivity ensures the maintenance of professional identity, the provision of ‘objective’ news and the discharge of journalism’s normative obligations. More nuanced articulations of this concept accept that achieving absolute objectivity is a chimera. The concept of objectivity itself has been undermined by a more sophisticated and nuanced understanding of modern journalism. From an epistemological point of view, according to these less dogmatic conceptions, representations, knowledge and perspectives can never entirely be freed from the subjectivity of those holding or making them. Paradoxically however, the limitations of objectivity are overlooked and this discourse is nonetheless invoked to justify and legitimate journalistic practice.

6.3 THE STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVITY
The discourse of ‘orthodox’ objectivity is enunciated by journalists as they make statements pertaining to their practice. The concept of objectivity is repeatedly characterised as comprising a commitment to facticity and “fairness, balance and accuracy” (Murdoch 2006; McPhedran 2006a; Kerr 2006). Ian McPhedran, reporting for News Ltd and stationed in Baghdad for most of the Iraq invasion has a terse conception of professional objectivity that is characteristic of this professional discourse. McPhedran (2006a) asserts objectivity is reporting “without fear or favour” and that in doing so a journalist “put one’s own prejudices to one side and report fairly, in a balanced way and objectively”. Lindsay Murdoch (embedded with US Marines, reporting for the Sydney Morning Herald) is similarly resolute in his conception of objectivity – “fair, balanced, accurate and getting it first” (2006) forms the basis of his professional practice.

Articulated thus, objectivity is fundamentally central to the professional scheme. “Without it we are lost – without that and facts we are lost!” declares McPhedran (2006a). In these enunciations objectivity is not simply an idealised goal, but an approach and a conception of journalistic practice that is applicable in all situations and circumstances. It is a signifier uniting a variety of practices; a universal, scientific method that once mastered ensures a regular and predictable flow of news consonant
with news organisational requirements. For Murdoch (2006), there is no difference reporting local crime stories to reporting on war; “…the same principles apply to writing a story in Australia…as they do when you’re writing about the war in Iraq when you’re there; you’re there, you report what you see and what you can get”.

These statements typify the orthodox position on objectivity. This conceptualisation represents objectivity and professional journalism as epistemologically uncomplicated. Such a conception implies a conception of reality and a relationship between a journalist, as an observer and reality itself, as something that may be defined, described and known accurately. This position represents a conventional conception of journalism, in which the norms of individuated, rational liberalism are fully internalised. Tuchman (1978) calls this position a “naive empiricism”. In light of this thesis’ theoretical approach it is possible to begin to discern the construction of discursive boundaries or frontiers (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Carpentier and Cammaerts 2006) outside of which forms of knowledge creation not reliant on objectivity are illegitimate and against which journalists define the professional identity. Effectively, discursive conditions are placed on knowledge formation and ‘good’ journalism is antagonistically defined against its outside (Laclau and Mouffe 1985) such as non-objective styles of journalism or strategies of information control. Credible journalism is thus that which reproduces objective norms.

Other journalists enunciate a less rigid objective professionalism. These range from orthodox positions similar to those above, tempered with the inclusion of concepts of analysis and contextualisation, to pragmatic views that disavow objectivity, yet maintain the centrality of those values that it represents: truth, balance, fairness, a reliance on ‘facts’, for example. Here, while differing in their specific discursive enunciations, essentially the same professional identities are established within the extending chain of equivalential professionalism. Nonetheless, while this conception of professionalism differs in its treatment of absolute objectivity, the difference is rhetorical as both articulations commit themselves to the same techniques of journalism and derive their legitimacy from a commitment to truth, without seriously considering the truth production that journalists actively engage in. In Foucauldian terms, the discourse
is understood as stating its object, bringing professionalism into existence through discursive practice.

As mentioned, while the values of objectivity are “absolutely central” (Wilson, 2006a) to practice there does exist a place for analysis and contextualisation that, “is intended to elucidate and educate one step further, adding value by telling people what you think, what the news event means and what it will lead to” (Wilson 2006a). This assertion sits awkwardly with comment by News Ltd’s Peter Wilson (2006a), that professionalism is,

an attitude that this (journalism) is not about me telling the world my unique wisdom and about how I understand everything, it’s about me just trying to understand what’s going on, as objectively as possible and communicating that without imposing my views on it.

Such a position is ostensibly contradictory, illustrating the difficulty for journalists in negotiating the inconsistent epistemology of professionalism, yet also pointing to their unwillingness, or inability, to completely abandon it. The concept of objectivity remains an important legitimating signifier for journalists. Indeed, here it is possible to discern the emergence of fantasy of professionalism which describes journalist’s relationships and commitments to professionalism – in which journalists recognise their shortcomings yet persist with their established methods.

Other reporters who participated in this study enunciate their understanding of objective professionalism similarly. Principles of truth, fairness, balance and accuracy continue to be central concepts on which the professional credibility of journalism depends, yet these are complicated by the acknowledgement that objective purity is a flawed ideal. Eric Campbell (ABC), stridently committed to objective professionalism, considers a loyalty to facts as crucially central to his practice. Alternate forms of journalism, such as the New Journalism (Wolfe 1973) of the 1960s and 1970s which sought to explore alternate methods and modes of representation, are, “utter crap and an utter betrayal of the craft” (Campbell 2006). An objective journalist must be dedicated to factual truth as a basis for knowledge.
Empathy with those reported on and sympathy with “the underdog” is considered legitimate however (Campbell 2006). This may be a morally comfortable position from which to argue, however, statements such as these contrast with the orthodox discourse of objectivity, which depends on a dispassionate approach. Indeed, Campbell (2006) adds, “as far as the bigger picture goes you have to take a very hard look at what’s going on, rather than trying to presuppose what the situation is”.

The least rigid statement of objectivity is articulated by the remaining journalists in this study. These conceptions maintain the professionalism’s importance, while rejecting absolute objectivity as unachievable. This more measured approach to professionalism emphasises the morality of the journalist, rather than a commitment to absolute conceptions. For these journalists, objectivity is contextually and situationally dependent. Nonetheless, it should be noted that this discourse is characterised by the same concepts that characterise more rigid notions of objectivity enunciated above. Here, objectivity as a goal is displaced by objectivity as an aspiration. From a discursive view, absolutist notions of objectivity have given way to pragmatic concerns over achieving the goals of professionalism - that is, providing legitimate knowledge which continues to be defined in accordance with liberalist tenets. Ultimately, the concerns are the same – to produce factual, verified and legitimate knowledge of reality.

Here professionalism is contingent on personal convictions and morality rather than adherence to any fixed external code. As Bormann (ABC, 2006) argues, objectivity, rather than being a simplistic balancing act, “is a bit of a cliché…people have this idea that there are two sides to every story and the truth lies somewhere in between and that’s objectivity – objectivity is being true to your own observations”. The professionalism of a journalist is based on how well they can suppress their biases and preconceptions and “approach the story in an honest way” (Willacy 2006a). For Willacy (ABC), his credibility and integrity as a professional stems from the relationships cultivated with both audiences and sources. But even though he disavows orthodox objectivity, he appeals to the objective method in asserting his professionalism:

If I have sympathy with a particular issue I will go harder on the people in that issue to satisfy myself. That doesn't mean I will give the other people an easy ride, but it's just a
matter of I want to get to the bottom of it…and any journalist who tells you they’re objective, or that you can be objective is telling you a bit a white lie – I just don’t think objectivity is achievable (Willacy 2006a).

Here the statements made surrounding the pragmatic articulation of objectivity are based on a notion of honesty and ethical behaviour. Although this conception of objectivity is freed from absolutist statements of truth and certainty, it still emphasises the scientific method and the professional techniques of fact based, verified reporting, and continues to embody the liberal ideal of the moral, conscientious citizen.

Objectivity is stated by ABC Radio journalist Jonathan Harley (2006a) as, "almost like enlightenment" illustrating the difficulty journalists have in expressing their professionalism in the absence of objectivity. For these journalists their professionalism has become an article of faith, rather than a tangible, clearly defined set of practices and goals. Like the others, Harley sees professionalism based on trust, accuracy, truthfulness and integrity, but asserts that “there is a great danger in abandoning objectivity altogether” (Harley 2006a), indicating its residual importance and the constitutive problems that result from identifying the problematic core of professionalism. In Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) and Laclau's (2005) conception, objectivity functions as an ‘empty signifier’, into which meaning is articulated according to discursive needs. Nonetheless, objectivity stipulates an uncomplicated relationship between the individual and the external reality of experience.

The central uncertainty of the professional discourse is as problematic as the more strict interpretations described above. Here, rigid objectivity is rejected. The practices and values that objectivity signifies are rearticulated, preventing journalism collapsing into relativism, in which any form of information production is legitimate. This central uncertainty, however, does not force a re-conceptualisation of journalistic epistemology and or potentially legitimate alternative forms of knowledge production23. Although postmodern arguments may have destabilised journalism’s epistemology (see Chapter Five), the discursive statements analysed here must be seen as performing ‘discursive repair’. Although quite different in their conception of the place of objectivity,

23 Examples being the ‘new’ journalism of the 1960s and 70s, civic journalism and more recently ‘citizen journalism’.
these professional discourses are essentially not dissimilar. Objectivity may be epistemologically problematic and thus it is rejected, however no other professional structure exists with which to replace it, consequently the discourse is re-articulated, enunciating the same professional values as those of the high modern era (Hallin, 1992). This is deeply revealing of the inherent contradictions of professional journalism and illustrates the discursive nuance and complexity which is attended to below. Here then two discursive features are visible. The discursive formation of objectivity is shown to be self-contradicted, and partially self-aware of its limitations – in this discourse, objectivity has become ‘fetishised’ and functions as a ‘fantasy’ which permits an awareness of objectivity’s shortcomings, but a commitment to it nonetheless.

Crystallizing around three central nodal points, (Laclau and Mouffe 1985) objectivity legitimates professional perspectives and practices, articulating potentially disparate practices and conceptions into an equivalential chain of professionalism (Laclau 2005). Although the separation of these points into distinct categories is somewhat artificial, the discourse being articulated as a coherent whole, this analytic technique permits a clear understanding of the assertive and reproductive power of discourse in maintaining established journalistic norms and reinforcing established identities. As noted, the discourse serves to reinforce and maintain the social position and role of professional journalists, reinforcing the legitimacy of their method and the knowledge so produced.

Firstly, a conventional journalistic understanding and approach with regard to reality is clearly enunciated. More precisely, the liberal modernist notion, that reality or ‘the world as it is’ is external to the subject, knowable and that journalists can accurately represent this reality to audiences is persistently reinforced through discursive statement.

Secondly, the authority of journalists, both moral and professional, grounded in their professional skills and expertise is emphasised. Journalists represent themselves as the legitimate conduit of information about the world and for representations of reality. Such legitimacy rests discursively with their skills, expertise and mastery of the professional method, which constitutes the last category or discursive theme. This
theme emphasises the extent to which journalists must maintain an ‘outside’ to the professional discourse as a crucial aspect of the discourses vitality and sustainability.

Thirdly, the professional method and practices it embodies are represented as the appropriate methodology for ensuring truthful representations of reality. Clearly, as these discursive messages echo and reinforce each other, the discourse of journalists as legitimate, skilled and morally balanced informants is powerful indeed. Theoretically, these concepts, articulated as discursive statements, should be understood both as ‘objects’ (Foucault 1972) of discourse and as nodal points (Laclau and Mouffe 1985) around which the discursive formation is crystallised.

6.3.1 REALITY

This section illustrates the importance of the concept of ‘reality’ for the professional discourse. There is a persistent notion within the professional scheme that reality is ‘knowable’ (Schudson 1978; Tuchman 1978; Kovach and Rosenstiel 2001). This notion is central to the modern, liberal model of journalism and broadly consonant with Western, rationalist cultural conditions identified previously (see Chapter Five). Through the application of professional ethics and technical skills journalists produce knowledge about the world which is accurate, truthful and reliable. That journalism is ‘true’ is it’s central claim on credibility and relevance, distinguishing it from other ‘non-fiction’ media forms, such as advertising and public relations, or indeed from any form of embellished or adulterated account (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2001). Journalism mediates between the individual and external reality and without a legitimate claim on truthfulness, professional objective journalism is fundamentally devalued, it is argued. Thus, the professional and commercial industry of journalism seeks in part its own reproduction, rather than a robust and ongoing reconsideration of its own basis. It is from this perspective that ‘reality’, as a central discursive object and as ‘knowable’, should be considered.

Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) journalist Eric Campbell (2006) contrasts his own approach with that of journalists whose tendency it is to report what they’d like to see, rather than ‘reality’. He argues a journalist must, “go into a story, have a look at the facts and the situation on the ground and you [sic] report down the
line what you see”, not “what you would like to be the reality”, clearly excluding any form of subjectivity from the professional scheme. This position is returned to again and again in Campbell’s interview, in which “the reality of the situation”, “what’s really going on” and “the reality on the ground” (2006) are repeatedly emphasised. Although there is room for analysis in Campbell’s scheme, it must be based on “the real story on the ground” and not in “trying to presuppose what the story is” (Campbell 2006) or add to the story that which has not been witnessed or verified. A journalist, in this liberal-rationalist conception, need merely to witness their subject in order to accurately report ‘what’s going on’. Likewise, for McPhedran (2006a) during the invasion the central issue was to report, “what I was seeing...without getting tied up in moral questions”. There is little doubt then of the efficacy of the objective method. In war there is often considered to be a heightened level of confusion and miscommunications than during times of peace, but even in a war context the objective method is considered clarifying. If a journalist maintains their impartiality and their honesty as a witness to events, then professionalism is credibly maintained.

6.3.2 AUTHORITY

This section builds on that above, detailing the centrality of ‘authority’ within the discourse of objectivity. Although reality is central, a journalist is discursively accorded legitimacy and authority in transmitting and imparting representations of reality. Reporters are presented as authoritative or even expert witnesses to events through the semiotics of news presentation (Fowler 1991; 25), be it in a television news broadcast or within in the pages of a daily newspaper. Professionalism sustains the legitimacy of these ‘gatekeepers’. Discursively, this authority is enunciated as a moral authority permitting journalists the freedom to turn their professional eye to widely disparate events and issues. Persistent reference is made to the professional qualities and virtues that reinforce this authority; the concepts of honesty, truthfulness, loyalty,

---

24 Often referred to as the ‘fog of war’. Originally a military term used to describe battlefield confusion; it has been adapted to also describe the miscommunication, misinterpretation and uncertainty of communications during war, especially those of the media. Also usefully refers to the ‘fog’ of propaganda that intensifies during war.

25 Rather than a formalised system of regulation and registration that controls and administers other professions, such as medicine, law and teaching, journalism is self-regulated, thus its professional status is contested. See Chapters Two and Five
dedication and empathy, for instance. Crucially for the purposes of discursive cohesion, this moral authority spans the gap between tangible reality ‘as it is’ and technical journalistic method. Discursively, the journalist is constructed as appropriately skilled and can be trusted to correctly and accurately represent reality to the news consumer.

The relationship between the audience and the journalist is built on “trust”; as the ABC’s Jonathan Harley (2006a) calls it “the only currency” a journalist possesses. Discharging their professional duties, a journalist must “dis-assemble and interpret” public affairs in order to provide the audience with an account that can be relied upon and on which they may base their judgements and opinions – crucial to journalism’s political function as a ‘Fourth Estate’ within liberal democracy. In providing such, journalists must “minimise complicity” with official or powerful perspectives (Harley, 2006a). Trust is central to authority. As Willacy (2006a) suggests, being a dedicated practitioner of journalism “committed” to both the truth and to the subjects of journalism is crucial to sustained journalistic authority. Similar concerns are expressed by other interviewees (Bormann 2006; Wilson 2006a; McPhedran 2006a).

Discursively, these invocations articulate journalists as embodying the values they espouse. Bormann (2006) speaks of “my morality…is being true to myself and to the integrity of my profession” clearly asserting the correctness of his correct bearing. Campbell (2006) demands “a loyalty to no one but the story”. These assertions should be understood in two ways. Firstly, these claims concern abstract qualities such as morality, integrity and loyalty and are not open to examination the way the practical aspects of journalism are, such as the use of skills, reporting techniques and story selection. For example, one may examine a journalist’s output for the uses of certain sources and interviewing techniques, but ‘loyalty to the story’ or being ‘true to oneself’ are impossible to assess. Secondly, they reinforce the overarching discourse of professionalism by rearticulating its central principles. The authority of professional journalism derives, in this sense, from the self-identification of journalists. Journalists here are stating their professionalism as conviction and commitment rather than by regulation. The articulation of professionalism in these terms, such as morality, integrity and loyalty, serves to contribute to the wider cultural norm that journalists are legitimate
in occupying important social and political roles. These articulations solidify the discourse around those concepts/nodal points.

6.3.3 PROFESSIONAL METHOD AND TECHNIQUE

The last concept or ‘nodal point’ identified within the discourse of objectivity for discussion is that of the correctness of professionalism as an appropriate method for obtaining representations of reality, to which journalists are morally committed. This section describes how in enunciating the professional discourse, journalists are persistently reinforced as the most legitimate source of news and information.

Central to the professional method are the journalistic skills of reporting which are applied and through them reality is apprehended. If, as some of the interviewees hold, objectivity is a problematic ideal, it is through the professional method that truthfulness and accuracy are achieved. As the ABC’s Mark Willacy (2006a) argues, bias and prejudice can be suppressed, masked and hidden through the mastery or skills such as balance, neutrality and verification. Using a metaphor of conflict, Willacy (2006a) calls journalism a, “daily battle”, evoking an image of a journalistic struggle, both to report the ‘truth’ and bring chaotic reality within the professional scheme. In this sense the professional method provides both order and a compass with which to navigate the events of the world, but also a template in which to fit events. As Tuchman (1978) argued, the objective method is an “organising principle”, allowing journalists to orient themselves to the world. Moreover, it is a journalist’s moral and professional credibility that equips them to cope with the challenges they are presented – as emphasised by the “tangled web” metaphor, also used by Willacy (2006a). Clearly, professionalism provides a template with which to make sense of an otherwise chaotic picture of the world. Indeed, these insights are supported by the literature in which journalism is criticised as incapable of dealing with substantive social and political issues, partly due to the demands of professionalism (McChesney 2004a), for if an issue is not readily understood through professionalism, or if relations of power obviate its appearance, it seldom becomes news.

“You don’t throw your hands up and say it’s all too hard “, argues Sydney Morning Herald Foreign Editor Peter Kerr (2006), referring to the difficulties journalists
face in reconciling their objective ideals with the complexities and constraints of reality. In a war situation these may include, for example, conflicting reports or local conditions that defy easy comprehension. It is the professional method that provides order. Kerr seems to suggest, however that incomplete or potentially inaccurate accounts of reality are acceptable too. Arguing, “you have to approach every issue on a case by case basis and you can only delve as far as you can given the time frame you have available and remembering…a deadline” (Kerr 2006) indicating an incomplete reality is acceptable to the professional method. From this position, the liberal, external and objective reality that is its object has become subject to the demands of professionalism, rather than remaining a detached and objectified system. This notion is reinforced by other discursive enunciations. Wilson (2006a) asserts that “[the professional method] is a big part of what I see my challenge to be and what I do every day is to get it right, rather than set the world to right”. As stated above, not only has reality become subject to professionalism, but the professional method itself has become focused on fulfilling its own requirements rather than facilitating the idealised role of journalism – the provision of public information allowing citizens to monitor the use of power (Siebert et al 1956).

Finally, this conception, that the professional method of journalism is the correct and proper method for understanding the world is further reinforced by the universal applicability of its attendant values and rituals. For Murdoch, those skills he learnt as a young reporter on the Age covering police stories apply just as well to a war situation as they do to covering metropolitan crime; “the same principles apply [sic] back then as they do when writing about the war in Iraq when you are there” (Murdoch 2006). Clearly then professionalism requires no modification of one’s method to fit local conditions, for example treating complex and complicated stories in anything other than a straightforward manner. Moreover, the professional method is discursively reinforced as the appropriate method with which to achieve a credible and reliable representation of reality. The discussion now moves to an analysis of the second major discursive strand that is identified in constituting professionalism: independence.
PART TWO
6.4 INDEPENDENCE
Independence is a central professional value and ethic of journalism, contributing to the overarching discourse of professional journalism. Alongside objectivity, it is important to consider ‘independence’ as a necessary requirement of journalists after the late-nineteenth century transition from politically partisan press to a professionalised mass market media system. This discourse finds its expression most clearly stated in discussions of two significant and highly controversial aspects of the Iraq war with regard to media involvement – the Pentagon designed system of embedding journalists with military units (ostensibly aimed at providing close and safe coverage of American and British forces at war)\(^{26}\) and the activities of the military public affairs bureaucracy charged with providing the official media briefings to the assembled world media\(^{27}\) based at Central Command (Centcom) in the Qatari capital, Doha. Much criticism of media coverage of the Iraq invasion 2003 has focused specifically on the system of embedding and on the Doha media centre (Seib 2004; Schechter 2003; PEJ 2003).

6.5 THE STATEMENT OF INDEPENDENCE
The attitudes of journalists toward their ability to assert their independence within a war context are at best ambivalent. These attitudes echo, to a degree, the experience of journalists throughout the history of war journalism, which is also a history of manipulation and control of journalists by military authorities (Knightley 2004). In the post-Vietnam era military controls over journalist’s activities have been strengthened. Journalists have been criticised for their willingness to be dominated by military interests (Kellner 1992). However, journalists wield little power within the professional media-military system to substantively assert their independence from official sources and power structures (Hallin 2000; Reese 2001; Bennett 2005), other than rejecting participation within that system wholesale. As a result, although there is some differentiation of discursive statements (possibly explained by physical location), the journalistic independence observed here is a dynamic articulation, adapted to fit the

\(^{26}\) For more detail see, Whitman, Department of Defense Media Support Plan, 2003.
\(^{27}\) Referred to variously as media management, public affairs/relations and official perspectives
context in which a journalist finds him or herself. This adaptation illustrates independence, in interview, as a discursive strategy which protects professional identity, as much as it is a literal fact of journalistic experience. As discourse, ‘independence’ in this sense serves to offer the research the guarantee of journalists as literally independent, and to ignore those factors that may be operating to compromise independence, such as embedment with a military unit, or utter dependence on military PRs for information at Centcom.

In this analysis the concept of ‘independence’, is enunciated in a variety of situations. In this sense, the discourse becomes a defence mechanism for journalists, against the possibility of compromised professionalism. Stating independence reinforces the professional identity. During war journalists may indeed feel their freedom constrained by the military. Their professional attitudes, however, are adapted to fit a new, dependent reality, rather than rejecting wholesale the practices and professional postures which are compromised by closeness and dependence on the military, such as was experienced in the experiment of embedding (Seib 2004). Conceptually, independence serves to legitimate journalist’s activities, rather than describe their lived reality of workaday journalism. And although journalists are aware of their situational, or context specific sense of independence, their practice is not altered accordingly. Professionalism persists in situations that are not amenable to its techniques, such as Central Command. Professionalism here begins to overlook its own limitations.

In discussing embedding in interview, the attitudes of journalists divide into three categories, although on balance most journalists offered their qualified support of the system. The first group are those in support of the media system and who argue embedding allows improved access to important stories; the second, those who cautiously acknowledge the positive aspects of embedding, yet are conscious of its limitations; and those who conceive of embedding as entirely negative and dangerously compromising journalistic integrity. This discursive variation is similar to that found by other studies of embedded journalists conducted after the war (Tumber and Palmer 2004; Carlson and Katovsky 2003).
The efforts of military public affairs personnel and the efforts of the military authorities to promote their point of view however, are considered by all journalists to be encroaching on their independence and require the firm enunciation of professional independence in response. This is a crucial antagonistic articulatory practice (Laclau and Mouffe 1985) which forms a coherent and clear ‘discursive outside’ against which to define journalistic identity. Although some journalists questioned embedding as inappropriate and refused to cooperate, the interviewees are resigned to domination by the PR officials, be it in the form of media management or direct ‘spin’. For these journalists the appropriate professional response is a redoubled effort in applying the professional paradigm, rather than some reconsideration of the purposefulness of cooperating with the military in their media and information strategies.

6.5.1 EMBEDDING
In this analysis ‘embedding’ is shown to exist within the discourse of independence as a concept (Foucault 1972) or nodal point/signifier (Laclau 2005) the meaning of which is unfixed – a floating signifier to which meaning is imparted through articulation. Through articulation the location of this concept/nodal point within war journalism professionalism is established. Although controversy has surrounded the issue of embedding with military forces, within the discourse independence is an important concept journalists use to articulate their professional identity, especially in the context of embedding.

For those journalists who viewed the experiment as a positive development, embedding improved access to the military and revealed to audiences the, unambiguous “reality of the troops” (Campbell 2006). Campbell (2006) is also dismissive of the novelty of embedding, arguing that it is “something that has been going on for as long as there have been journalists”. In this view, a formalised system of embedding is something of a breakthrough in military-media relations that soured in the later years of Vietnam, when the military began blaming the media for falling public support (Hallin, 1986). This relationship has remained fraught ever since.

Kerr (2006) states that in Iraq the American military were, “quite open” and allowed journalists the freedom to report as they saw fit. By comparison, the Australian Defence Force (ADF), with its reputation for secrecy, is described as “locking down
information, being incredibly protective and amazingly frustrating for any journalist who has anything to do with them” (Kerr 2006). From the perspective of the *Sydney Morning Herald* (*SMH*), embedding permitted stories that would otherwise not have been told, such as Murdoch’s account of the use of incendiary weapons (white phosphorous) by US forces (*SMH* 22/03/03, 1; the *Age* 22/03/03, 1). For Kerr such stories thereby illustrate the exercise of journalism’s watchdog role in relation to military power. “Being embedded allowed that story to be told - in the scale of things, it might not be a massive story, but it’s one that would otherwise not be told”, argues Kerr (2006). Likewise, Geoff Thompson’s story of trigger-happy American soldiers at checkpoints (*AM* 10/04/03) is cited by other journalists as evidence of the embedding system’s openness and efficacy.

Independence, in these articulations, is not jeopardised by closeness with the military. Rather this intimacy ensures a more full sense of the reality of war. For Campbell (2006), “there is nothing wrong with actually being in a military unit as long as you present it as a snapshot of the war, this is what these troops are seeing, this is a bit of a sniff of the reality of what’s happening for US troops on the ground”.

Lindsay Murdoch, embedded during the Iraq war with US Marines, found his experience frustrating at times (and gruelling physically), but dismisses criticism of embedding as “naïve and misguided” (2006). Rather, embedding provided “great insight” into what was happening at “the spear if the invasion”. Nonetheless, Murdoch himself acknowledged publicly the limitations imposed on his practice and his perspective (the *Age*, 05/03/03). For these journalists an intimacy with military units merely enhanced the normative function of journalism; to provide true, first hand information about military operations and experiences. Articulated so, embedding was of great benefit and was merely the specific context in which journalistic independence was enacted, rather than a constraining or restricting exercise. Furthermore, there is little critical reflection concerning the potential substantive effects of the persistent and generally positive presentation of military perspectives. In other studies the closeness of the military and the media has been criticised for militarising journalism. This critique argues that the persistent representation of military perspectives and logic serves to
normalise militarism (Seib, 2004; Reese, 2004; Kellner, 1992). This critique will be shown to have relevance in the Australian context (see Chapter Nine).

The supposed openness of the embedding system, which famously permitted any reporting other than that which jeopardised operational security (Whitman 2003), is contrasted with the treatment journalists received at Central Command. Compared with the “complete farce” (Campbell 2006) at Doha, Murdoch describes his experience as relatively free. “[Centcom] was all skewed towards propaganda – on the ground [embedded] there was no censorship” states Murdoch (2006), as long as he did not give away exact locations or details of troop movements. Embedding is then articulated into the professional discourse and identity as a legitimate journalistic exercise. Furthermore, as the research will demonstrate, the embedding perspective nonetheless presents a naturalised, empathetic portrayal of US forces. This is even the case in circumstances of military incompetence, such as those witnesses and reported by Geoff Thompson (see Chapter Nine).

While supportive of embedding, these journalists, and others, were aware of the limited perspective that necessarily results from travelling with a military unit. Such an arrangement is anathema to the individuated, independent and balanced liberal perspective. Professionalism however, serves to articulate such access facilitating regimes as acceptable. Indeed, individual responsibility is abdicated, in favour of journalists seeing themselves as part of a wider effort or bigger picture, represented by their organizations efforts as a whole. Murdoch is clear that his perspective was limited by travelling with US forces, stating that while his unit would roll through villages and towns on their way to Baghdad, there was no contact with the local population and that his was an utterly military perspective; “sometimes we came under fire, we didn’t know who was friendly and who wasn’t - basically I never got real access to the Iraqis”. Nonetheless embedding is articulated as positive development, getting the soldier’s eye view of the war. But the “problem with embedding is where it’s being used, where that snapshot picture is being used as the overall picture” (Campbell 2006), effectively laying blame for any problems with the embedding system with news organizations rather than with journalists themselves and their improper professionalism. Indeed, as Cottle (2006) notes the genius of the embedding system was the apparent increase in
information available. With the advent of embedding, crude forms of censorship gave way to a journalistic form awash in drama, detail and visual immediacy, but separated from issues of context and substantive meaning (Lewis and Brookes 2004; Cottle 2006; 94-95).

Embedment spans a middle ground between truly independent (so called ‘unilateral’) reporting and the contrived settings of military briefings and should be used as “an adjunct to journalists attending military briefings” (Wilson 2006a). Wilson, reporting independently from southern Iraq during the war, emphasises unilateral independence as a crucial aspect of professionalism and worries that embedding may become a replacement for independence. For Wilson (2006a) embedding was “cheerleading for the Americans and British”. Wilson saw the real story as “covering the people’s war and what impact it was having on the people” (Wilson 2006a).

Other articulations however demonstrate the concept/nodal point of embedding to not have completely solidified within the professional discourse. Just as objectivity has been ‘emptied’ of meaning and rearticulated, so too has independence. Thus, embedding carries with it the responsibilities of remaining independent (if possible) from those with whom a journalist travels. Bormann (2006) warns that embedding must “be seen for what it is” which is “a very limiting perspective – like the soldier you are somewhat sanitised from the horror of what you are doing”. Embedding offers only one aspect of a complicated picture of war. As Bormann (2006) argues, privileging the perspective of the military is “the very nature of travelling with a military group – the weapons fire out, but like the soldiers, you don’t see the other end. You don’t see the schools in ruins, you don’t see the hospitals hit by misdirected bombs”.

There is a fine balance, between privileging and naturalising military perspectives and the close insights that embedding provides. Several journalists express and awareness of this. Bormann (2006) cites the Geoff Thompson (embedded ABC journalist) story of civilian deaths at a nervous and poorly organised American checkpoint as an example of embedding’s value. Positive aspects of the embed system are considered against the difficulties faced by journalists in remaining independent from and dispassionate about those they cover. A fundamental contradiction exists, however, Bormann argues, between journalistic independence on one hand and the
building of trust relationships between soldiers and reporters on the other. Unwittingly journalists become “seduced” (2006) by a situation where they are protected by soldiers during war. This ambivalence towards embedding is repeated throughout the interviews with several journalists emphasising that embedding should be considered only one perspective on a wider war (Bormann, 2006; Campbell, 2006). These journalists argue that problems arising from the institutionalisation of embedding, result from its editorial use, rather than from the exercise itself. As the ABC’s Geoff Thompson (2006) argues, for example, “our [embedded] coverage was only one aspect of it…the ideal is to have someone everywhere…it’s only [problematic] when you pretend that it tells the whole picture.”

Embedding is also considered an entirely negative, restrictive development in media and military relations, but an innovation with obvious appeal for news organizations, the military and individual journalists alike. In this conception, embedding journalists with military units is the last on a list of coverage priorities. “I don’t agree with it and I wouldn’t do it…but I can see that it is part of the overall picture”, states Ian McPhedran (2006a), who reported from Baghdad during the war. Although most of what journalists were shown by Iraqi minders is described as “propaganda” (McPhedran 2006a), McPhedran argues he was able to report independently from Baghdad. Taking care not to antagonise the authorities, McPhedran constructed his professional identity against that of a compromised hack. Ultimately, however, his contravention of the rules imposed by Iraqi authorities that governed his movements saw him expelled to Jordan until the Iraqi government fell. However, in McPhedran’s conception a situation in which journalists, while under restrictions, may use their creativity, tenacity and guile to produce good journalism, still constitutes a qualified independence. Embedded and under the direct control of the military the possibilities are, “obviously very limited” (McPhedran 2006a). Embedding offers “no other perspective” (McPhedran 2006a) than that of the military. And thus an independent journalist’s professional identity is made visible as constructed through articulation in contrast to embedding and the restrictions that embedding is held to engender. As shown, the discursive object of embedding illustrates both the functioning of ‘good’ professionalism and also provides an ‘other’ of the constitutive outside (Laclau and Mouffe 1985) crucial to the formation of journalistic
identity. As noted it is possible therefore for an individual journalist to remain fully within an independent identity, within the context of embedding as questions over their journalistic output are to be directed at the way in which their reporting is used in the context of wider coverage strategy. Professionalism here is highly individualistic, rather than an important feature of the media system as a whole.

6.5.2 CENTCOM

In contrast to embedding, the statements and articulations surrounding media management strategies, here symbolised by the Doha media centre, Centcom, demonstrate how aspects of a discourse become fixed. The analysis shows the information policy pursued at Central Command is constructed by journalists as the antithesis of professional journalism. This policy is clearly identified as a coordinated strategic military PR exercise, against which journalists define themselves and their professionalism. Again, following Laclau and Mouffe (1985) the military-media operations become ‘other’, beyond the frontier of professional identity. As opposed to the ambivalence over embedding, all journalists interviewed denounced what they saw as official attempts to manipulate and obfuscate. Indeed, given the normative tension that exists between the military and the media, this relationship forms an arena of legitimate antagonism, in which professional identities may be performed, what Hallin calls the ‘sphere of legitimate controversy’ (Hallin 1986). That such treatment by military authorities is inevitable in a war context is a common concern. Here, although journalists are united in their opposition to military information strategy, there is a pervasive acceptance of military manipulation as an inevitable aspect of conducting journalism during war. The unequal relationship between journalists and military authorities is taken for granted as a feature of the modern news system. However, journalists enunciate a strategic response that maintains cooperation with the military. This response is concerned with “chipping away” and “dis-assembling” what military officials have to say. For these journalists however, military public relations and strategic communications is all part of the reality of reporting military operations. By their admission these journalists have little option but to professionally engage with these strategies. These journalists can be seen, however, as operating from a set of
assumptions concerning war reporting that have already designated the position of journalism in relation to military power. In this situation journalists are indignant at their treatment and aware of their limitations, yet continue in their engagement with military power nonetheless.

The military briefings at Centcom were variously called “a disgrace”, “a farce” and “counterproductive” (Willacy 2006a; Campbell 2006; Kerr 2006). The military briefings delivered at Centcom were notoriously empty of useful information, deflecting of journalists inquiries and “metronomically on-message” (MacGregor in Tumber and Palmer 2004; 66) – an allusion to the White House-speak and coordinated international media strategy (Tumber and Palmer, 2004) that required spokespeople to reinforce and reiterate the ‘message of the day’ throughout the pre-invasion and conflict period. Similarly, alongside the obfuscatory tactics employed by the Coalition spokespeople, the design and organisation of the Coalition Media Centre was “as annoying and inconvenient as possible” (Massing 2003; 16).

In this context it is argued that there is no way discerning credible accounts of events from the unverified official pronouncements with which journalists were presented:

I don’t think you have anything effectively, because you are at the whim of what you are being told and there is no way of verifying it, we know the nature of propaganda in war, that’s what it is, I don’t really think there’s any other word for it, because that is the correct characterisation, so when you are faced with unverified official accounts I think it’s not exactly going to be a journalistic peak (Harley 2006a).

Indeed, the Centcom spokespeople were unable and unwilling to keep pace with the ‘real-time’ accounts and reports pouring forth from the hundreds of embedded journalists, adding to the frustration and sense of futility that characterised many journalists’ experiences at Centcom.

While journalists recognise the media management which occurs in such settings and are frustrated by it, there is no alternative. “These people’s job is to obstruct and to obfuscate and that’s what they did very successfully”, states McPhedran (2006a), who
argues the only sure strategic response is to completely disavow contact with, or protection from, military sources and report ‘unilaterally’.

The difficulties in performing the normative role of the professional journalist are acknowledged in these circumstances. The suggestion is made, that journalists do initiate a strategic response to the efforts of military officials to control information. “I suppose in terms of what can be done, it’s the same as anything in a situation where journalists are being frozen out – you chip away as best you can”, argues Kerr (2006). That poor treatment by the military is inevitable is obvious from the comments of Harley (2006a), who states that, “ideally a place like that (Centcom) is supposed to give you a global overview, because in any conflict you are always in a compromised position anyway”. Indeed, it is accepted that in war the military will manipulate and ‘spin’ information, and such procedures are characteristic of modern military operations (Knightley 2004). Journalists however maintain a professional commitment to covering those authorities, not expecting to receive credible or useful information. The information which is released is inevitably partial. Professionalism demands that in such a situation it is necessary for journalists to “write as hard as possible” in order to “minimise their complicity” (Harley 2006a) yet it is acknowledged that “a bunch of journalists complaining about it (media management) is not significant enough impetus for change” (Kerr 2006).

The question arises then as to why journalists persevere in such circumstances. Harley (2006a) argues, as do others, that securing independence from the military “depends on how good you are” as a professional. Although military dominance of the media is seen by all as inevitable, Harley argues that through the application of professionalism that this dominance may be resisted. Crucially, it is language that provides the possibility for journalists to assert their independence, and not physical location or choice of sources. Harley (2006) argues, “it’s just part of the skill, to unravel the sanitising language” within locations such as Centcom. However, while the discourse-theoretic position of this thesis grants agency to journalists to ‘state’ and ‘articulate’ war and military operations with creativity and diversity, it also posits hegemonic discourses such as professionalism as exerting generative power, enabling ‘militarised’ professionalism. The following section provides a brief discussion of the
power of journalistic language use to defend the journalistic identity and assert independence.

6.5.3 THE DEFENCE OF THE PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

‘Independence’ is not simply a central dynamic in the relationship between the military and media. Independence, as has been noted, is also a strategy of legitimation within the professional, liberal framework, which reinforces the professional identity of war journalists. Crucially for journalists working in the complicated and controversial situations such as war, claims of independence and invocations of the professional discourse provide a defence against accusations of co-option by military or political powers. In Laclau and Mouffe’s (1985) terms the military must remain beyond the ‘discursive frontier’ of professionalism, as an ‘other’. However, as this section makes clear, the chain of equivalential (professional) practices and norms can be expanded to include those professionally questionable aspects of war journalism, such as embedding. Here then, the ultimate contingency and instability of professional categories and concepts and the capacity for inclusions and exclusions to be discursively enacted is made clear. As such the claim of independence is an assertion of professionalism and an argument in defence of conventional professional practice. Independence, as a discursive concept, does not possess a rigid meaning, specifying fixed roles or relationships, but operates as an ‘empty signifier’ (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Laclau 2005) which is invoked by journalists in a range of situations as a defence mechanism against (possible) accusations of non-professionalism and thus, illegitimacy. In this sense, independence, like some notions of objectivity, can be understood as contextual.

Some of the journalists interviewed for this study were not embedded with military units nor stationed at military briefing centres, and considered their literal independence a symbol of their identity and credibility as professional journalists. “Unilateral” News Ltd journalist Peter Wilson, who famously survived capture by Iraqi forces stated, “escaping both the control of the American and Iraqi controlling systems and working unilaterally, working independently” (Wilson 2006a) to be his greatest

achievement. Another unilateral, Mark Willacy (2006a), when reporting in Baghdad, “would rather get out and about on the ground” than attending American press briefings, the American viewpoint could be simply and easily gotten from other press agencies and news outlets.

These journalists claim they preserved their independence intact by staying un-embedded and beyond the controls of military managers. They also help to reinforce the notion that the deployment of certain concepts assists in the strategic defence of one’s own practice. As the analysis will demonstrate, remaining professionally detached and independent was not necessarily sufficient to compete with the efforts of official military authorities. However, invoking independence is a pragmatic, discursive defence against allegations of compromised professionalism. In this sense discursive statements of independence become regulatory mechanisms, through which discursive coherence is maintained and normative professional roles pursued. As such the concept of independence permits the continuation of normative professional roles and relations while at the same time preserving the journalistic ideal of literal independence. In this sense independence is both a discursive end in itself and a higher professional goal.

Murdoch, as stated above, quite openly discusses the limitations of being an embedded reporter. “Being embedded was frustrating”, says Murdoch (2006), “in that I couldn’t see what was going on in the wider invasion…So that was very much a limiting factor”. The issue of how much he could see and report on and the limitations embedding placed on his perspectives were discussed in The Age, 5 April, 2006, where he wrote, “I report the war only from the marine’s perspective” (The Age: Insight; 2003). Nonetheless, criticisms of embedding are dismissed as “naïve and misguided” (Murdoch 2006) given the positive aspects, such as close detailed coverage of military operations, that embedding provided. The dangers of journalists becoming ‘too close’ to the military were real, claims Murdoch, and the jingoistic identification of some of the American networks with the soldiers is to be rejected. Clearly for Murdoch, independence permits both the maintenance of idealised journalistic distance and a defence against accusations of militarisation.
Although reporting as embedded may have been a difficult proposition, it is asserted that journalists limited their complicity with military interests by fostering their own independence. With no barrier or separation between himself and the soldiers, Murdoch asserts that through the judicious use of language, a psychological, rather than literal ‘distance’ is maintained:

When they were talking about “the enemy” I was talking about Iraqis. I set myself apart from them (the Marines) in all my dealings. Basically, when you go into that sort of a situation, you’ve got to set your boundaries and make sure your professionalism stays intact. (Murdoch 2006)

Perhaps unsurprisingly, even though the emphasis and focus of the embedded experience was squarely on the Coalition forces and their experiences, Murdoch considered his commitment to the ethic of independence strong enough to resist any familiarisation and sympathy with the soldiers. He thus considers his reporting non-militarised.

The use of language therefore has the power both to compromise and the power to sustain a journalist’s independence. For Murdoch the use of certain language serves as a defence against his ‘closeness’ with the military. Through the use of certain phrases, words and meanings embedded reporters can maintain psychological independence or independence of thought, whilst dependent on the military for safety, sustenance and information. Journalists are aware of the power and discursive force of language to influence thought, understanding and realities. Just as those close to the military assert their independence through language use (Harley 2006a; Murdoch 2006) so do the ‘unilaterals’ see language use as a crucial symbol of the compromised position of such journalists. For Bormann (2006) and Willacy (2006a) the use of military language normalises the logic and horror of war. Wilson (2006a) laments the corruption of journalism and the production of credible knowledge by the PR trained “anti-journalists”.

The discourse of independence is then clearly enunciated as a centrally important and controversial aspect of professional war journalism. The system of embedding journalists is cautiously accepted by most journalists as an addition to the
scope of wartime news coverage, however should be treated for what it is – a limited perspective, privileging the perspective of the (in this instance) American and British military. Embedding is not considered with universal ambivalence however, with journalists both denouncing it as complicit with the military and others supporting the system as providing important new perspectives. Importantly, all journalists use their position on embedding to illustrate their support for the doctrine of journalistic independence. Those who either support embedding or were embedded themselves cite their independence as articulated through their non-identification with soldiers and their maintenance of distance and dispassion within the context of travelling with military units. Conversely, those who consider embedding a problematic journalistic exercise see it as fostering closeness with the military both physically and cognitively that is unavoidably corrosive of journalistic independence and integrity.

Similar attitudes are expressed towards the efforts of military and political authorities to manage the news. Through official briefings, the adoption and mastery of journalistic practices and the use of a language of militarism, military strategic intent seeks to naturalise of the military point of view. On this issue journalists are resolute – attempts to manipulate and co-opt the media should be resisted. Curiously however, and with implications for professional journalism, no alternative or method of dealing with such management is advanced, aside from appeals to strive for the professional ideal of independence – an ideal so compromised by the unequal relationship between journalists and the military and political sources they cover.

The limitations imposed on journalists reporting Centcom were similar to those experienced by embedded journalists. Where embeds had only the military perspectives and activities to report on, those at Centcom were forced to make do with the official pronouncements of military spokespeople, with no way of verifying what they were told and effectively operating as conduits for military information. Harley concedes the weak position of journalists, but argues that distance can be established and professional integrity maintained by “writing as hard as possible” (Harley 2006a) and not reproducing official perspectives and accounts. Independence is still possible in such a context. A journalist constructs stories by piecing them together using the information provided at Centcom and incorporates that with information from international sources
seeking to avoid the reproduction of strategic communications (Harley 2006a). In this instance independence is expressed through the picking and sorting of information and its arrangement as news. The avoidance of official perspectives relies then on the skill of the journalist involved, as Harley (2006a) argues, “it just depends how good you are”. The implication here is that a skilled journalist will make clear in reports the lack of credible information, the efforts of the military media managers and the artifice of the official view.

Several positions are visible with regards to the use of language by journalists. From the journalistic perspective, language is symbolic of their independence – they maintain themselves as correct in their professionalism through their use of language that separates them from the military. From a discourse-theoretic perspective, through avoiding sanitising language and employing professional qualifiers, independence is created or made real. This notion is consonant with the theoretic position of this thesis – through language use meaning is created. Importantly the conditions in which language use takes place are understood by journalists and are a significant site of the pragmatic “daily battle” (Kerr, 2006) to maintain journalistic professionalism.

PART THREE
6.6 NEWS VALUES
News values are central to the formation and the production of news. For the purposes of the present analysis news values are held to include both the empirical categories of newsworthiness, such as those elaborated by Galtung and Ruge (1965) and those broader cultural values identified by writers such as Gans (1980). A discourse concerning news values and newsworthiness is central to professionalism. Through the implementation of news values and identification of newsworthiness professionalism is demonstrated, legitimated and reproduced. As Gans (1980) argues no-one approaches any social phenomena from a value free perspective. And as Tuchman (1978) has established, such values and practices are routinised into the norms of professional journalism. For journalists in Iraq, conceptions of how they should approach and negotiate their assignments provide further insight into the professional discourse and how it functions to produce news. News values link with the other discursive concepts
of objectivity and independence to round out the professional identity of journalists who participated in this study and to illustrate the regulation that characterises the discourse of professionalism, protected through the correct use of news values.

News values constitute a central concern for journalists and guide their professional practice. A 'news value', in so far as it can be isolated and defined, has been variously defined as a product of institutionalised news production (Tuchman 1978) or resulting from a commitment to objectivity (Schudson 1978). Gans (1980) describes conventionalised, mainstream news values as supportive of the status quo, originating in a complex interaction between dominant cultural values and myths and the institutional and professional contexts of news journalism (Galtung and Ruge 1965; Harcup and O'Neill 2001). News values anchor and orient a journalist in relation to the reality they must analyse and from which they must produce 'news' that is coherent and meaningful for audiences. As this section demonstrates such values are especially important during coverage of modern war when the sheer volume of information available can be overwhelming, the public mind is especially focused on the events and the military-political authorities are centrally concerned with the public reception of the war. As previously recognised, in modern “information war” (Tumber and Webster 2006) and fully mediatised conflict perception management is all-important (Louw 2005). In the context of limited war requiring democratic consent, globalised media organisations providing ‘real time’ reporting enable mechanisms of consent and cultivation of public opinion. As Tumber and Webster (2006; 86) argue acute concern over public opinion ensures military and political authorities conduct, “careful management and rehearsal of information from and about the war, whilst at the same time making assiduous efforts to avoid the charge of censorship”.

In the current section the discourse of newsworthiness is shown to illustrate the professional expertise and abilities of those journalists interviewed. This discourse serves to regulate journalistic production, providing a ‘location’ within the discourse from which to speak (report). That is, news values provide journalists with ways of speaking about war, as Foucault (1972) has described – professionally legitimate enunciative modalities. For these journalists, embedded, unilateral or based at Centcom, the discursive strategies surrounding news values provide a countervailing, articulatory
power to that exerted by military authorities in managing representations of war. In their discussions of their experiences in Iraq, journalists state that their judgement of newsworthiness and their organisation of their experiences into news is a product of their professional skill. The ability to apply professional skills and values to a chaotic and often confused working environment in order to produce coherent knowledge distinguishes journalists.

The technical skills of journalism are supported by a discursively constructed moral identity. Journalists are concerned to represent themselves as concerned and empathetic, intent on focusing on the ‘human’ story of the Iraq war. For this study’s interviewees, this was inherently the most legitimate ‘angle’ from which to approach the conflict. Although this moral concern may seem to contradict the ethos of professional detachment, journalists interviewed considered such a bearing as emphasising their professionalism, rather than undermining it. News values illustrate professionalism less as a consistent, rational regime, but rather as a pragmatic legitimating strategy.

6.7 THE STATEMENT OF NEWS VALUES

Newsworthiness is most clearly enunciated through three discursive concepts (Foucault 1972) or nodal points (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). As ‘concepts’ news values are identified here in keeping with the discourse-theoretic approach of this thesis, which differs fundamentally from the ‘content analysis’ of Galtung and Ruge (1965) or Harcup and O’Neill (2001). The most important discursive concept discussed below is that which establishes these journalists as moral professionals, rather than simply as technical experts. The moral identity of the journalists in this study is evident in their preoccupation with the ‘people’s war’ and the ‘human story’.

The limitations and difficulties of reporting during war are also important discursive concepts articulated by professionalism and which contribute to the broader theme of news values. War is a particular environment, with a range of dangers, restrictions and considerations that must be taken into account, such as particular forms of extreme violence and danger that are specific to the experience of war. Again, through the negotiation and consideration of circumstances and local conditions journalists are able to ‘do their job’ as well as display and reinforce their
professionalism. The notion that these journalists are possessed of expertise which they employ in producing credible and useful news is discursively expressed, constructing journalists as legitimate arbiters of social reality.

The last concept is the notion that a journalist may witness events and, employing their technical skills and experience, may judge the news value of what they have witnessed or otherwise become informed about. Through emphasising journalist’s skill at “deciding what’s news” (Gans 1980), the legitimacy of their position of power to define social reality is sustained. ‘Judging’ the news may appear to contradict the earlier identified discourse of objectivity, which requires a neutral, fact based approach and posits a reality independent of individuals. However, news judgement has objectivity to support it, providing journalistic guidelines for determining the news. News judgement also illustrates the flexibility and malleability of the professional method, which is adaptive to a range of journalistic situations. The discourse of objectivity imposes certain requirements on those aspects of reality which are selected to be produced into news and news values provide a means of selecting between different aspects of objective reality. The exercise of judgement over the news is then both a demonstration of journalistic expertise and professionalism and also a demonstration of professionalism’s positive legitimation of aspects of social reality and rejection of others.

In enunciating a discourse of newsworthiness journalists advance the professional identity, establishing themselves as expert, non-ideological and morally upright. In practice these discursive strands are interwoven, rather than artificially separated as they are presently. The separation of these discursive strands here serves to permit a close and clear examination of their constitution and how they combine to construct the larger discourse of professionalism.

In stating their concern for the ‘people's story’, journalists establish for themselves both a political and moral orientation from which to view events. This orientation guides their coverage and the concerns of their journalism, effectively regulating influences on what becomes news. Again the notion of professional impartiality, neutrality and detachment is flexible and pragmatic. By considering a moral or humanitarian focus as appropriate and favourable, the more resolute commitments to objectivity, as stated above, seem less certain, as compassion necessarily requires a
privileging of the interests and perspectives of the victims of war over its prosecutors. But although objectivity is a concern for facts, journalists are free within this system to judge the news value of facts where they see fit, such as highlighting the human story. Rather than the objective facts of a story awaiting a journalist, a journalist turns objectivity onto the story, producing an account that accords with the tenets of professionalism. Essentially, journalistic deployment of news values, rather than facilitating the objective representation of reality, brings reality into existence by ‘making real’ aspects of war and leaving others unilluminated. That one takes a humanitarian angle to one’s reporting is based a moral judgement of news value, rather than reliant on objectivity. From this perspective absolute objectivity and news values appear contradictory. The professionalism observed by the research however, is flexible enough to permit journalist’s to make moral judgements about war, such as foregrounding the experiences of Iraqi civilians. The employment of news values, in this sense adds further contingency and nuance to the professional discourse. The central discursive concepts of morality and ‘the people’ are discussed below.

6.7.1 MORALITY AND THE ‘PEOPLES STORY’
The concern for the human story is based on a desire to ‘tell the truth’ of civilian experience and is thus resonant of the wider liberal-professional concern with credibility, honesty and integrity. It is a concern to make visible the truth of war through statements about war, although as will be clear it is also a largely de-politicised category of analysis. The judgements a journalist makes about the story are centrally concerned, as has been noted, with the “reality of the situation” and a desire to understand “what’s really going on” (Campbell 2006). This concern does not preclude however a privileging of perspectives, as Campbell (2006) argues the assumption of a ‘news perspective’ is “based on various principles”, including that “sympathy for the underdog is quite legitimate”. This moral outlook extends to colour the news categorisation of events too, serving as a guide for news judgement. Such a moral concern provides something akin to a journalistic template. While not prejudging the news, a journalist is concerned with “which people are behaving in a way that is moral, that is consistent with international
law, which people are doing things that are counter-productive…” (Campbell 2006), rather than simply abandoning them to some ‘objective’ definition of news value.

Such concerns are both professionally and personally fulfilling for journalists. Peter Wilson considered his ‘unilateralism’ his most significant achievement of the Iraq War. His escape from the “controlling systems” of both the American and Iraqi forces permitted his team to cover the “people’s war” (2006a) of southern Iraq. For Wilson a focus on the effect on the conflict on the people of Iraq was the only acceptable moral and professional way of approaching the war. Wilson even rejects the Baghdad ‘behind enemy lines’ perspective, which he criticises as “sort of sitting there in a hotel room…most of them [journalists in Baghdad] covering it [the war] off the internet…turning material around with a Baghdad dateline” (Wilson 2006a). Rather he sought to make visible and real a neglected reality; the experiences of Iraqi civilians. Likewise “doing stories that involved human beings and Iraqis themselves” provided a deep professional satisfaction for Trevor Bormann (2006), who considered it “very gratifying to see how normal Iraqis were dealing with (the war) and what they thought about events”. Willacy (2006a) was most proud of getting out and talking with “the people, normal Iraqis”.

What becomes news however is not simply contingent on a journalist’s conscience, but also pragmatically related to the circumstances a reporter finds him or herself in. Journalists must use what is available to them, within a given period to produce news reports. Each theatre of the war had differing limitations and degrees of danger for reporters. In the period immediately following the fall of Baghdad journalists experienced a freedom and openness previously unknown. This stands in contrast with the heavy restrictions placed on journalists by the Iraqi authorities especially, in their attempts to report on the experiences of the local civilians. It also illustrates the extent to which journalists have the capacity to construct and produce news of their choosing and as a result of their moral compunction. Wilson (2006a) describes Baghdad as being “wide open, it was paradise”. Where previously getting honest and accurate representation of people’s attitudes was nearly impossible, after the fall of the Iraqi government, “there were so many (stories)…any idea you could have there were stories” (Wilson 2006a). The fall of Baghdad permitted journalists the freedoms they
value to perform their craft as they saw fit, free from “being shadowed by and Information Ministry minder” (Willacy 2006a). In this period it was possible to approach American soldiers for comment and stories and while Willacy found the American troops naturally open, talkative and honest after a short while they became increasingly apprehensive about being approached, even by press. Willacy (2006a) was unconcerned as “it was one of those situations where you just look out your window and see what was happening”. Similarly, Bormann (2006) talks of, “just going out each day, more or less just going onto the streets and getting our stories”.

A focus on the human side of the conflict then articulates a moral bearing as well as a concern for the democratic principles of journalism, encapsulated in the old clichés concerning the profession’s ‘watchdog’ role as a ‘Fourth Estate’ of government. This ethic persists in the contemporary era as illustrated by the predisposition of journalists towards covering the ‘people’. As the thesis will demonstrate, it is clear that the professional discourse legitimates the bringing into existence and making visible certain sanctioned aspects of war, civilian casualties and ‘iconic’ events for instance. Journalism has greater difficulty making visible potentially politically sensitive, unsanctioned accounts, such as critical analyses of the media management at Central Command or more robust considerations of the implications of embedding. Criticisms of this kind exist firmly inside what Hallin (1986) has called the sphere of legitimate controversy.

Even Lindsay Murdoch, embedded with the US Marines was inclined towards covering the responses and attitudes to the war of the Iraqi civilians he encountered. Military regulations governing embedding forbade such interaction. Nonetheless, a concern for ‘the people’ is enunciated, according his experiences as an embedded reporter (from the liberal perspective) a degree of legitimacy. “Basically I never got real access to the Iraqis” laments Murdoch (2006), however the “sheer mechanics” of it restricted what he could do from within the embedded context. From an embedded perspective Iraqi civilians become represented as potential combatants rather than potential sources of useful information. “You’ve got to remember that most of the time, when we’re going through these villages, sometimes we came under fire, we didn’t
know who was friendly and who wasn’t”, says Murdoch (2006) both explaining the lack of contact and illustrating the divide that embedding imposed on journalists.

6.7.2 CENTCOM, EMBEDDING AND BAGHDAD
This section details how certain newsworthy ‘locations’ are articulated and legitimated as newsworthy. These locations such as embedded or at Centcom, were strategically established as appealing to journalists sensibilities. In effect they were pre-established as newsworthy by military public relations officials cognisant of professional journalism’s weakness and need for briefings, official sources, compelling coverage and a steady supply of material.

The situation at Central Command for Australian journalists was professionally trying. Although they were generally disdainful of the entire operation, Australian journalists continued to report from Doha, experiencing great difficulty in countering the military efforts to control the flow of information and the media in turn. The ‘tyranny of distance’ meant that the war was far away and Centcom military-media managers could easily control the release of information. Harley (2006a) was forced to change his coverage from ‘breaking’ news stories, to “piecing together stories from a range of sources” – clearly stating the journalistic attempts to construct credible news in the context of the military’s power to control information. Illustrating contempt for the media operations in Doha, this information is described as “fundamentally no different to any of the material you can get from Sydney, Tokyo or London” (Harley 2006a), a glaring contrast to Centcom’s promotion as central point for Iraq war information. Notably however, the arrangements at Centcom were not seen as irredeemably flawed. One journalist, New York magazine’s media critic Michael Wolff, challenged Brigadier General Brooks as to why journalists should bother coming to Centcom to report, “so useless and barren of information were his briefings” (Massing, 2003b). As Wolff himself put it, reporting from Centcom was a Groundhog Day29 experience:

“You woke up only to repeat the day before, and no matter what you did or said or thought, you were helpless to effect a change in the next day. So every day, everybody

29 Referring to the film, starring Bill Murray, in which an egotistical weatherman is forced to relive one day, Groundhog Day, over and over again until he confronts his own ego and shortcomings.
asked the same questions about Basra and the supply lines and the whereabouts of the WMDs and Saddam, and got the same answers. They were war correspondents after all (or trying to be)” (Wolff 2003).

Harley however takes a nuanced view. Although disdainful of Wolff’s criticism, he is not entirely dismissive, arguing that Wolff through his challenge to the military authorities illustrated that there was still room available in which journalists could manoeuvre and meaningfully illuminate war. “I suppose you could argue that because Michael got up and said that, it’s totally possible [to challenge authorities]…it’s a double edged sword, the officials may have regarded him with distain, but many journalists regarded him as a hero”, says Harley (2006a), enunciating the legitimacy of Centcom as a sphere of legitimate controversy.

In other theatres of war restrictions imposed by embedding or by bombing in Baghdad, meant pragmatism and newsworthiness made war real through what could be witnessed, while maintaining a degree of safety. Embedded with US Marines, Lindsay Murdoch (2006) states newsworthiness as “just what I could see every day and what I could quickly get out, with the limitations I had”. This was simply the reality of embedding for many correspondents to which professionalism was adapted (Carlson and Katovsky 2003). Murdoch brought this reality into existence as the subject of at least one news dispatch:

I can only report on the battles, the stuff-ups, the human tragedies that I see. I don’t have a broad view of how the war is unfolding. My reporting is restricted to what the Marines I am with are doing…I want to be able to report more of this war. (the Age, April 5, 2003)

The reporting situation in Baghdad was also restricted, but rather by pragmatic concerns over safety and the avoidance of Iraqi officials. In the early stages on the bombing campaign Iraqi Information Ministry minders sought to control the activities or foreign journalists, periodically searching hotel rooms for forbidden communications equipment and restricting their access to stories (Wilson 2006a). News Ltd’s Baghdad reporter Ian McPhedran was eventually expelled from Iraq by the besieged government.
Until then McPhedran’s reporting strategy was similar to Murdoch’s straightforward approach, although it was also very much concerned with safety. “What you are trying to do is to stay alive and report what you’re seeing”, offered McPhedran (2006a), the dangers of war severely narrowing one’s range of options. “Anyone who thinks you can just sit in Baghdad, in Iraq, during a war and do analytical, nice think pieces and nice pieces of analysis is not only a little bit naïve but probably a little bit stupid”, argues McPhedran (2006a), emphatically and emphasising the pragmatic nature of news production.

6.7.3 JUDGEMENT
The concept (Foucault 1972) or nodal point (Laclau and Mouffe 1985) of judgement is the final important component of the discourse of news values, identified in this study. This concept crystallises notions of the expertise and reliability of journalists to exercise professional judgement in deciding what to report. Judgement in this sense is articulated in terms similar to those used to discuss objectivity. That news is to be ‘judged’ echoes the objective concern with fact, fairness and balance. That is, through the application of professional expertise, that which is newsworthy, which exists independently from the journalist as part of ‘reality’, may be separated from that which is not. In asserting the legitimacy of a liberal journalist to exercise judgement, these journalists reassert the importance of the professional, neutral and non-ideological approach. The act of judging news however is obscured by a discourse of realism that presents journalists as mere conduits for reality, ‘as it is’. In this sense the role of journalists in choosing what becomes news, in bringing war into existence for news audiences, is obscured.

Wilson argues that rather than “develop an ideology either for or against the war, what journalists needed to be doing was giving people back home an accurate picture of what effect the war was having and the attitudes of the Iraqi people” (Wilson 2006a). This professionally dispassionate approach to war is supported by Campbell, who although not embedded, considered embedded ABC reporter Geoff Thompson’s story of civilian killings at an American checkpoint a symbolic triumph of news values over propaganda, military manipulation or censorship. While the military were in Campbell’s
(2006) opinion “commendably open” the tragedy of Iraq reporting by embedded journalists was that individually so many were “behaving in such an irresponsible manner that they were not reporting what they should have been reporting and were reporting in ways that were quite wrong”. For Campbell a concern for news values overrides other, more pragmatic considerations. “You don’t care about how the military’s going to react [to unflattering coverage], if you are close to the source and the source doesn’t like it, well, you move on” (Campbell 2006). Here, faults with journalism are clearly articulated as the improper internalisation of professionalism by individual journalists, rather than as representing deeper, systemic issues, such as journalist’s reliance on official sources and military protection.

From the point of view of the Sydney Morning Herald having a reporter ‘on the ground’ covering events ensured the “impartial and balanced coverage and to bring an accurate account for readers of the Herald…rather than rely for example on the Washington Post or the New York Times” (Kerr 2006). From Foreign Editor Peter Kerr’s perspective, as a foreign editor, there tends to be a daily ‘natural news lead’ that similar publications identify as the most important, beyond which an editor should be concerned with balance and comprehensiveness, as well as “telling a human tale” (2006). Kerr concedes however that while believing in “inherent newsworthiness” it is clear that “in an event as big as war, there won’t always be that agreement and people make (news) judgements for a hugely complex range of reasons” (2006).

News values therefore are subject to tension and ongoing negotiation as professional concerns for telling a sympathetic ‘people’s story’ and sensitivity for inherent newsworthiness appears to conflict with objectivity’s concern for neutrality. As Wilson (2006a) states, although one may consciously assume a neutral perspective, moral and legal questions are ever-present during war. “Obviously you are thinking about it [the legality of war] and trying to decide, is this right? Should I be taking an aggressively critical position?” Here, neutrality and moral conviction are in constant struggle, Wilson eventually basing his view that the war was not inherently illegitimate on his discussions with local Iraqis and likewise bemoaning the descent of Iraq into civil war as a result of a poorly handled occupation. Importantly, his statements neatly illustrate the fragility of the professional discourse, its tensions unresolved and
incomplete fixity leaving discursive space available for alternative articulations of journalistic practice.

This approach is reined in however by a professional commitment to deeper journalistic values, the moral conviction of a witness restrained by professionalism – such an analysis is also objective argues Wilson:

“It is not based on me going there being pro-war or anti-war, it’s based on getting there and speaking to the people and hearing them say that…Its, yeah, not just “report the facts objectively”, but I think it’s still objective, in that you’re saying what you’re seeing. You know being objective doesn’t mean you’re just a tape recorder” (Wilson 2006a).

This tension and difficulty in reconciling discursive concepts provides moments of contrast and space for journalists to explore alternative conceptions. The tension between the identity of the moral witness to events and the professional need for objective fact is neatly illustrated by the now infamous episode in which American soldiers toppled a statue of Saddam Hussein in Baghdad’s Firdos Square. Around the world images of Iraqi men and American soldiers pulling down the statue were presented as symbolising the end of the Hussein government and the birth of liberty in Iraq (BBC 2003; Poole and Blair 2003). Wilson (2006a) argues that such images play well as they can be produced as “iconic moments”. Inevitably, and inaccurately, parallels were drawn between this and events such as the fall of Berlin Wall. Crucially, such moments reveal the power of the discourse as it both inscribes events with meaning, but also produces a site of contest over meaning that can potentially be exploited by journalists seeking to re-conceptualise the production of news and introduce critical perspectives. However, for professionals, such moments, “serve their purpose, that image sums up a broader truth that Saddam did fall, both his statue and his government” (Wilson 2006a). However Wilson himself considered the episode as symbolic of American insensitivity and ignorance, rather than of Iraqi freedom, arguing “it was a microcosm of a lot of the problems…the Americans showed their insensitivity by the way they put an American flag on Saddam’s face, you know this is stupid. Showing the world this is what happens when America conquers Iraq. And they got up and did it!” (Wilson 2006a). Some of this sentiment is reflected in Wilson’s reporting at
the time, when he writes, “…celebrations in Iraq, epitomised by the toppling of the grand statue in central Baghdad, were marred by more looting and lawlessness and growing security concerns” (The Australian, 11 April, 2003). The statue episode illustrated both American insensitivity and the media corps enthusiasm and weakness for ‘iconic’ imagery. Furthermore, it illustrated well the needs of professionalism. Through professional journalism, this event was inscribed into reality and generated meaning; in this case the symbolic end of the Iraqi regime, to which Wilson was able to attach a quiet warning about the potential for future civil unrest following the regime’s demise. Jonathan Harley was reticent about making non-objective issues news. He states an unwillingness to deviate from the professional conception of neutrality. Although the media operation at Centcom was highly controversial, Harley considered his news reports the wrong medium for covering the news management strategies of the Centcom officials, however newsworthy these may have been, given the context of the military’s media operations and the highly controversial political context of the Iraq war. Harley suggests that news consumers should seek a broad range of sources for their information, rather than simply rely on a broadcast bulletin. “I think if people are going to be a lazy media consumer then they are going to get a lazy media product”, argues Harley (2006a), “the biggest priority is to be accurate and to be succinct and give people a quick hit”. In Harley’s articulation news audiences are sufficiently sophisticated to understand the sub-text, contained within objective, neutral news coverage of Centcom news conferences. “I am really wary of making the media the story and I think people are much more savvy and when they watch or read they actually incorporate into their understanding the way it (the news) is produced” (Harley 2006a) articulating the impossibility of making ‘sub-text’ explicit. That is, explicitly articulating into news discourse the sorts of limitations, constraints and contingencies that affect his reporting and conditions of news production at Centcom. As is clear within this professional scheme “the biggest accountability” is correctness (Harley, 2006a) rather than transparency.
6.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter has contributed to this thesis’ stated aim. The significant central discourses that constitute professionalism have been identified and elaborated an analytical process in keeping with the discourse-theoretical perspective discussed in Chapters Three and Four. This section has also begun to illustrate some of the influence this discourse has on the construction of war news. This analysis has identified those concepts and discursive nodal points which crystallise within the central discourses of objectivity, independence and news values. This section has examined the means by which these concepts become discursive strategies with which to perform professional war journalism. This chapter has outlined professional journalism’s central epistemological, practical and moral concerns. Tensions, ambivalence and contradictions within the discourse have been illustrated. The commitment to professional norms that obscure these tensions has also been described. It is argued that while central concepts exist around which the discourse crystallised, areas of discourse remain unfixed with respect to solidified meanings, or in tension. This has been shown in several examples, such as those discursive statements and identities surrounding objectivity, or professionalism in the context of embedding. Several journalists articulate a contextual notion of independence for example. Others give support to operations such as embedding conditional on its use in wider coverage. Nonetheless, this chapter has argued that while this variation exists with regard to individual journalists’ discursive statements or enunciations, the notion of the legitimacy of professional journalistic epistemology, method and morality is emphasised within the discourse to the extent that, while able to accommodate a degree of variety, professionalism is sedimented as hegemonic. And in a practical sense, professionalism allows journalists to overlook these contradictions and tensions and continue to report according to journalistic norms and conventions. A significant consequence of this emphasis is the construction of a discursive framework in which certain forms and aspects of war coverage, such as reporting as an embed or from Centcom are accorded legitimacy and propriety, and the need for perspectives less dependent upon military sources receive less emphasis, leaving non-military dependent perspectives largely unarticulated.
The extent to which this general arrangement of statements, concepts and discourses can be understood as a self-legitimating, internally coherent framework, or system, has also been examined by this chapter. This aspect of the analysis forms the basis which the following chapters build upon. This chapter has also begun to suggest the consequences for public knowledge that are made visible by this form of analysis. That is, the analysis suggests that professionalism limits the possibilities for the production of journalistic knowledge and understanding, rather than expanding them. For example, critical perspectives, such as those generated either through embedding or through Central Command journalism, remain firmly within Hallin’s (1986) concept of a sphere of legitimate controversy. The discourse clearly does this by legitimating certain perspectives and practices and marginalising and excluding alternatives. Also shown has been the contingency with which journalistic decisions are made, both in the context of objectivity and neutral news values.

Several points should be raised however. The concepts established by the professional discourse, identified and discussed above, should be considered conceptual and strategic articulations of a larger whole; the overarching discourse of professionalism. These concepts have been articulated in an interview setting and the three most prominent concepts of the professional discourse which arose have been isolated and analysed. This general constellation of concepts has been organised in order to demonstrate how they may be understood as discursive framework. This framework articulates the regularity and general organisation of professionalism as it is observed within the context of Australian war journalism. The following chapter shifts the analytical focus from the ‘general arrangement’ (Foucault 1972) of discursive and focuses on the relations of power and discursive control that structure professional war journalism. The following chapter begins to illustrate the extent to which professional journalism must be understood, not as a fixed system of discourse, but as dynamic, fluid and contingent, in the context of power.
CHAPTER SEVEN - PROFESSIONALISM AND POWER: IRAQ, 2003

7.1 INTRODUCTION – DISCOURSE AND POWER
This chapter provides an analysis of how the power dynamics of ‘professionalisation’ result in specific forms of war journalism, and the effect these dynamics have on journalism production. Here I argue that the ‘microphysical’ (Foucault 1981) dynamics of coercive, administrative and institutional journalistic power must be understood in the particular cultural-historic context and conditions that characterise professionalism and within which professionalism plays a central role in the governance of contemporary society. The analysis proceeds from a basic level of individualised, journalistic power. Here, the matrix of the professional discourse established in the previous chapter provides an analytical framework for understanding journalistic power and provides a scheme through which much of the professional experience of war can be understood. This section seeks to make clear the power of the professional discourse in ‘producing’ (Foucault 1972) its object – the Iraq invasion – through journalism and for Australian audiences. This analysis is sensitive, however, to the circulation of power, and its operation “from below” (Foucault 1980; 100). In this conception then, the professional discourse does not directly and uniformly discipline journalists, but rather journalists are operative within a wider field of structured power relations.

This wider field is identified as the analysis briefly moves to discussing the institutional arrangements that administer journalists as employees of news organisations. The extent to which these relationships impacted on the practice of war journalism is considered. Lastly, this section attends to a contextualisation of the power relations immanent in contemporary war journalism as resulting from journalism’s location within hegemonic liberalism.

7.2 OBJECTIVITY
The following section sets out how various practices and norms that regulate war journalism can be analysed in terms of the preceding chapter’s analysis of discourse. As has been demonstrated, enunciations of objectivity by the journalists involved in this study reveal the often contradictory nature of these central discourse concepts – its
‘emptiness’ unites and encloses a variety of understandings. As McPhedran (2006a) states (all emphasis added), “Without it [objectivity] we are lost – without that [objectivity] and facts, we are lost! So I think that [objectivity] is a primary pillar, alongside factual information”. Here objectivity is defined as “the ability to put your own prejudices to one side and to report what you see fairly, in a balanced way and objectively” (McPhedran 2006a). Similarly, Murdoch (2006) states, “well, they [objectivity] are the values [of journalism], that’s what journalism is about.” Campbell (2006) argues “objectivity is absolutely crucial”. These enunciations of objectivity’s centrality are contrasted with those who question the relevance of objectivity. As Harley (2006a) says, “[journalism] I think is about good story telling and making it accessible, taking people on a journey…We know that you are never going to, that there is never anything purely objective”. Bormann (2006) agrees stating, “I think objectivity is a bit of a cliché in a way, people have this idea that there are two sides to every story and the truth lies somewhere in between and that’s objectivity, I don’t see it that way”.

The inherent epistemological uncertainty or instability is identified at the centre of the discourse of objectivity. Importantly this contradiction reveals the most central discourse of professionalism as incomplete or as incompletely hegemonising the field. However, rather than producing a constitutive crisis in journalism, the contradiction is resolved in the practice of journalism – the central concept serving as a unifying ‘empty signifier’, permitting the enjoyment of the fantasy of professionalism (Žižek, 1989). Here, the contradiction of objectivity at the heart of professional journalism is overlooked and a pragmatic set of practices and norms that re-articulate a commitment to the liberal-democratic journalistic model are enunciated. In other words while objectivity does not provide a fixed and solid foundation for journalistic practice and theory, journalists act as if it does, reconciling this contradiction of journalism in practice. Here we can see clearly the discursive regulation of journalistic practice – both pragmatic and ‘orthodox’ approaches towards objectivity resulting in the same practical outcomes. This power of professionalism prevents a radical reconsideration of the journalistic approach to war, even in the context of highly nuanced, situationally dependent and subjective understandings of these central professional values. The articulation of

---

30 As discussed in the previous chapter.
central discourses provides coherence to the practice of journalism. As will be shown, individuated journalistic power is crucial in maintaining legitimacy of professional journalistic practice.

Discourses surrounding the practical aspects of war journalism provide the discipline with cohesion not granted by the instability or emptiness of the central notion of objectivity. Effectively, and in practice, journalists appeal to notions of professionalism – such as independence, authority and training – to legitimise their practice, in the absence of a formal or codified basis, namely a universally accepted and agreed upon central defining epistemology; objectivity. Professionalism is in this sense ‘haunted’ by objectivity. As noted in the previous chapter, this internal contradiction at the heart of professionalism manifests itself in an ever more rigorous articulation of the central concepts within objectivity – the ability of journalists to represent ‘reality’ truthfully; their authority as legitimate and skilled news producers and the appropriateness of their ‘objective’ method of fact gathering, verification and independent neutrality. These discursive concepts/nodal points within objectivity provide journalists with a degree of certainty with regards to their legitimacy and purpose – that is, the ideological fantasy of professionalism stabilises their otherwise unstable identity.

Nevertheless, these concepts retain for professionalism the power to represent war. Professionalism anchors journalism within the cultural-historic condition of liberal democratic discourse and news institutional frameworks, and from this journalism derives public legitimacy. As will be shown in the following chapters, this ‘power to represent’ necessarily produces war in accordance with specific, narrow professional concepts and needs.

Briefly, it is clear from the analysis that the ‘power to represent’ articulated as objectivity both significantly influences the content of news messages and obscures the practical conditions of news production. As News Ltd’s Rory Callinan (2006) states of his Centcom experience, much of the journalistic activity taking place there was redundant:
What they [News Ltd editors/managers] did initially was, they said to me you’ll do the write-off from Doha, the battle as it unfolds. But what we found was that people in New York and journalists back in Australia, started to get briefings from politicians, like Downer [Alexander Downer, Australian Foreign Minister] -- I can’t remember who the Defence Minister at the time was -- they started to get briefings from Canberra that we weren’t getting, while we were in Doha, where theoretically there was a command HQ, so it just made it completely ridiculous.

The restrictive and logistically dysfunctional arrangements at Centcom ensured journalist’s energies and attentions turned channelled towards whatever information was made available. As Callinan additionally comments, in the absence of ‘hard information' this was often toward favourable accounts of military activity:

Yeah, you do trend to champion that sort of “Australian troops during war”. That sort of parochial, Australian interest...I wrote a story about a marine, using a jaffle iron to cook food for the troops – so you do get a bit caught up in that (Callinan 2006).

Furthermore, Callinan argues that such reporting styles are the automatic, irresistible outcome of a heavily restricted information environment. Callinan argues his reporting never suffered however:

I can see a point where you could get so desperate, and might start thinking, “should I go a bit soft on these guys and they might start looking after us”...It didn’t happen for me and I didn’t feel that it coloured in any way my reporting, but I could tell that you had to think about stuff and you had to think, “well, if I include that [negative military coverage] I have got bugger all chance of getting out of here [Centcom]” (Callinan 2006).

The representative power exercised by journalists can function to obscure the restrictions they faced when reporting on the Iraq war, which contradict the liberal conception of press freedom. As Callinan’s remarks demonstrate, journalists exert little countervailing power to that of military media managers. And although Callinan articulates through objectivity he is able to maintain a professional bearing, the
compromises journalists make in these circumstances are made clear by Callinan’s admissions.

The ‘power to represent’ is articulated as permitting the full expression of the ‘objectivity’ of journalistic perspective, rather than potentially obscuring its restriction or encouraging journalists to compromise their professional ethics, as described by Callinan above. Thompson argues during his experiences as an embedded journalist he was entirely free and unrestricted in what he could report:

The thing is we could never see the whole battlefield, but we could see what was in front of us and the same rules of objectivity would apply to that…there wasn’t any intentional obfuscation of what we were allowed to do (Thompson 2006).

As noted, ‘objectivity’ as the central epistemological foundation of professional journalism is unstable. Professionalism, through invocations of the importance of professional practice can be understood as overlooking its own limitations and uncertainties. Through exertions of the ‘power to represent’, objectivity functions as the productive concept through which a variety of circumstances and practices are produced as the normative and legitimate mode of journalism.

7.3 INDEPENDENCE

As illustrated in the previous chapter ‘independence’ is another of the central discourses that comprise professional journalism. Similar to the analysis provided above, this section illustrates the extent to which military and political power dominates journalists through both informational and physical control. The extent to which journalists possess and execute a counter veiling power is further examined. This tension consolidates both the legitimacy of professionalism and the depth of the ‘fantasy’ that must exist for journalists to function in their normative socio-political roles, as the concept of independence becomes ever more important in the context of control.

The institution of embedding by the United States military constituted a form of literal, restrictive power over journalists and press agencies. While embedding has been praised for the degree of openness and access to the military it provided (Carlson
and Katovsky 2003), it has elsewhere been criticised (Schechter 2003). As stated in the Department of Defence embedding guidelines the strategic intent of the program, to promote an authentic, military focused perspective is clear:

We need to tell the factual story – good or bad – before others seed the media with disinformation and distortion, as they most certainly will continue to do. Our people in the field need to tell our story – only commanders can ensure that the media get to the story alongside the troops...These embedded media will live, work and travel as part of the units with which they are embedded to relate maximum, in-depth coverage of US forces in combat and related operations (Department of Defense Public Affairs Guidance on Embedded Media 2003).

In the previous chapter, the support for embedding as a journalistic practice has been shown as ambivalent - supported by those journalists who participated in the program and criticised by those who did not. Generally however, the administrative process by which journalists volunteer to enter into military units, and are subject to military control and protection, has become an acceptable and normalised facet of professional war journalism. As the ABC’s Geoff Thompson (2006) argues technology, shifting cultural norms and commercial competition all demand participation:

If you don’t have good access then people lose interest, they actually want to see from the ground up, people living their lives. So you can see that that Iraq war and the embedded experience was like “Big Brother at War”, in many ways and that's all part of the phenomenon.

Other journalists were opposed to embedding, enunciating common criticisms. News Limited journalist Peter Wilson (2006) called the program “cheerleading” for American forces, while Willacy (2006) comments that embedding necessarily leads to journalists identifying with the military with whom they travelled:

[W] hat we saw was the phenomenon of the embedded reporter and constantly referring to “we” and “us” in terms of the unit they were embedded with and that's why I think with embedding there's a great ethical dilemma there for journalists and why I refuse to do it.
Similarly the arrangements at Central Command have been heavily criticised for the informational control imposed upon journalists assigned there and can be literally understood as disciplinary institutional power. Central Command however, represents a far less ambivalent object of professional discourse than does embedding. Here the ‘traditional’ or normative antagonisms, which are held to exist between military-political institutions and professional journalists, are performatively enacted. The opposition to military PR reinforces the professional subjectivity within the liberal journalistic model, which, following Laclau and Mouffe’s theoretical conceptions (1985; Laclau 2005) requires of an ‘other’ for its normative identity – that is, a journalist seeks to hold power to account through the engagement of professional skills and techniques. The discourse concerning Centcom then permits journalists to demonstrate their ‘independence’ from military and political power through antagonistic articulations and criticism of Centcom media management strategies. Through the production of ‘factually accurate’ information journalists define themselves against military power.

Unsurprisingly then, several journalists were strident in their criticisms of the restrictive high security atmosphere and the heavily restricted information regime established at Centcom and to which they were subjected. As Callinan (2006) recounts:

You would stay in a nice hotel out in the capital somewhere and then you sort of half an hour’s drive to get to the place and then you sort of hit this huge, like a fortress basically of security and you went through several gates. And once you started going through that security apparatus, you suddenly realise that this is an intensely controlled environment. The guys will either do a strip search of you or you had to walk through the X-ray machine that was like getting zapped…and the control just increased from that moment.

Similarly, Harley (2006b) comments of the paucity of information available at Centcom that resulted from the information control exerted by military officials:

Basically it’s [Centcom] frustrating because there’s so little to work with and basically often there’s just not a story to tell and you’re not bearing witness – I am the sort of
journalist that needs to see and feel things to kind of really tell it, and there’s just no narrative at Centcom…. I think it’s such a peculiar environment, it’s such a hothouse for information and disinformation, and it’s that fabulous, perverse media circus at its most extreme and it’s most insane.

Furthermore, according to Harley, who states clearly the idealised journalistic role and identity, in such circumstances, arrangements such as those at Centcom force journalists into an antagonistic relationship with military power. Thus:

I mean what’s really going on at Centcom is that there are two worlds – there is the media world and then there’s the operational world. And you’re never really going to know what the operational world is – so part of your writing is always going to be about trying to dis-assemble the spin or the PR or the propaganda, call it what you will (Harley 2006b).

The direct control of embedded journalists and those assigned to Central Command respectively provides examples of the forms of disciplinary and repressive power that Foucault identified in his institutional analyses (1977; 1981). In this direct sense, military power regulates and controls both the journalists themselves (through the ‘guidelines’ and provisions of embedding and the Centcom security apparatus) and regulates the information they utilise to produce news.

Following Foucault (1981) power is not merely dominatory, but also productive, circulating throughout the social world, rather than merely imposed or unilaterally deployed, as suggested by the journalistic descriptions of Central Command. This ‘disciplinary’ power produces a form of journalistic identity and practice, rather than merely prohibiting or controlling specific functions. Through experience of these methods and systems of control a form of journalistic subjectivity is produced that insulates legitimacy and protects professionalism by providing space for its normative expression. As disciplinary power circulates, journalist's distributive role in the information ‘economy’ of war is overlooked. Independence from control, articulated and enunciated, reinforces the professional identity and the legitimacy and normalisation of professional theory and practice. Indeed, to continue after Foucault (1981), it is
possible to begin to understand professionalism as ‘self-discipline’, in so far as ‘professional’ journalists who participate in these media exercises have internalised the logics and practices of administrative military power.

As Harley (2006a) has commented, Centcom represented a “frustrating” experience. Callinan (2006) is more explicit:

But when you got there it was, your sole point of contact was the military —“Australia’s got 5 F-18s and today they bombed three places and didn’t bomb somewhere because they might have killed civilians”, so I was dealing with a flow of military information… But what we found was that people in New York and journalists back in Australia started to get briefings from politicians…they started to get briefings from Canberra that we weren’t getting, while we were in Doha, where theoretically there was a command HQ, so it just made it completely ridiculous.

In such circumstances then, the tight control of information is used to discipline or create “useful” (Foucault 1977; 211) journalists who must satisfy a professional need to produce information. As Callinan (2006) recounts, information starved journalists are quick to use whatever information they are provided, serving as a useful conduit for military interests:

They [the Australian military authorities] blocked all other international media, so all these international media were leaning over the fence and climbing over the fence to film down to get some sort of action. So they gave us a reasonable briefing and said, “we’ve gone into combat, so we raced out and filed that. And that was what we were supposed to do there – receive those briefings and then file straight away.

Moreover, Callinan articulates a response to military control that was concerned primarily with military ‘operational’ issues rather than policy or political issues. This tendency to focus on operational matters is directly encouraged by an information control regime that strategically controls and releases information.

In the previous chapter and above, professionalism is noted as serving to reconcile the antagonism between the military and the media, providing the means with
which to manage the relationship. As shown above, rather than provide an incisive and critical representation of military media management, the relationship permits journalists to ‘perform’ their independence through “writing it hard” (Harley, 2006) or “where you don’t make what you’re seeing appear to be greater than what it is, pretending greater knowledge than you actually have” (Campbell 2006) and thus discharging their public, democratic responsibility while avoiding a substantive critique of the manner in which military authorities control, regulate and seek to construct public knowledge about the invasion.

7.4 NEWS VALUES
The notion that professionalism produces disciplined journalists is further elucidated by an analysis of the function of the discourse of news values and newsworthiness, which was identified and discussed in the previous chapter. This analysis proceeds in three subsections. Firstly, this section illustrates the extent to which journalists wield productive power in their representation of war. Specifically, through professionalism the normative function of war journalism is reproduced. Journalists serve as witnesses to wartime events and, at times operate as a public conscience and in doing so fulfil their liberal-democratic obligations as a ‘watchdog’ over official power.

However, as noted similarly above, the discourse of news values also enacts control, regulation and exclusion in relation to journalistic production. In this sense, the second part of the analysis begins to identify means by which military and political issues become separated from issues surrounding the ‘human’ or ‘dramatic’ aspects of war. Moreover, these regulatory practices illustrate the extent to which professionalism, in the context of Central Command and embedding, is disciplinary and serves to legitimate, rather than interrogate, the exercise of official power.

In this sense, and in the last section of this analysis, it is argued that newsworthiness, as part of a larger discursive formation of professionalism, further contributes to the production of ‘useful’ journalists, in so far as through the performance of professionalism, i.e. the selection of news items, the strategic goals of the military are enabled.
7.5 THE POWER TO REPRESENT

The primary means by which journalists ‘produce’ war, as we have seen, is through their judgement and selection of aspects of war to become news and the authority with which they make these decisions – the ‘power to represent’. In making these judgements, journalists have enunciated the centrality of the ‘human story’ as central. Both Bormann (2006) and Willacy (2006a) state, “going onto the streets” to get their stories as the most rewarding aspect of their work. As Wilson (2006b) states:

I wanted to cover the people’s war and write about how it is affecting the people on the ground, what do they think about it [sic], because like with any story, no matter how complicated or esoteric the issue if you can humanise it, then it’s going to reach your readers much more easily.

Similarly, McPhedran (2006a) has argued,

now given that most of what we were told or most of what we reported on was propaganda, we were able to get beyond that by going out and seeing for ourselves some of the things that were going on and talking to the local people.

Lindsay Murdoch, as an embedded journalist, also articulated an awareness of the importance of the ‘human story’, even though he was largely prevented from covering it by the conditions of embedding.

Well, that [reporting on civilians] was hard, I did, but not as often as I would have liked, because of the sheer mechanics of it - I don’t speak Arabic, nobody else in Iraq speaks English, nobody I saw spoke English. The Americans had very few interpreters. There were no interpreters in my unit… (Murdoch 2006)

Furthermore, as a direct witness to war and equipped with the requisite skill and training, journalists are legitimated as the correct conduits through which information concerning war should travel. Wilson (2006a) has argued such accounts of war should
be staunchly non-ideological. Campbell (2006) and Thompson (2006) both commend the military for its openness in permitting embedded journalists and their avowed non-censorship of journalist’s broadcasts and publications.

Here then, the ‘reality’ of war is communicated to audiences. Through concepts such as ‘the people’ and ‘journalistic freedom’ the openness of war and the ability of journalists to convey the ‘truth’ of war experiences, in particular the truth of the civilian experience, is conveyed. As shown in the previous chapter, a concern on the part of professional journalists is to show “what’s really going on” (Campbell 2006) during war. This notion of truth being made available is reinforced through the discursive enunciation of concepts of ‘reality’, ‘authority’ and ‘professional methods’ analysed in the previous chapter.

7.6 CONTROL, REGULATION AND EXCLUSION
Alongside demonstrating the role journalists play in presenting and indeed ‘producing’ knowledge through their position as powerful agents, the discourse of news values and newsworthiness also facilitates the separation of journalistic knowledge into discrete bodies of information. On one hand the prominence of the ‘human story’ or the reality of embedded soldiers, articulates the centrality of liberal journalistic concerns. The enactment of a moral identity of the journalist, or simply of a ‘witness’, however separates journalistic knowledge – leaving coverage of the operations and ‘action’ of war, disconnected from the impacts and effects of war on civilian populations. The analysis also demonstrates that ‘power’ as conceived by Foucault (1977; 1981), is not oppressive, in so far as Central Command or embedding was a coercive operation in media management, but rather that in its very openness – its invitation to the world media to attend the infamously Hollywood-designed press centre, and to embed with the military, ‘to facilitate telling American stories’ – power retains the disciplinary capacity to produce meaning consonant with its strategic intent.

An example of this separation of journalistic knowledge is provided by ABC journalist Geoff Thompson’s experiences as an embedded journalist. While travelling with US forces Thompson witnessed the shooting of Iraqi civilians by young, nervous American soldiers manning a checkpoint. This episode has been referred to by several
journalists as signifying the utility of embedding and the willingness of American forces to subject themselves to journalistic scrutiny (Campbell 2006; Harley 2006b). From a normative liberal position, this episode\textsuperscript{31} provides the legitimate grounds for strong criticism and analysis of American military performance, in light of international rules of war such as those enunciated in the Geneva and Hague conventions. In this representation however, the circumstances and events that took place are described, before the episode is ultimately characterised as a “clearly tragic incident” (AM, 10/04/03). Indeed, rather than suggest any possibility of American culpability for this crime, its occurrence is explained away as a consequence of the inherent dangers and confusions of war, not as an entirely preventable result of military incompetence or potentially a war crime:

Linda Mottram: Are you suggesting that these soldiers are trying to cover up for a tragic mistake?  
Geoff Thompson: No, I think what’s happened is that they got very excited and I think that they were very anxious, they were very…basically they were trying to keep the civilian vehicles away (AM, 10/04/03).

That journalists were able to cover these events at all is considered un-problematically as evidence for the progressive media-military relationship instituted through embedding. Nonetheless, such events are characterised as mistakes, which serves to elide responsibility and accountability. As noted in the literature (Reese 2004; Seib 2004; PEJ 2003) and by journalists involved in this study, living, travelling and surviving alongside soldiers almost irresistibly leads to journalistic identification and empathy with the military. This problematic aspect of embedding can be reconsidered. The system of embedding, which disavowed ‘management’ in favour of openness and absence of censorship, nonetheless functions in a disciplinary manner. It permits journalists to fulfil their normative role and function as professionals, yet conditions and disciplines them all the same.

\textsuperscript{31} The killing of civilians by American soldiers, their reaction and the coverage that this event received is the subject of further analyses in subsequent chapters.
Similarly, Centcom was promoted by military officials, not as a heavily controlled information environment, but as a ‘media centre’ where up-to-date information and high-level official military briefings would take place. As General Tommy Franks remarked,

“This platform is not a platform for propaganda, this is a platform for truth and so what I will do is I’ll try to provide you the best balance I can and that is what I have asked that our people here do (AM, 25/03/03).

The consensus among journalists was that, on the contrary, Centcom represented the worst of military control and management. Control was exerted not only through strategically staged and executed press conferences and the strategic release of information, but also through the physical control of journalists and their subjection to military authority. In relation to ‘independence’ – rather than producing substantive critique of military-media relations, the apparatus of control permits the construction of a professional identity in opposition to control; that is, an independent, professional journalist who fights control and asserts independence. Likewise, in relation to news values, or what becomes news, the criticism is not that the controlling, propaganda element of military operations is treated sincerely by journalists and this strategic intent is functional – rather in disciplining and controlling journalists in such ways, they are aware of control, yet become ‘docile’ and ‘useful’ (Foucault 1977) in turn.

7.7 ‘USEFUL’ JOURNALISTS
As noted, Callinan and other journalists found Centcom to be a heavily controlled and restrictive environment. Callinan (2006) has remarked, “It [Centcom] was a very frustrating experience”, “horrific” and “ridiculous”. However, rather than simply reproducing the military perspective and information that was released in press conferences, journalists recognised their professional responsibilities to press military sources for more detail and to glean information from obstinate military spokespeople, performing their normative professional role. As Callinan (2006) comments:

The Australians [military authorities] put up this immense blocking mechanism or defence to try and stop you doing it. But if anything it made people angrier and keener
to get around it. But having said that it was a very effective defence… Whenever you’re put in those circumstances you always think, “it’s my job to get around this stuff, it’s all part of the business”

However, rather than producing a critique of the Centcom military-media management strategies to which journalists were subject, the control and restrictions on information led to journalistic ‘hunger’ for details about military operations. Such control ensured those details released would be immediately published, advancing the Australian military’s interests. As Callinan (2006) has observed of an early press conference given by the Australian military, the tight information control led directly to the reporting of any information concerning the military – ensuring the military’s priority messages were well covered.

Rather than making the ongoing and systemic media management a central aspect of ‘the Centcom story’ however, criticisms of media policy are relegated to the Media section of News Ltd publications, discreetly separated from the main news sections, and featuring other frustrated journalists as sources. This reporting provides a clear example of the effect on war journalism of firm control and strategic release of military information. Callinan’s Centcom reporting was demonstrably sympathetic towards military interests, including profile pieces on the Australian military commander, Maurie McNairn (The Australian, 31/03/03; 14), favourable stories covering both the Australian SAS (The Australian, 21/03/03; World; 5; The Australian, 24/03/03; World; 3) and Navy diver contingents (The Australian, 26/03/03, World; 5) and an Australian Army bombardier critical of anti-war stance of Australian opposition leader, Simon Crean (Weekend Australian, 05/04/03, World; 2). As Callinan comments in retrospect, the “parochial Australian interest” is both picked up by Australian news organisations and the result of information restrictions which allow journalists little material with which to work.

A similar pattern is discernible within the coverage of the Iraq war, from ‘behind enemy lines’ – from those journalists stationed in Baghdad. Wilson, for example, is content to record the drama of the aftermath of the American shelling of the Palestine-

---

32 See ‘On the outside – How truth is caught in the crossfire as journalists fight the military spin’, The Australian, Media Section, 03/04/03, 1.
Meridien Hotel, housing the world’s press corps, rather than to make the American contravention of the laws of war subject to any detailed criticism. Wilson writes that “the balcony was hit by what the Americans later admitted was a blast from one of their tanks” (The Australian, 09/04/03, World; 1). Rather than cover this event which resulted in the death of the Ukrainian cameraman Taras Protsyuk as a significant and important example of either American incompetence or military strategy, the drama of the event is emphasised, with Wilson writing,

We threw on our bullet-proof vests and ran upstairs one flight to see shocked journalists running up and down the corridor screaming for a doctor. I ran up another flight to the 15th floor and there was the same scene of bedlam; journalists bellowing and Iraqi men crying and yelling there was no doctor.

I bolted back to our room to grab my homemade first-aid kit then raced back to room 1503 (The Australian, 09/04/03, World; 1).

Subsequently Wilson’s reporting turned to triumphal accounts of American militarism (The Australian, 10/04/03, World; 1); the dissolution of the Iraqi state (The Australian, 10/04/03, World; 2); the celebration of liberated Iraqis (The Australian, 10/04/03, World; 1) and emerging problems of insecurity in Baghdad (The Australian; 11/04/03, World; 1). As Wilson himself commented, professionalism demands drama;

[the emphasis on the dramatic] is not necessarily an inherently bad thing, you need the drama to get people to read the story, you need some aspect – it’s the basic challenge of journalism to make often uninteresting things interesting. And present it in a way that people will actually read it. It’s no use being worthy, but no one reads your stories (Wilson 2006b).

Considering these brief examples, a more clear conception of the circulation of power within war journalism is possible. As is established at the beginning of this section, the normative, professional role of journalism is enabled through the contemporary organisation and regulation of war journalism; through embedding with military units, journalists are permitted closer to soldiers than any press corps in recent history and their interviews and eyewitness accounts are published relatively free from
draconian censorship and control. Locations such as Central Command provide a legitimate forum for military briefings, accounts and statements. The media management ‘contest’ between journalists and the military enable journalists to discharge their liberal-democratic obligations through the performance of holding military ‘power’ to account. However, this power, granted journalists in their social role as legitimate, skilled witnesses, is one current of circulating power. Indeed, as noted, the overt ‘control’ exercised by military officials, such as the controls relating to embedding and to Centcom have become naturalised through professionalism as “all just part of the job” (Harley 2006a). Further, new journalistic regimes and technologies, such as embedding and satellite communications have been emphasised as offering better opportunities for more dramatic, closer, more real and more instantaneous news production. In this conception technology and access have improved journalism to the extent that its ‘high modern’ values and qualities (Hallin 1992) are evermore perfected, overlooking however the shortcomings of professionalism and its frequent exploitation by military and political power. As this section has argued, it is within this new regime of war journalism that both professional identities are able to be realised and enacted, yet at the same time, ‘docile’ and ‘useful’ (Foucault, 1977) journalists are produced. These ideas are further explored in the following sections that briefly examine professionalism in the context of news institutional arrangements and relations of power.

PART TWO – THE CONTEXT OF POWER

7.8 INSTITUTIONS

This section provides a discussion of the context of power relations in which journalists are located. While journalists possess the ‘power to represent’ reality this is tempered, moderated and constrained by the institutional and administrative needs of their organisation. Although an element of coercive power exists in which journalists are forced into certain roles, it is administrative power which exerts the most forceful influence on journalists. Professionalism is crucially central to the exercise of administrative power, which is exercised through institutional processes rather than
direct command. Within the institutional context of power relations two strands of power are discernible from a brief analysis of the discourse.

Firstly, there is the direct control of news organisations over their employees. Forms of this control include the decisions made by editors and other news managers over the deployment and dispersion of news gathering resources and importantly the extent to which these organisational authority figures provide direction to those correspondents ‘on the ground’. That is – the extent to which journalists are 'managed' rather than autonomous. This form of institutional power, the power to direct and control, can be understood as coercive power. These moments however, of power intervening directly in journalists practice, are contrasted in the discourse with the ‘freedom’ journalists enjoyed from having to conform to an institutionally prescribed mode of reporting. Ultimately, as will be shown, coercive and direct power exerted by news managers is an expression of the administrative power in which the interests of news organisations are embodied and to which journalists are professionally reconciled through discursive articulation. This second strand of institutional power is only visible within this discourse as administrative power which circulates through the various levels of authority within news organisations, is administered and arranged bureaucratically and is inculcated through habituation and training to news organisational norms and values, in processes described by media sociologists (Tuchman 1978; Gans 1980; Reese 1997; Soloski 1997). In other words, central to this form of disciplinary power is the institutional internalisation and normalisation of journalistic professionalism. The clearest examples of the functioning of this form of power are drawn from the decisions made and directives issued by senior editorial figures within the news organisations included in this study.

7.9 COERCION

The following short examples provide an insight into the operation of explicit, coercive institutional power. Mark Willacy, reporting from Baghdad for the ABC in the period immediately pre and post-invasion, and Rory Callinan, reporting from Centcom for News Ltd, tell of being explicitly directed to cover certain aspects of the war, against their
personal, professional news judgement. In both cases the pursuit of these stories resulted in “redundant” (Willacy 2006b) coverage that was characterised by parochialism and in the case of the ABC, pursued in an interest to compete with commercial news competitors.

As Willacy recounts he was explicitly directed to leave Baghdad during the invasion period to report on Australian naval manoeuvres in the Persian Gulf. Willacy (2006a) comments:

To me that was the most boring bloody story I covered in the whole time. And I’ll tell you why, because they [the Australian Navy] were sitting on a billiard flat sea, with their thumbs up their arse and their minds in neutral.

Coverage produced by this trip is anodyne, telling of the Coalition naval forces literally ‘parked’ in the Persian Gulf:

Mark Willacy: From the air, the waters off Iraq look like a giant parking lot for Coalition warships. Cruising slowly up and down the coast are US, British, Australian and even Polish navy vessels.

David McCourt: I have been in the Navy over 25 years and I’ve never seen such a collection of ships in a small patch of water and from, you know, from the perspective of a professional officer it’s just amazing (AM; 31/03/03).

This episode brought Willacy into direct confrontation with his (unidentified) editors in Australia as his autonomous news judgement conflicted with organisational needs, creating lasting professional animosity. As Willacy (2006b) adds:

I tried to argue it very hard and I lost because I sometimes feel that the person who made this call is too busy chasing Channel 9, who had been on the boat a week earlier. In my opinion that makes the story redundant anyway, because it had been done. And that put a bit of tension in the relationship, and sometimes you argue a story so vigorously with someone that it creates tension in the relationship that lasts and in this case it did.
Ultimately however, Willacy was forced to make the trip into the Gulf and to report on naval activities. In similar circumstances Callinan was made to remain at Central Command in Doha while more newsworthy events were considered to be taking place elsewhere. The little information available through military briefings at Centcom was considered to be almost useless, yet Callinan was required by his employer, News Ltd, to remain at Centcom, maintaining the organisation’s war coverage strategy. Callinan recounts:

I was constantly on the phone to News Ltd, saying I need to get out of here, this is ridiculous – the briefings are happening overseas, they’re not happening here. The people who are here, you get very little access to them, it would be much better if we were on the ground, seeing what Australians are doing and they would just be going, “No, this is the situation…” (Callinan 2006)

Again, similar to Willacy’s reporting, Callinan was thus constrained by the organisational needs and intent of his employer, in contradiction of his autonomous, professional judgement. As Callinan makes clear, this contradiction, of institutional needs overriding journalists is not so much an intentional, conspiratorial policy to favour coverage of Australian or Coalition forces, but rather a consequence of the functionalist administration of journalistic resources. That is, contradiction results from the deployment of journalists to pre-conceived news locations or towards fulfilment of organisational coverage strategy. Individual journalists must yield to organisational needs.

As has been noted, in the context of little hard information being made available to reporters, Callinan’s reporting tended to focus on the exploits of Australian “diggers at war”33. As Callinan (2006) reflects:

That’s something I look back on over the stuff I did and think, “Oh, you know, probably might [sic] have used a few less adjectives in some of the stuff. But it is a problem, especially when you haven’t done it [covered the military] before and I don’t think any of the journalists that turned up from Australia had done it before.

---

33 Colloquial Australian term for enlisted soldier or infantryman. See Tranter and Donoghue (2007).
This tendency towards favourable and sympathetic coverage of military forces – the normalisation of militarism (Kellner, 1992) – is not necessarily the product of direct and explicit organisational policy. As Callinan (among others) notes, never was pressure applied to cover the war from a certain political or ideological perspective. Rather, for Callinan, the imbalance of coverage towards Australian forces and the focus of significant news resources on Centcom, for example, resulted directly from attempts to ‘administer’ war journalism, as was Willacy’s experience. Miscalculations and poor judgements on the part of Australia based editors resulted from journalistic/editorial professionalism incapable of adequately understanding, processing and organising the sheer volume of Iraq war news:

You’ve got people who were the foreign editors, who were just being bombarded with so much information and they were having to make decisions really quickly that was putting them under immense pressure…People talk of all these conspiracies with Fox and [Rupert] Murdoch and the rest of it – just in terms of the logistical nightmare of receiving copy from us over there, to try and spin it or direct you to cover a certain angle was just not feasible. I think it was the case that they weren’t set up logistically to handle rapid copy coming in like that (Callinan 2006).

Clearly then it is possible to understand the coercive power of news organisations, rather than a separate category of power to administrative, disciplinary power, but rather as a crude expression of the administration of journalism by organisations and news managers (editors). It is to analysis of this less immediately visible form of power that this section now turns.

### 7.10 ADMINISTRATION

Administrative power in this context is understood as the decision-making power that ‘governs’ (Burchell et al 1991) the production of news and the reproduction of the professional norms and values. In a ‘foreign/war news’ context this administration is conducted at a distance – the reporters and journalists ‘on the ground’ being both physically and, often communicatively separated from the editors and managers to whom they are answerable. In the case of the Iraq invasion the separation was of many
thousands of kilometres and subject to the vagaries of war-time communications. This distance notwithstanding, it is clear that professionalism serves to regulate and administer war journalism. In this context professionalism provides the institutional and professional logic that ensures that the appropriate news is produced and that recourse to management by command (as experienced by Willacy) is largely unnecessary, although at times it is employed to achieve specific strategic aims. As has been shown, little formal direction is provided to ‘autonomous/independent’ journalists beyond occasionally instructing the fulfilment of organisational news strategy. What is clear however is that professionalism is a primary factor in the maintenance and reproduction of institutional discipline in relation to the production of war news.

In the first instance, the ability of news organisations to disperse their news gathering resources (journalists and associated technological infrastructure) effectively is directly contingent on journalistic professionalism. Crucial for editors and associated planning and management staff is the ability of journalists to in produce high quality, consistent and reliable news information often at a great distance and generally with a minimum of instruction or direction (Tuchman 1978). In other words, central to the news organisations proper function is the professional reproduction of its news value system and organisational ethos. As Michael Carey, an executive producer with the ABC’s news and current affairs programming comments, in relation to ensuring quality news ‘feeds’ from war correspondents,

[a]lot of it is just “suck it and see”, you get people who you rely on, people you think are good…They [ABC war journalists] are all very professional, they are all experienced foreign reporters, who hopefully don’t get snowed that easily and understand what their role is and what our role is (Carey 2007).

This perspective is echoed by other editors, for whom professionalism is a primary consideration when considering who should be sent to cover conflict. Here the journalist who has most fully internalised professional and institutional norms is considered the strongest candidate for prestigious overseas assignments. Michael
Gawenda, the editor of the Fairfax broadsheet the *Age* during the study period and the most senior journalist interviewed for this project offers:

[Y]ou [an editor] make the decision on the basis of, especially in a dangerous situation, who has the experience, who is likely to be able to cope with the difficulties that the foreign correspondent in that particular situation is going to confront...but really you’re looking for someone who’s experienced, who’s done this sort of thing before and as far as possible will be able to look after themselves. And someone who is a terrific reporter. And knows the story… (Gawenda 2008).

As Peter Kerr, the *Sydney Morning Herald* foreign editor in 2003 comments:

[A]t the *Herald* we pretty much leave it up to the people we trust in the field, because those people are there because we trust them and for the most part they are the most experienced journalists (Kerr 2007).

From an editorial or production perspective, professionalism is that quality of journalistic ability and character on which an organisation can rely to reproduce a given news organisational perspective. The professional journalist is one who can take care of themselves, who can operate autonomously and can reliably produce news that accords with the institutional norms and values of their organisation. In effect, the professional is one who has internalised the institutional needs to the point where they are fully normalised, journalistic professional needs. It is important to note however, that this internalisation is at times incomplete, as evidenced by Willacy’s confrontation with an ABC news producer described above.

As noted in Chapter Six, for the maintenance of journalistic identity the ability to report independently and autonomously is central. Many journalists interviewed for this project emphasised the lack of pressure placed on them to report the war from a certain perspective or to ‘spin’ what they were reporting. Obviously interference from editors and more senior colleagues or instructions to report in a prescribed manner must be considered a challenge to a journalist’s individual professionalism. Journalistic alignment with organisational needs and values through professionalism then obviates the potential identity crisis that may arise for journalists having to reconcile the institutional demands for conformity with their individual, independent identity.
Ian McPhedran, reporting from Baghdad for News Ltd and in daily contact with Australia, states he received no pressure to ‘spin’ his reporting; “they left that [daily reporting] entirely in my hands because they understood that in a situation like that it’s very difficult for them to second guess what’s actually going on” (McPhedran 2006b). Thompson notes that he was able to resist pressure from producers in Australia to provide live, ‘stand-up’ updates for ABC television news, as it would have produced “facile television” (Thompson 2006), in his opinion. As Jonathan Harley argues, the ABC’s concern was not so much for the public perception of the news product but the political context in which their coverage of the Iraq was to be seen. Indeed, in the immediate post-combat phase of the Iraq war the office of the Australian Federal Minister of Communications, Richard Alston laid several formal complaints against the ABC for bias in its coverage of the Iraq war. Harley argues that in this context the political pressure brought to bear on the ABC has been intimidating:

Australian journalists and editors and producers are increasingly sensitive to how the ABC’s coverage is perceived. There is increasing pressure on the ABC to, pull its punches, to put it frankly...How does that impact a journalist’s coverage of war? I just think is an assault. It has had the effect of undermining the courage and confidence of ABC news and current affairs. I really, really think that that has been both the intention and the effect (Harley 2006b).

By contrast, Campbell comments that overt pressure from the military to present news and information in sympathetic ways, to moderate criticism or to reproduce military ‘spin’ is rejected out of hand by professionalism. He states:

I think it’s like any other story, you don’t care about how the military’s going to react to what it is that you are reporting, if they don’t like it they can lump it. I don’t think anyone who reported war was concerned how the military would react to it as long as your story stands up to scrutiny, then its fine – if people don’t like it that’s their problem (Campbell 2006).

It is a matter of professional pride however that journalists operating ‘on the ground’ were able to provide to their editors and producers ‘good copy’ that satisfies
with the institutional needs and concerns. That is, they produced journalism that was already organisationally ‘aligned’ without having to be directed. As Wilson comments;

…you know I would have written a business report [about Iraq] if I could have, trying to get all different sections of the paper. That one you were talking about, John Feder’s [Wilson’s photographer] technology - that was for the Media section, tailored to various holes in the Australian that can be filled. I always want to get as much in the paper as possible. The way to do that is to understand your paper and its range of interests and hit as many sections as you can (Wilson 2006b).

Thus, a final crucial function of the professional journalist, from both an institutional and individual point of view, is the ability of a war journalist to reliably provide useful news that contributes to news organisational efficiency, productivity and, ultimately, competitiveness. Willacy was ‘ordered’ to chase the ABC’s commercial rivals and Thompson successfully resisted the requests for what he considered to be unimportant, shallow yet dramatic live-updates from the battlefield. Nevertheless, both Thompson and Michael Gawenda of the Age have commented on the importance of keeping up with innovations in technology and coverage formats, such as live battlefield broadcasts and embedded reporting, in order to protect or enhance news organisational impact or relevance. Indeed, such innovations protect journalism’s commodity value in the context of ‘new’ digital media. In relation to embedding Gawenda (2008) states; “the audience demand it [embedding]. And these days the technology demands it”. Thompson (2006) has argued that in the era of ‘YouTube’, non-conventional reporting and digital publishing, ‘access’ is evermore a war journalist’s most significant concern. Michael Carey, an ABC Radio National executive producer, (2007) states:

[Competition with commercial stations] becomes a consideration when you think we are lagging behind other people’s coverage. The ABC justifies itself as the premier electronic news organisation in the country [Australia]. If people are finding they get their information more quickly somewhere else then they probably will.

It is possible therefore to understand the institutional context of war journalism one in which professionalism is relied upon to ensure the reliability and efficiency of news production at a distance. Power, identified by Foucault (1977; 1981), circulates
and is productive. Journalists also possess power, to act within the context provided by their news organisation and importantly to resist the coercive attempts by military authorities to directly intervene in the production of information. Institutional power, as shown, disciplines journalists and ensures their normalised professional function. Here professionalism operates in a number of ways. News managers apply professional considerations in reaching decisions over news-gathering resources and editorial decisions as to what is published and what is not. Professionalism also serves to align journalists to the needs of their organisations, ensuring their reliability and efficiency in producing news, while permitting the maintenance of the individualised, professional identity. In this way, professionalism obscures any differences that may exist and it becomes the degree to which journalist’s subjectivity and autonomy is maintained and one’s ‘usefulness’ to the news organisational strategy overlooked.

The other form of administrative power that is presently of relevance is the more purely bureaucratic power that circulates within news organisations, and serves to select what is eventually ‘made’ news. This is the administrative power that organises and arranges news in accordance with institutional needs, norms and interests. The following brief analysis of the processes and practices undertaken by senior editors in their selection of Iraq war news reveals the organising role played by professionalism. The weakness and contingency of this system is also illustrated. As both Michael Gawenda (the Age) and Peter Kerr (SMH) describe the allocation of resources as a bureaucratic process and value motivated judgement, in which their newspapers sought to maximise the return on their limited investment in coverage. Kerr (2007) describes this process in purely professional terms;

...in terms of goals and aims it was to cover the war as comprehensively as possible and in as balanced a fashion as possible, drawing on all sources of information that were available and anticipating the places that reporters and photographers would have to be, while also guaranteeing the safety of those reporters and photographers.

As Gawenda (2008) states, similar concerns guided decisions at the Age:

We were limited as to how much we could afford to do...The second thing was what other resources could we use – we have access to the Guardian, to the Daily Telegraph,
to the New York Times, and Washington Post, among other things and we wanted to make sure that we used these resources as well as we could within an Australian context.

These decisions, and those directly concerning the production of the newspapers – which news to include and exclude, page layouts, photographs, for example, were made in consultation among the senior editorial and managerial staff, typically the editor, deputy editor, foreign editor, photographic editor, and, in the case of the SMH the Iraq news editor (Kerr 2007; Gawenda 2008). Kerr points out that in order for the proper functioning of a newspaper during an intense news period, such as the brief, controversial and spectacular Iraq war, systematised organisational efficiency is of utmost importance:

[O]nce you’ve got a system in place, there is a system in any newspaper or and media organisation, particularly now that you’re getting more information from wires than you would have, you’re getting more information from people in the field because they have got access to satellite phones and that sort of technology…the filtering process is much the same with any project, but it might be a bit more sophisticated, in terms of what you pick, any particular gatekeeper, whether it is someone monitoring an agency wire, or photographs or someone monitoring reporters in the field, every particular gatekeeper who’s the liaison point person, has to make decisions on the run…(Kerr 2007).

As noted in literature, news production is a rationalised system of which tends to generate standardised, reliable and predictable news, making the efficient and reliable provision of public knowledge possible (Tuchman 1978). In the context of the Iraq war, as a short term, intense and heavily covered conflict, the role of news decision makers is crucial to understanding the ultimate production of news. Michael Gawenda, the Age’s editor during the study period, comments that his opinion, or judgment, was final. Furthermore, editorial disagreements were minimised due to collegial commitments to professionalism. Gawenda comments that as the editor of the Age he would make interventions into the news process “all the time” (2008), whereas Kerr emphasises the team based approach to decision making at the Herald:
So the structure of the team or teams that were in place in Sydney to cover it was fairly sophisticated in terms of having the general run of the way that the news desk gathers and breaking those pages up into ‘pod’ editors, an editor for a package. We might have someone in charge of a page or two pages or four pages. Information gathering happens as it happens on any newspaper anywhere – you gather all your information as early and as best you can and then you sit down with it in editorial conference say, “ok we’ve got this, this and this, you would have heard on radio that this and this, we have reports from London and Washington, we’ve got this person on the ground here, and we consider that – the photographic editor would run through. We had greater than usual access to photographs I think, so that would be a morning meeting and then another early afternoon meeting… (Kerr 2007).

This highly systematised and orderly administration of news production was considered necessary in dealing effectively with the volume of information available to newspaper editors. Here it is possible to discern the administrative workings of professional editorial and managerial power in the organisation of Iraq war news. This orderly and highly rationalised professionalism, for the most part produced news that accorded with institutional norms; “we did pretty damn well” (Gawenda 2008); “I was very proud of the reporting…there’s an immediacy that you can get out of radio, and as I said I think we did that really well…” (Carey 2007).

Nonetheless, such systems, exercising significant generative and productive power with regards to information and accounts of war, are fragile. Just as moments such as conflict between journalists and editors expose the artifice and contingency of independent professionalism, so to do mistakes and errors in reporting or news presentation reveal the shortcomings of the professional administration system. They reveal the fantasy that must operate within this system in order for it to function smoothly. The story of American soldier Private Jessica Lynch and her heavily propagandised ‘rescue’ (Gallagher 2007) by American Special Forces is, in this context, exemplary. As Michael Gawenda concedes, the Age was incautious and overcredulous in its reporting of this story. Importantly however, emphasis is placed upon relying on other people’s reporting rather than on critically assessing the news value and credibility of stories as they are processed. The fault lies not with the sincere efforts of
institutionalised professionalism, but rather with the journalists supplying them with inaccurate information:

There were some stories where I think we should have been more sceptical than we were. There was the story of that young woman, the American – Private Lynch – which we swallowed at first and ran. I think looking back it was probably an improbable story and we should have said "hang on, this is …" But it’s hard at the time, you make a decision, you’re on the spot you’re relying on other people’s reporting, you haven’t got your own reporter there that you can ask, “well, can you confirm this, is this true”. So there were several stories like that, looking back I think we could have been more sceptical about (Gawenda 2008).

Michael Gawenda goes on to directly attribute the misrepresentation of this episode, and the significant propaganda success it delivered the American political-military authorities, to the reporter ‘on the ground’ (in this case John Burns, the New York Times Baghdad bureau chief), on whom the *Age* relied:

It’s very frustrating when you’re running copy from journalists – and I think John Burns is a terrific reporter and has reported on Iraq really well, nevertheless, I could never speak to John Burns…and it was impossible for him, he wasn’t going to talk to some editor in Australia regularly about his coverage. So that’s a huge frustration, you’re running this copy but you can’t talk to the reporter. And you can’t say, “what about this? Why this?” You know? (Gawenda, 2008)

The Jessica Lynch episode provides a clear example of the shortcomings or breakdown of the professional administrative system of news production (other episodes include the misreporting of the fall of Basra). Furthermore, rather than this episode illustrating a systemic weakness, the weakness is individualised; the legitimacy of the news institution is preserved and the criticism directed elsewhere. This is evidenced by Gawenda’s statement of the difficulty of collecting accurate reports and relying on external reporters

Finally, stories and episodes such as this also illustrate the extent to which the professional administration of war news serves to privilege the dramatic and spectacular as it assesses coverage. Several examples have been provided of news organisations
actively pursuing a coverage style which favours dramatic and exciting news items, such as Willacy's deployment to the Persian Gulf and Thompson's encouragement to provide 'live updates'. In several other instances journalists and editors enunciate an institutional preference for spectacular and dramatic coverage. Callinan, it has already been noted, commented that his reporting tended towards the coverage of heroic Australian military operations and the associated military personalities because that was what was published:

The other issue is that the newspapers did pick that sort of stuff [military profiles and features] up and you might have been filing something that was much less like that one day and it's not getting a run, and the next day you file it and it gets a run…(Callinan 2006).

Similarly, as Wilson argues, material that communicates to audiences in easily digestible and accessible ways is inherently attractive to news organisations, leading to a surfeit of exciting, dramatic, amusing and otherwise compelling reporting. As noted, a notorious event during the ‘fall of Baghdad’ was the toppling by American forces of a statue of Saddam Hussein. Initially this event was reported as the spontaneous actions of jubilant, liberated Iraqis (BBC 2003). As was reported in the Australian:

The Baghdad night rang with cheers and chants as the Iraqi capital celebrated the end of a tyrant...The crowds revelled in the cool evening, destroying statues and portraits of Saddam in a repeat of the scene that followed the fall of dictatorship from Romania and the Soviet Union to the Philippines of Ferdinand Marcos...

In Al-Firdos Square, east of the Tigris river crowds were atop a huge iron statue of Hussein, which had been toppled from a crane mounted on a US tank recovery vehicle (Australian, 10/04/03; World; 1).

As Wilson comments, episodes like this appeal directly to institutional needs for dramatic images and accounts of events and are quickly reproduced for consumption:

[I]t was an iconic moment and icons tell stories and people [editorial staff] wanted a moment that symbolised what was going on, like the fall of the [Berlin] wall, the images
we see of people swinging sledgehammers at the wall, were not the first images of the wall being destroyed – the wall had been breached elsewhere. But that’s what we see, as the fall of the wall (Wilson 2006a).

This preference for spectacle over analysis must be understood primarily as dependent on the institutional needs of news organisations and the willingness of professionals to cater to these needs. As has been shown, the bureaucratic process of news production both requires and produces events as news in reliable, easily processed and comprehended forms and avoids the ambiguous, complex or nuanced (McChesney 2003). As Wilson clearly states:

…images and events – they sum things up, it’s not just the visually driven nature of the media. It was an event - the war ended at 3 37pm. They also serve their purposes. That image sums up a broader truth, that Saddam did fall, both his statue and his government…Which is not necessarily an inherently bad thing, you need the drama to get people to read the story, you need some aspect – it’s the basic challenge of journalism to make often uninteresting things interesting. And present it in a way that people will actually read it. It’s no use being worthy, but no one reads your stories (Wilson 2006b).

As has been shown, this preference is explained as symptomatic of the difficulties and realities of reporting war (Gawenda 2008), the product of technological developments (Thompson 2006; Wilson 2006a) or the unreliability of a individual journalist (Gawenda 2008) rather than explaining drama and spectacle as necessarily an organisational need, given commercial competitive pressure to provide the most attractive and appealing news product. The preference for the dramatic and spectacular demonstrates on one hand the weakness of the professional system, yet also illustrates the productive power of professionalism within news institutions to produce and characterise war. Significant problems with bureaucratic approaches to war are seen by news professionals as individuated, differential, yet ultimately minor problems within war journalism, rather than as symptoms of professionalism, as aspects of the systemic whole.

Having provided a brief account of the institutional context of professionalism and
the power news organisations exert in the production of war news, the analysis now moves to how professional journalism operates within the broader contemporary socio-cultural context which has been describe previously. In keeping with the critical intent of this thesis, through this final aspect of the analysis it is possible to understand the embeddedness and functionality of professionalism within the era of neo-liberal globalisation. Here the contemporary ‘conditions of existence’ of journalism are described.

As has been argued, the central discourses of objectivity, independence and news judgement provide professional journalism with its public legitimacy and its claim as a privileged site of public information. Although the notion of objectivity is somewhat unfixed, it has been shown that this discourse nonetheless denotes an approach to the world and a particular treatment of information as factual or non-factual and thus beyond the legitimate attention of journalists. Centrally, objectivity holds ‘reality’ and information derived from it as tangible and directly available to diligent and correctly skilled individuals. Similarly, a discourse of independence enacts a view of professional journalists as providing an unabridged account of reality, not beholden to power and, in journalistic cliché, ‘without fear or favour’. In this sense the independence of a journalist is fundamentally bound to the liberal ideal of individual liberty and their ability to apprehend the world as rational, autonomous agents. Both liberalism and its hegemonic successor, neo-liberalism, are predicated on the inherent rationality of individuals and their ability to make sense of the material world and self-maximise their individual interests through apprehending materiality ‘as it is’. In particular, neo-liberalism holds that the ability of individuals to objectively self-maximise economic opportunity and efficiency (through the mechanism of a ‘market’) results in an increase in the aggregated level of wealth, well-being and beneficial social organisation (Harvey 2005). Similarly, objectivity in journalism holds the through the application of reason and rationality and the individualised capacity for thought and decision making an account of social and political reality ‘as it is’ is produced. Indeed, it is for this inherently conservative stance that professional journalism has been criticised (McChesney 2004b). Liberal journalism, as a product of individualised inquiry, is normatively engaged in the provision of individually consumed information, in keeping with the neo-
liberal value system focused on individualised concerns and in accordance with ‘market’ based preference and demand. Within this scheme it is easy to characterise the shortcomings of war journalism, such as misreporting, as the result of individual failings and of incompletely internalised professionalism (as several interviewees have done), rather than expressing systemic weaknesses.

Similarly, through professionalism the impression of neutral, disinterested observer is cultivated and demonstrated through the well-coordinated and managed antagonism with the military. As argued however, the discourse of independence obscures the normalisation of the military perspective and of militarism generally. Indeed, the routinisation of war reporting obscures both the extent to which journalists lack independence (such as those based either at Centcom or embedded) and that they serve military strategic intent in the war information system – that is, providing an information service for military and political authorities, while simultaneously producing a reliable, easily consumed war product for audiences.

The discourse of news values and newsworthiness in this sense also helps to locate professional journalism within contemporary formations of hegemonic neo-liberalism by articulating what is legitimate and illegitimate in terms of public information. News values, along with the routinisation of war reporting through independent coverage, serve to separate the dramatic/spectacular, the human and the operational aspects of war, making the wholeness of ‘war as policy’ unclear, yet producing for consumption a compelling product to be ‘enjoyed’ by Western audiences. In constructing the war product – as noted in the comments by editors and journalists above – news organisations attempt to extract maximum value from their investment in war through reporting resources, allocations and deployments. Through the efficient, productive dispersion of news-gathering resources and the use of technology, through strategic planning and through exercise of professional judgement a quality news ‘product’ may be created. Commercial considerations, such as competition in the news market, are central in such calculations. At times these logics outweigh a cautious approach to news-gathering, with the rush to compete with other organisations leading to mis-representations in reporting as has been shown was the case with the Jessica Lynch story.
7.11 CONCLUSION

This chapter has demonstrated several aspects of power in relation to professional war journalism. It has been argued professionalism possesses significant power in constructing war news. This chapter has employed the matrix of discursive concepts outlined in chapter six to demonstrate the operation of this form of power. Specifically, journalists, through the professional discourse, are producers of knowledge and are empowered to ‘produce’ the Iraq war for their audiences. Through professionalism journalists construct themselves as operating within the norms of liberal journalism. Through objectivity, independence and news values, journalists are able to demonstrate and perform their professionalism and reinforce their identities as legitimate. Professionalism, however, also enables journalists to ‘overlook’ the extent to which their normative role is compromised through their treatment of certain aspects of reality as news, their division and categorisation of war and their antagonistic, yet dependent relationships with sources. In the case of Iraq this is most often a dependence on the military-political authorities. Indeed, while providing journalists a normative professional identity, the professional discourse can thus be understood as disciplinary as it serves to produce ‘docile’ journalists who are functional within the strategic intent of the military and political authorities. In this sense journalists are reproductive of hegemonic value systems. The discourse of professionalism, it has been argued, accords with the contemporary neo-liberal cultural, economic and political conditions.

This chapter has also contextualised professionalism within the relations of power that characterise the institutional arrangement of journalism. Here, the extent to which journalists are coerced by their employers, to report in certain ways and from certain locations has been analysed. While this chapter found that on occasion journalists are ‘ordered’ to perform certain journalistic tasks, the most significant form of disciplinary institutional power exerted was through professional institutionalisation. In this sense, professionalism is defined by the extent to which journalists reproduce and reinforce news organisational perspectives and values as internalised, self-discipline.

By definition then, a professional journalist is receptive to the forces of disciplinary, administrative power. Again, a journalist is considered professional based on his or her ability to provide news coverage that is consonant with organisational
news values and news strategy.

In these senses, it is possible to understand professionalism as powerfully productive of the professional identity, which ensures the pursuit of the normative goals of liberal journalism, yet obscures the compromised position and relations that characterise war journalism. Furthermore, professionalism, both on an individualised basis, and within news institutions, by definition produces journalists who are 'useful' both within news organisations and within the wider military strategies engaged in by military and political authorities.

In turn, these features of the professional discourse should be considered as functional within the broader cultural-economic conditions of neo-liberalism, in which professionalism 'performs' a normative role for journalists while obscuring and 'overlooking' its complicity within commercial and military processes that aim to produce war as a spectacular and compelling consumer product.
CHAPTER EIGHT - DISCOURSE AND THE LEGITIMATION OF NEWS COVERAGE

8.1 INTRODUCTION

As shown in the previous chapter, professionalism plays a powerful role in shaping journalists' conceptions about themselves and their occupation, their orientation towards their work and their understanding of the correctness of their method. That is, professionalism makes journalists 'useful' (Foucault 1977). Importantly, the discourse legitimates the disparate activities of journalistic and editorial practice. This chapter continues to analyse interview data and incorporates an analysis of news production in order to understand how the professional discourse constructs and legitimates contingent forms of news coverage of war. The thesis has previously traced the emergence, contemporary conditions and general formation of the professional discourse. The analysis now seeks to reveal the operation of the professional discourse and to illustrate how professionalism constructs journalistic knowledge in practice. This chapter argues that professionalism exerts and maintains dominance and control over journalism, in processes of hegemonic meaning and identity construction, while simultaneously obscuring the processes of tangible, material meaning production that characterise news journalism. Here a conceptual model is proposed, drawn from this thesis' discourse-analytic perspective, which analyses the discourse in four separate coverage forms of Iraq war journalism; the 'people's story', the journalist as a 'witness' to war; the journalism of Central Command and lastly, embedded journalism. In interrogating these aspects of war journalism, this chapter seeks to illustrate the hegemony of professionalism, to understand how it is expressed and reproduced and to understand its impact on knowledge of war.

Tuchman used the notion of a “news net” (1978) - a system of values, routines, practices and resources that journalists deploy to ‘catch’ news in a routinised manner to describe the practicalities of daily news gathering. Expanding on this notion, I conceptualise professionalism as discourse and a system of regularities beyond values, ideologies or material resources. This makes viewing professionalism as legitimating and prescribing certain modes of understanding war possible, through which journalistic professionalism itself is reinforced. Here, the discourse enunciates and articulates certain aspects of reality to be of public interest and de-legitimates that which falls
beyond its scope. It does so however, not from an ideological intent to deceive through the production of ‘false consciousness’ (see Chapter Four) within its audience, or unselfconscious ideological reproduction, but rather resulting from contingencies of the professional discourse and its ongoing resonance within Western democratic liberalism.

Professional journalism is concerned with its own discursive needs; authority and establishing and maintaining credibility. In effect the discourse serves to produce and reproduce journalistic control and power to define the practice and discipline of journalism, and thus knowledge about the world. As this chapter demonstrates much of what is made visible in war is reliant on established modes of understanding that reiterate and reinforce cultural norms and values of militarism and provide a dramatic, vivid representation of conflict, consistent with a notion of war as a consumer product. Further, the regulation of journalism through professionalism produces generally supportive and sympathetic representations of militarism consistent with the broader political, military and commercial hegemony of Western power. As this thesis recognises however, following Laclau and Mouffe (1985), hegemonic meanings are contested, and while in the journalism of the Iraq invasion moments of dissent can be identified, the power relations that govern journalist’s behaviour prevent the more widespread enunciation of counter-hegemonic statements about war.

8.2 LEGITIMATING COVERAGE
Firstly this chapter attends to the legitimacy afforded certain forms of coverage by professionalism. As has been noted previously, the concept of newsworthiness is central to professionalism. Journalists emphasise that their expertise and moral bearing legitimates them as ‘agenda setters’ (McCombs and Shaw 1972). Here, newsworthiness encapsulates the conception of certain events, beats, locations and subjects as newsworthy and the exclusion of competing ‘stories’ as uninteresting, irrelevant or illegitimate. Importantly, through a specific dispersion of both physical and cognitive resources of news making (Tuchman 1978), in accordance with discursive needs, certain aspects of the Iraq war are ‘made real’ for news audiences by ‘ordering’ (Foucault 1994) into specific categories of coverage, while others remain unordered, unilluminated and in effect, invisible.
Within this definition of appropriate news, three notions are central. Firstly, that the coverage of the ‘people’s war’ and the human story of Iraq is the most legitimate story to cover during the war. Secondly, that journalists should ‘bear witness’ to important events, by implication acting as the world’s moral watchdog during times of war and conflict and acts as a conduit for this ‘reality’ to be transmitted to audiences. Lastly, the geography and space of war and the distribution of news gathering resources within it (the ‘news net’) creates news locations, from which news emanates, leaving voids and non-news locations and literally ‘unreal’ aspects of war.

8.3 THE PEOPLE’S STORY
The ‘people’s war’ is a resonant image and construction that is naturalised by the same moral concern and bearing that supports humanitarian intervention in conflicts in defence of universal human rights. As identified in the previous chapter, ‘the people’ is a crucial, central concept in liberal political theory and discourse, in which moral and political authority is invested in the collectivity, rather than in other interests and institutions, such as ‘the state’, or private interests (Siebert et al 1956). In war, as conceived by liberal, professional journalism, primacy is accorded to interests and experiences of civilians over the interests of other actors in the conflict. This concern is a common theme in the interview discourse and establishes civilians as a central legitimate feature of the Iraq story.

Conversely, the concern for civilians establishes journalists as independent from state and military power, as a means of expressing their identity. Importantly, this concern for and statement of professionalism legitimates a problematic approach to war coverage and it highlights an immanent contradiction within professional journalism. Professionalism, reliant on truthful, factual representations taken from foreign, dangerous and challenging environments, slips easily into using established stereotypes and well-worn clichés when covering civilian stories, rather than providing insightful, thoughtful and often difficult representations. The power of professionalism, as identified in the previous chapter, is such that representations pass un-interrogated into print and broadcast, normalising clichéd, superficial reporting. This is considered problematic. As noted in the previous chapter, journalist’s are ‘trusted’ to produce high
quality information, and professionalism provides the assurance on which this trust relies.

Reporting from Baghdad, News Limited’s Ian McPhedran (2006b) considered telling a human story “the obvious choice” in conveying the reality of wartime. Considering a strategic overview or broader coverage of the US invasion unworkable given the difficulties and limitations in reporting from Baghdad, McPhedran discusses keeping his reporting personal, providing a relevant perspective where there are “not too many options” (2006b). Clearly, given the security environment in Baghdad, broad coverage choices were determined by circumstances and expediency (availability of sources, safety considerations). Within this calculation however, a moral outlook that attends to the experiences of the Iraqi ‘people’ is stated in interview discourse as a centrally important aspect of a journalist’s approach. A journalist should monitor the effect of war on civilians before, during and after the coalition invasion, acting as a witness to events. The ‘people’ are constructed as the most genuine, authentic voices to be represented during the war.

Peter Wilson, travelling independently in southern Iraq, focused his reporting for News Limited specifically and purposefully on the ‘people’s war’. Both he and McPhedran state ‘the people’ provide the most legitimate sources of the ‘true war experience’. Wilson’s intent is pragmatic (he talks of “adding-value” to news reporting by doing something the wire services and larger organisations were not) as well as being morally motivated to illuminate the experiences of Iraqi civilians. Rather than casting ‘ideological’ judgements about the correctness, or otherwise, of the war, Wilson’s focus is on remaining resolutely professional through assiduous cultivation of the independent journalistic archetype of a morally driven, courageous and ideologically neutral identity.

Of seventeen stories by Ian McPhedran published in The Australian and the Weekend Australian between 20 March and 15 April, 2003, five deal directly with the experiences of Iraqi civilians and their attitudes and experiences during war. The remaining articles focused variously on McPhedran’s personal experiences, the Iraq government, the US and Australian military and other issues, including McPhedran’s expulsion from Baghdad. Similarly, reporting for the ABC’s AM and PM radio shows
Mark Willacy made nineteen broadcasts concerning Iraq in the same period, only three of which were directly including or covering what may be termed ‘people’s stories’, primarily events concerning the relief of Um Qasr, the strategically important southern Iraqi port city. By comparison, thirteen broadcasts focused primarily on military issues, either Coalition or Iraqi – subject matter that while not illegitimate, has been de-emphasised in favour of civilian coverage. It is argued ‘the people’ feature more prominently discursively than literally; pointing to the importance of this category for the professional identity.

Peter Wilson, asserting the explicit intention to report on the war’s impact on Iraqi civilians, was arguably best placed to do so, travelling independently through Southern Iraq and with the services of both a photographer and an interpreter. Of the thirty-one stories he published in the *Australian* and the *Weekend Australian* during the period of major combat operations and invasion, twelve focused on Iraqi civilians, either quoting locals directly, or featuring them prominently in his stories as a result of his commitment and his circumstances. Other areas covered included the military strategies and specific events of both the Iraqi and Coalition forces, and Wilson’s own personal experiences, including his arrest by Iraqi authorities and transportation to Baghdad. The ‘people’s’ story comprised the largest subsection of his reporting.

This humanitarian focus in reporting receives powerful discursive expression. The moral dimension of revealing the human story is bound to the notion of ‘bearing witness’, a central aspect of professionalism, implying journalism’s truth function. As noted, discursively, ‘truth’ is constructed as flowing from ‘the people’. The civilian experiences and efforts to cope with war thus provide then the most true and morally legitimate perspective on war, rather than the perspectives of either military or civilian authorities. The ‘people’ is a powerful discursive ‘concept’ (Foucault 1972) or ‘empty signifier’ (Laclau and Mouffe 1985) of pure, democratic, human morality and authenticity, powerfully deployed as inherently legitimate within the liberal, professional model. Furthermore, a wide variety of journalism may be legitimated through invoking a commitment to the ‘people’s story’. As has been noted elsewhere, those journalists who conceived of their professional obligation to focus on the civilian experience were concerned to tell the story of the war “as it really is”, as opposed to the managed
relationship that was in place between the military and the media, either embedded or at Central Command’s Media Centre (Centcom).

Problems emerge however, when a closer investigation of news discourse is made into the sort of truth-meanings that are created through these journalists and their moral concern for the ‘people’ as the most legitimate journalistic subject. McPhedran’s reporting, for example, uses a narrative, descriptive style that is something of a departure from the normative, often terse ‘hard news’ writing style:

\[E\]xplosions could be heard on the outskirts of the city and at 9.08pm a large building just across the river, close to one of the city’s seven bridges across the Tigris was hit by a cruise missile. The faint whirr of its propulsion system was followed by the loud roar of the blast from its 500kg warhead. The building, known as the Palace of the End, houses one of Saddam’s most notorious torture facilities. It was immediately engulfed in flames as a large plume of black smoke drifted across the perfectly still Tigris and reflected the entire scene (Weekend Australian, 22/03/03: 4)

Although such writing offers a colourful description of the drama of war, a similar approach to the experiences of Iraqis tends towards stereotypical characterisations; a fatalistic population putting “their fate in the hands of God” (The Australian, 20/03/03: 1).

The people remain remarkably calm and although some have built or renovated underground shelters, most have put their fates in the hands of their God; simply gathering in their homes and hoping for the best.

“Inshallah, we will survive”, one man said. Many are reluctant to enter government shelters, built mainly for chemical and nuclear attack, because the US bombed a civilian shelter in 1991 killing 408 people, most women and children. They realise diplomacy has had its last chance and that the US-led invasion will not waiver.

“Bush wants to kill us all”, said one street vendor as he looked skywards. (Australian, 20/03/03; World; 1)

Although a narrative reporting style does offer the possibility of insights into the nuance and subtlety of Iraqi public opinion and local reaction and this report does mention the
Gulf War atrocity of a civilian shelter being bombed by the Coalition, McPhedran is content to describe the reaction of Iraqis to their circumstances as simply as is possible. This reporting relies largely on caricature. Here the ‘reality’ of war is reduced to rather simplistic local assertions of Iraqi defiance or despair. This tendency is legitimated by appeals to the difficulties in reporting on war (McPhedran 2006a).

“Futility is the dominant emotion in Baghdad these days...you can’t help wondering: What’s the point?” writes McPhedran (The Australian, 21/03/03: 1) of Iraqi attitudes. He describes defiant young militiamen, women and older Iraqis using the same terms and context, describing them as invoking both Saddam Hussein and God in proud defence of their city (The Australian, 26/03/03: 1), angrily denouncing American imperialism and mourning their dead with despair. A typical scene illustrates this succinctly, mobilising many Western stereotypes concerning Middle Eastern fatalism, passion, religious irrationality and inherently violent culture:

Faris Asheed Ismail lost his cousin, a father of four, in the attack. “Only God can help us respond to this,” he says wiping tears from his cheeks.

Sadness and bewilderment quickly gave way to anger. Some ran to join the chanting mobs of Fedayeen militia baying for the blood of those responsible for this tragedy. One young man held up a severed hand, shaping its fingers into a grotesque victory sign. “See Mister – this hand will crush the Americans and the British,” said Sami Walid as a group gathered around him. (The Australian 28/03/03: 3)

Lurid descriptions of Saddam Hussein, his government and policies reinforce the ‘otherness’ (Said, 1997) with which Iraq and Iraqis are characterised. For McPhedran, Iraqi public buildings are “palace lairs” (The Australian, 22/02/02: 4), Iraqi government spokespeople are deluded and ridiculous (The Australian, 27/03/03: 3; Weekend Australian, 29/03/03: 3) - and the civilian militia a ‘dad’s army’. “Unlike the British comedy series, in which Mainwaring’s doddering band of aged warriors make the locals shudder at the thought of the thin grey line, these guys mean business. “Who do you think you are kidding, Mr Bush?” could be their theme song” (The Australian, 1/04/03: 1).
Although McPhedran agrees in interview that a sarcastic attitude towards Iraq runs contrary to the ethos of objective impartiality and detachment, it is argued that given the situation as a journalist in Baghdad, such characterisations are impossible to avoid\textsuperscript{34}. “You do sort of fall into that, given the sort of people that you’re dealing with and the propaganda that they are trying to peddle...this is not a Sunday school picnic. This is a dictator and he’s brutal and that’s the way it is. And I don’t think that’s propaganda, I think that’s accurate” (McPhedran 2006b).

Reality then becomes easily digestible and simplified as complex issues and events are articulated in culturally resonant language and easily understood ways of speaking about war. The tropes used by McPhedran are readily understood by Australian audiences habituated into understanding Iraq through a persistent frame of evil despotism, backwardness and fanaticism, established in popular Gulf War (1991) discourses (Kellner 1992; Taylor 1998) and which persistently characterise Western coverage of the Middle East generally (Said 2003; 1997). In McPhedran’s professional conception, what he could witness constituted his reality and simplistic caricatures filled in for substantive understandings and insight concerning the condition of Iraqi society, reinforcing established stereotypes. In this sense the journalistic moral interest in the “people’s war” and “bearing witness” to real events loses its power when what is witnessed is re-communicated using established stereotypes and persistent orientalism (Said 2003). Nowhere in this thesis’ survey of Australian news material are comparable lurid descriptions of Western authorities or forces found.

The process of representing the ‘human story’ of Iraq is a complex process through which professionalism, with its concern for truth and reality, guides the reporter. However, the question remains, can professionalism, with its interest in revealing Iraqi anger, misery or joy actually explain the experiences of war, beyond the dramatic and often violent representations? As evidenced above, what is witnessed as ‘real’ is highly dependent on the interpretation and representation of a given journalist. For both Willacy and Wilson the professional model continues to hold the key for a ‘truthful’ and ‘real’ understanding. Again the human angle is considered the most legitimate.

\textsuperscript{34} Willacy by comparison argues the Iraqi leadership ought to be treated with seriousness and respect given their power and ruthlessness.
Although being in Iraq necessitated reporting official pronouncements, Willacy (2006b) argues, “I wanted to tell the story of the ordinary people…I want to get out and talk to real Iraqis”. Likewise Wilson’s personal goal was to convey some truth about the Iraqi experience, “like with any story no matter how complicated or esoteric the issue, if you humanise it then it’s going to reach your readers much more easily” (Wilson 2006b). Thus the ‘people’s story’ is enunciated as a legitimate, ethical and practical means of reporting the ‘reality’ of war.

Difficulties remain however, as evidenced by McPhedran’s journalism, in conveying this reality, whatever one’s intention. Does a detached and impartial reporting style, as demanded by the professional model, reveal the truth of experience? For Willacy it can, when applied in the correct manner – being well prepared and well connected for one’s assignment. “You’ve got to have the background in the culture, I had a little bit of a background in Arabic, having been to Iraq a couple of times before the war had helped me,” argues Willacy (2006b). Similarly, Wilson was able to hire an Arabic fluent Lebanese/Canadian interpreter, Stuart Innes, allowing him to communicate freely with Iraqis. For both journalists the difficulties in reporting the ‘people’s story’ paled in comparison to the restrictive, stultifying and single perspective assignment at either Centcom or as embedded with American military units. Several of Wilson’s stories featured Iraqis as the primary sources and focus. Being equipped with an interpreter meant Wilson had the potential to go beyond crude caricatures and attempt to reveal Iraqi concerns more deeply. A typical passage:

“Africa has promised us food, democracy medicine, water, everything”, said a 38-year-old father of four. “So far we have nothing.”

Three men were brave enough yesterday to go to the British military command on the edge of town to report the names and addresses of Ba’ath party loyalists. “At night the party members come out and give each other support and threaten the rest of us,” said one of them. “They are armed with guns and grenades and none of them have been caught yet.” (The Australian, 28/03/03: 1)

A degree of appreciation for the subtlety of the Iraqi situation is clear in Wilson’s writing, which is explained in part by his freedom as a ‘unilateral’ journalist and his being
accompanied by an Arabic speaking interpreter. Nonetheless, Wilson (2006b) concedes the limitations of applying the practices of objective journalism to the complexities and confusions of war afflicted his reporting. “By definition,” he argues, “you’re going to give [only] a bit of the picture; you’re going to give what you see. That’ll be limited to where you are and the people you come across. You’ve got to acknowledge that it is not going to be an overall, universal objective picture, but you can do that objectively, if you are determined to write what you see” (Wilson 2006b). This enunciation of professionalism illustrates well the contradiction at the heart of journalism and the extent to which professionalism tries to obscure it. Here, objectivity is articulated as meaning the honesty of subjective experience, rather than an objective description of independent reality. Yet, the liberal ideal, that truthful representation and an independent reality can be apprehended is maintained. Wilson (2006b) is at once both sceptical of the abilities of objective journalism, yet unable to discount it entirely as doing so leaves a yawning epistemological hole that no other professional model can fill.

Tensions exist between the competing values of professional detachment and of humanistic compassion and empathy. Although committed to professionalism Willacy considers sympathy with “ordinary Iraqis” who were no different from people anywhere, except, “the difference was they were under the gun and they also had their president who could knock on the door in the middle of the night and drag them out…I felt that these people had been through a lot and were about to go through a lot more” (Willacy 2006b). Thus a concern for ‘the people’ is enunciated as a central concern. In his broadcasts for ABC radio however, Willacy made little of the ‘people’s story’, only three of his stories during the invasion period directly covered the conditions in Iraq for civilians. Rather, the majority of Willacy’s radio reports concerned the conduct of the military campaign generally, pronouncements of both the Iraqi and Coalition authorities and his own varied observations and experiences.

Thus, there is a disconnection between these reporter’s interview representations of their own work and an independent interpretation of what was actually produced and published, or in some cases, broadcast. Such an inconsistency merely illustrates further the power of discourse to construct for journalists a set of ideals, professional
values and an identity seemingly consonant with professional norms, yet in practical reality quite unrelated. Rather, the professional discourse serves as a legitimating scheme for a variety of representative practices. Within this interpretation, discourse has produced both an idealised version and journalism’s practical realities.

8.4 JOURNALISTS AS ‘WITNESS’

This section examines the extent to which the articulation and identity of a journalist as a witness to events serves to further legitimate certain aspects of wartime reality. As emphasised by Willacy’s reporting above, the discourse of objectivity demands fairness and even-handedness towards sources, effectively rendering non-objective reporting illegitimate and transgressive (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2003). This approach has been criticised for its favouring of official, institutional and powerful social actors. This tendency of the professional journalist has been identified and is a primary criticism of the professional model (McChesney 2004a). Willacy’s reporting of the so-called ‘Basra up-rising’ provides a good example. Early in the invasion of Iraq, an anti-government rising of the predominantly Shi’a Muslim population of Basra was a widely anticipated event both by the media and the military. This anticipation of an uprising led to misreporting and incorrect accounts of Shi’a rebellion. Confusion, the so-called ‘fog of war’, at times hangs over the battlefield, clouding judgements and making communications difficult. Nevertheless, there is also a tendency for reporters, especially in the context of rolling, high volume news and saturation coverage, with its demands for a constantly updated news stream, to report events that are improperly confirmed and reports that are poorly substantiated or corroborated, and often speculative (Cottle 2006; 93). Willacy’s reporting of the ‘Basra rising’ was just this:

Now we’ve heard that only about one thousand so-called Iraqi irregular troops were holding out in Basra...now it appears the general population has turned on those irregular soldiers. Those irregulars have responded with mortars against the protesters and now we’re hearing that the British forces are shelling the Iraqi troops to try and protect the civilians who are rising up. (AM, 26/03/03).
Similar accounts were published widely (BBC 26/03/03; CNN 26/03/03). The “Basra uprising” is, however, widely understood not to have taken place. Rather, this episode illustrates the operation of the echo-chamber and amplifier effect whereby news agencies report and amplify each other’s reports, a weakness in professional journalism gainfully exploited by the US government in the lead up to the Iraq invasion (Mooney 2004). In such situations news becomes a circularity of quote and counter-quote among news agencies, no longer rooted in a tangible reality, but a semi-fictionalised and speculative exercise. The credibility of news accounts however, and believability, stems from is construction and presentation in professional news discourse, with the journalist-witness as its central figure. Although this issue was not discussed with Willacy in interview, Callinan provides insight into the ease with which the echo-chamber effect can occur. As Callinan (2006) states:

And that [the fall of Basra] was one the one thing I think they [News Ltd editors] did get wrong. But I think it was the case that they weren’t set up logistically to handle rapid copy coming in like that. It might have been they couldn’t change the story in time. I don’t think there was any great conspiracy, but I think they might have seen it on the wire services that, “hey Basra’s fallen” [sic] but that was completely false and I was quite annoyed

In Callinan’s account, this failure of the journalistic process resulted from the normal editorial system being overloaded by the volume of Iraq war material. However it is also possible to understand the system being overwhelmed due, in part, to its own norms. As Callinan (2006) remarked, the competitive pressures of the news business lead to “foreign editors who were being bombarded with so much information and they were having to make decisions really quickly that was [sic] putting them under immense pressure” which ultimately led to the publication of inaccurate reports. Here the misreporting of Basra is understood, not as representing the ‘fog of war’ and the inability of journalists and editors to keep on top of complex events, but as representing a contradiction and tension in journalism production between the demands of accuracy and competition.
Crucial to credibility is the journalist’s claim on privileged access to the knowledge they are imparting, most commonly understood as the journalist’s role as ‘witness’ to events, to the “reality on the ground” (Campbell 2006). This notion is central to the professional conceptions and discourse of all journalists interviewed who variously asserted to report only, “that which you know to be true” (Thompson 2006) and, “just to write what you see” (Wilson 2006b). McPhedran (2006a) argues, “but you have to be very careful that you are actually seeing what you purport to be seeing, and what they (authorities) purport you are seeing, you have to take a very, very critical eye to what you are being shown and what you’re hearing”. Such statements enunciate a difficult epistemological position for journalists confronting newsworthy reality; they must faithfully record independent ‘reality’, and only those ‘truthful’ aspects and they must be careful and critical in their doing so. By contrast, the consequences and conditions of their judging newsworthiness, their understandings of truthfulness and their critical energies are overlooked as contributing to reality’s construction.

The act of professional witness produces news-reality for news consumers. Journalist’s experiences are able to become the story, its quality and value are contingent on their professionalism. Indeed this aspect of news production makes clear a central theoretical point. Social meanings, our lived reality, do not exist outside of discourse (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). In this case, the events of war, as a material social reality, do not come into existence outside of professional journalistic discourse for the consumers of war news. Other examples of this contingency include those ABC journalists (Willacy and Bormann especially) who had been in Iraq and were removed as the invasion began due to security concerns. Similarly, McPhedran was deported from Iraq to Jordan for contravention of reporting regulations, and the Centcom journalists chafed under the restrictions and limited access to information that was emblematic of the Centcom experience. Nonetheless, professionalism, and its claims on authority and the legitimate right of journalists to report, comment and speculate as witnesses and commentators, exerts a powerful influence. The result can be at times alarming, when the norms of professionalism and its concern for truth, honesty and accuracy are held as central. Examples of speculative and inaccurate reporting abound in wartime; the Basra ‘uprising’ being just one, the contrived story of Private Jessica
Lynch’s and her rescue another. Embedding has come under specific attack for heralding a new era of up-close war journalism that, while rich in detail, is poor in substantive knowledge of the reality of war (Cottle 2006; Reese 2004; Seib 2004). Criticisms of embedding focus on the limited perspective, military control (Johnson and Fahmy 2005; 303) and journalistic form that presents confusion, disorientation, fast moving and poorly understood events simply and often stereotypically, as news (Seib 2004; 55; PEJ 2003). As shown however, embedding has been articulated as possessing retains professional legitimacy, as it facilitates the primary journalistic task of witnessing.

Willacy’s circumstances provide another illustration of the conflicts and inherent tensions within the professional scheme. As this episode makes clear, the interests of professional independence and institutional dictates are at time contradictory. These contradictions are overlooked however and find remarkably uncomplicated expression in news. Rather than reporting non-newsworthy events, professionalism legitimates other sources of news and information as newsworthy, at times contrary to an individual journalist’s news sense. Contradictions can result in mundane events and occurrences being articulated as news. This demonstrates the extent to which the power relations within news organisations may determine the production of news and how professionalism in journalism overlooks these contradictions.

At the height of the Iraq invasion, in late March and early April 2003, Mark Willacy was sent by the ABC into the Persian Gulf to report on the activities of Australian minesweeping and support vessels, an assignment he calls, “…the most boring bloody [sic] story I covered the whole time” (Willacy 2006b). For Willacy the professional role had been inverted, having been sent to cover a non-story, while, “I could hardly wait to get back into Iraq to do some more reporting, which I did because that’s where the story was…I was on the bloody Kanimbla [sic], the Americans were trying to secure Baghdad and that was when the seeds of the insurgency were planted, during that period” (Willacy 2006b). As previously noted, according to Willacy (2006b), the producer who sent him into the Gulf was, “too busy chasing Channel 9, who had been on the boat a week earlier”. Willacy’s dispatches were accordingly anodyne; “From the air, the waters off Iraq look like a giant parking lot for Coalition warships.
Cruising slowly up and down the coast are US, British, Australian, and even Polish navy vessels...” (2006b).

This situation and that of mis-reporting the Basra-uprising are explained by the understanding of the discourse presented by this thesis. The naturalised liberal democratic ideal of accessing knowledge and witnessing events so to be able to convey the truth of their meaning is clearly evident in Willacy's remarks, “I don’t think I was going to win a Walkley award for sitting on the Kanimbla eating duck a l’orange in the Ward Room” – by implication a Walkley could have been won, and indeed was won, by getting closer to the story (Willacy 2006b). Here ideals collide with the pragmatic journalistic needs and requirements of keeping up with the competition (rival networks), providing parochial coverage that an Australian audience will find appealing and being subject to institutional directives, rather than fulfilling the normative professional role. Thus the limits of journalistic power are illustrated as individual professionalism conflicts with the organisational requirements and priorities of news institutions. In this instance the authority and credibility of a journalist is leveraged by news organisations to achieve credibility and legitimacy for a professional performance intended not to further public understandings, but to ensure competition with commercial rivals is maintained.

As shown, established forms and practices, such as the radio interview and feature broadcast further encourage, if not wholly require, journalists to project themselves as engaging with important events, conveying valuable information and providing a useful service to the public as informed witnesses. These news forms demand that information of events and issues that journalists may know or care little about must be reported and that journalists should strike an authoritative tone and speculate, or alternatively portray non-news as important and newsworthy. In this sense, redundant reporting, such as Willacy's from the Kanimbla, gives an example of non-news being articulated, through professionalism into public information. Further, this episode demonstrates clearly the extent to which news values and substance are compromised by the pursuit of commercial imperatives, such as seeking to replicate

---

35 The Walkley Awards are the Australian media industry’s annual awards for excellence in journalism, administered by the Walkley Foundation.
and follow a competitor’s news agenda. This section now moves to a discussion of the legitimation of the news locations of Centcom and embedding.

8.5 CENTRAL COMMAND

The journalism produced from the Central Command Media Centre, provides deep insight into the contradictions and paradoxes of professionalism. This heavily controlled and regulated media environment at first appears would seem repellent to professionalism. Yet this pseudo-event (Molotch and Lester 1974) *par excellence* managed to garner significant credibility and legitimacy from the global media, who attended in great numbers. Central Command was also the site of contested and competing discourses and of divergences between public news discourse and the lived experience of journalists. These aspects of the Centcom experience are evidenced by the representations offered in the interview discourse and demonstrate clearly the difficulties journalists face when contemplating critical articulations that challenge either the dominance of American military perspectives, or more subtly, the discipline professionalism and professional conduct. However, as with the above example, professionalism ensures established news forms and conventions are adhered to. By critically interpreting the journalism of Central Command is it possible to perceive the extent to which journalists become themselves subject to administration, both through physical and informational control exerted by military officials (as stated in the embedding guidelines, see Whitman 2002), and through their adherence to constricting professional discourse. At Centcom, for example, competing discourses were evident, such as operational discourses of daily military successes, the larger narrative of American righteousness and the ‘media story’ of journalist’s frustrating experiences at Central Command. The efforts of media managers and military public relations officials to control information and to assert and articulate a strategically crafted version of reality was however largely effective. Although journalists complained about access to information they did complain not about the quality information itself or the strategic purposes for which it was intended. The broader activity of favourably structuring

---

36 Approximately 700 foreign media personnel attended Centcom during the combat operations phase of the Iraq war, 2003 (Wolff, 2003).
representations of war for the consumption of the (largely) Western public went largely unexamined by Australian journalists. On occasion Centcom information strategies were called into question. However, the competing discourses of the ‘media story’, which detailed the frustrations and exploitation of the media corps, and the ‘operational story’, which detailed the prosecution of war were kept entirely separate. Again this provides an example of professional journalism privileging given understandings (that war can be understood and known through the prism of Centcom) and relegating potentially critical or unconventional perspectives (the treatment of media and the managerial structuring of reality) to the margins. Professional practices enforce an artificial segregation of information into discreet typologies, rather than drawing on the Centcom experience as a whole or journalist’s subjective experiences. Centcom provides insight into the administration and control of information (journalism) by military power yet shows how this is done in a manner appealing to professional journalism – through press conferences, information releases and stage-managed briefings. Although this produces a disciplined and ‘useful’ journalism, journalists are not rendered completely powerless. Through the articulation of an antagonistic discourse, space can be created in which to cultivate an opposed journalistic identity. While this thesis identifies the conditions of this possibility, it is argued that professionalism, as a hegemonic discourse restrains the emergence of a truly counter-hegemonic journalistic identity.

American media critic Michael Wolff (Wolff 2003b) notoriously introduced a critical perspective into the Centcom reporting discourse by asking the briefing general what purpose reporting from Centcom held when there was so little of any value being divulged. As Wolff writes;

> Everybody here was having the same perfectly Groundhog Day experience…The purest form of reporting: armies were moved, weapons deployed, kill counts tabulated. Nothing postmodern about a war reporter. Events needed to be confirmed and recorded. But behind this stripped-down facade, invisible to the public, was a secret, very pleasant theatre of the absurd.

The question, it turned out, spoke powerfully to people who think this whole thing (not just the news conference, but, in some sense the entire war) is phoney, a set-up, a fabrication in which just about everything is in service to unseen purposes and agendas…But it seemed to speak
even more dramatically to people who think the whole thing is real, pure, linear, uncomplicated, elemental. For the former I'd addressed something like the existential issue of our own purposelessness, but for the latter, I seem to have, heretically, raised the very issue of meaning itself (Wolff 2003 )…

The ABC’s Jonathan Harley perceived these stage-managed qualities of the media centre clearly, however a sense of the ‘theatre of the absurd’ was not articulated into his reporting. Centcom was divided into two realms; the media ‘world’ of daily briefings and press conferences and the operational ‘world’ which remained largely unknown to the assembled press, other than as represented by the media managers and military PRs. Rather than question and investigate the tension between the ‘official line’ and the self-reflexive understanding of Centcom that Wolff introduces, Harley conceives of the professional role to “dis-assemble” [sic], or interpret for the audience the information presented by military officials. This role is articulated as fulfilling the traditional Fourth Estate role of the press as a monitor of power. However, the Fourth Estate role is enacted without substantially questioning the forms of knowledge and the journalistic and military discourses emanating from Centcom. Essentially, the role of the journalist is to establish the flow of information, rather than to question the processes and motivations of information production. In this scheme the ‘hard news’ aspects of Centcom are kept separate from the media story, or the information management aspects of the operations. A typical report combined commentary and sound bites from official sources as the following illustrates:

Jonathan Harley: Nearly three days after launching the assault on Iraq, the Commander of Coalition forces began his media offensive.

Tommy Franks: Let me begin by saying this will be a campaign unlike any other in history. A campaign characterised by shock, by surprise, by flexibility, by the employment of precise munitions on a scale never before seen, and by the application of overwhelming force.

Jonathan Harley: General Tommy Franks’ armoured columns are systematically sweeping across the breadth and depth of the country. But his troops’ widening net has not yet revealed any weapons of mass destruction.
Tommy Franks: One would expect that weapons of mass destruction would be perhaps found in certain parts of the country, and that is work that lies in front of us, rather than work that we have already accomplished.

Jonathan Harley: As for whether Saddam Hussein is dead or alive?

Tommy Franks: Actually I have no idea where he is right now. I suppose, I suppose we'll know in the days ahead, and that's the best answer I can give you.

Jonathan Harley: the 50-minute press conference included grainy black and white video material of air strikes, on what was described as Iraqi positions, as well as fuzzy aerial photos, supposedly showing lines of 700 Iraqi soldiers who've deserted their military equipment, and are waiting for Coalition forces to arrive and there were photos of a tugboat with floating mines, just off the coast of Iraq, some of the 139 mine so far intercepted under Australian command. None of the presented material could be verified. It was a tightly managed media event, with the message that Iraqis should welcome the invading forces. (AM, 23/03/03)

Here Harley enunciates his awareness of the news conference as a “media event”, employing light irony to compare a media campaign to a military one. This report does not draw critical attention to Central Command itself, as Wolff does, nor is Harley willing to counter Franks’ account of the war so far (notably journalists interviewed praised the efforts of others to ask critical questions at Centcom). And, although Harley draws audience attention to the public relations aspect of wartime briefings, which audiences have largely come to expect (Harley, 2006a), these are not dwelt upon and are relegated to secondary importance when compared with the official military version of events. This is professional journalism *par excellence*, where Harley is seen to be assiduously avoiding controversy or sensitive, critical perspectives, yet at the same time remains detached from the military version of events through the use of qualifiers, such as “described as” and “none of the presented material could be verified” (Harley 2006b). Indeed, as Harley argues his professional role is not to ‘make the media the story’ or to draw attention to the stage management. Rather the journalist’s role is to report the war, aware of information management, but not to question the artifice in-depth. “The media story is always part of the story, the military presentation is always part of it, but it’s never, well, it’s rarely the story”, argues Harley (2006b) justifying this approach and
enunciating a differential logic (Laclau 2005) which maintains the discursive distinction between legitimate news and marginal narratives. Through differential logic professionalism is maintained and conventional professional practice is articulated as normal and correct.

As Harley (2006b) argues, “when you’re in Centcom and you’re reporting from military spin central…you have to work it into your copy, but you can’t just make it your copy because it just becomes repetitive…”. Such an orientation towards one’s material however ensures journalists will treat information as events and news releases, rather as contextual, processual or part of broader news management strategy. Centcom reporting then can easily be understood as encouraging the established modes of professional journalism; characterised by a reliance on official sources (as there are literally no others) and poor efforts to contextualise information, rather to simplify it and present it as episodic or associated with specific events. In this interpretation, a journalist’s concern for not being repetitive in their reporting can lead to their practices being easily exploited by sophisticated strategic communications. For Harley, reporting of the reality of military operations, although operating with highly controlled and limited information, out-weighed the importance of conveying an understanding of the limitations and controversies surrounding the system of knowledge production at Centcom.

Centcom is enunciated as a legitimate and credible news location, a node of newsworthiness. For Harley (2006b) it was, “simply part of the coverage”, a location articulated as consequential by military authorities, and thus also by the media. Another reporter, assigned to Centcom, News Ltd’s Rory Callinan described Centcom as a challenging working environment. This was especially so for ‘under the radar’ print journalists, not looking to make a big impact at news conferences or other public forums, in order to protect their source relationships, and not required to ‘be seen’ as are television journalists. Indeed Callinan is effusive in interview concerning the control and secrecy surrounding Centcom operations, calling it “horrific theatre” (2006). “Once you started going through that security apparatus, you suddenly realise that this is an intensely controlled environment…and the control just increased from that moment” (Callinan 2006).
Although Centcom was designed and promoted as the central briefing location for the war correspondents (and thus its status as a main focus point) it did not function as such. Callinan, echoing Wolff (2003b), describes the absurdity of travelling into the Qatari desert to cover the war when journalists in other international capitals were receiving clearer, more specific information and briefings; “But what we found was that people in New York and journalists back in Australia started to get briefings from politicians…they started to get briefings from Canberra that we weren’t getting, while we were in Doha, where theoretically there was a command HQ, so it was just completely ridiculous” (Callinan 2006).

For Callinan, the activities at Centcom were clearly a pseudo-event, designed and enacted solely for the purposes of military-administration strategic communication (Molotch and Lester 1974). Yet journalists stubbornly persisted with their credulous reports from Centcom of the early military operations. It is a novel facet of the experience of war journalists that they are entirely aware of the restrictions and strategic intent of such military public relations exercises, yet willing continue to participate in them nonetheless. The liberal ideal of journalism is invoked in order to shelter journalism from its obvious complicity in a wider strategic communications exercise. This is a clear example of what Pedelty (1995; 172) identified as “self-conscious non-reflexivity” that obfuscates rather than reveals the workings of contemporary power, or as this thesis reconceptualises this notion, as ideological fantasy (Žižek 1989). It is a central argument of this thesis that professionalism encourages only superficial engagement with powerful sources, and relies on the liberal ideals of journalism for its legitimacy. In the context of hegemonic professionalism a radical reconsideration of its normative values is unlikely. In this sense professionalism exerts considerable regulatory power over the discipline and over the potential for the development of substantive critiques. A paradox of the professional experience however, is that rather than such experiences illustrating to journalists the shortcomings of the professional model, such encounters with the military establish antagonistic (Laclau and Mouffe 1985) relations through which journalistic identity is reinforced. The military and its control of information is radically ‘othered’ as anathema to professionalism, providing the ‘constitutive outside’ (Laclau and Mouffe 1985) against which journalistic identity
may be defined. In this sense, the more a journalist encounters immovable military, the more professional that journalist becomes.

Callinan’s reporting (published in *The Australian* and *Weekend Australian*) over the same period exclusively dealt with military operations, especially focused on Australian activities. Much of this coverage is celebratory of Coalition efforts (especially Australian) and is reproductive of many of the mainstream discourses about Iraq and the correctness of war. Notably, while Callinan articulated a disdain for the artificial and limited perspective at Centcom, this did not restrain him from directly and explicitly reproducing military perspectives and arguments, including several breathless articles on WMDs (weapons of mass destruction) and the exploits of Australian military service personnel. An early piece profiled the Australian Special Forces in celebratory fashion; “...[the Special Forces are] likely to be on standby to rescue any Australian pilots who crash or are shot down in the war on Iraq...their key job is long-range surveillance and reconnaissance – hunting out mobile missile sites and hidden chemical and biological weapons that Saddam Hussein might try to use against coalition forces.” (*The Australian*, 21/03/03: 5). Although he was conscious of the heavily restricted and controlled environment at Centcom, this seemed to have little influence on Callinan’s reporting or altering of perspective. Rather, a stubborn persistence in adhering to the conventions of professional journalism is evident. All articles published by Callinan between 20 March and 3 April directly relate to military (primarily Australian) activity and personalities, using predominantly military sources (other sources include an Australian academic and the *New York Times*) and representing events and activities in an uncomplicated, straight-forward manner, but one which nonetheless foregrounds the perspective and experience of Australian military personnel ‘in action’. The following is typical:

An Australian pilot has described flying combat missions in the flak-torn skies above Iraq as “hours of boredom with moments of stark terror”.

Flight-Lieutenant Grant or “Tails” as his fellow pilots call him has been riding shotgun in his F/A-18 fighter-bomber for tanker and early-warning aircraft as well as bombing targets. (*The Australian*, 27/03/03: 2)
This model is broken somewhat with the publication of an article entitled “On the Outside: How truth is caught in the crossfire as journalists fight the military spin” (*The Australian*, 03/04/03: B.1). Here the frustrations of journalists in dealing with the military authorities are detailed. With this article the possibility for a more critical understanding of the Centcom experience emerges. Such articles and stories powerfully reproduce the professional discourse. Here, the ‘fight for truth’ is enunciated as a central journalistic concern and the simplistic, archetypal image of the dogged, independent journalist is invoked. “So extreme was the Australian level of operational security that informal sporting matches involving coalition soldiers were kept secret...Such censorship appears greatly at odds with the treatment Australia’s coalition media counterparts are getting from their forces” (*The Australian*, 03/04/03: B.1). Here, then is an expression of journalistic disquiet at the management and restrictions in place at Centcom and a public cultivation of the professional journalistic persona. And the media has thus become the story – something generally discouraged by professionalism (Harley 2006b; Wilson 2006b). The ‘media story’, however, is relegated from a news story to a ‘feature’ section – in this case *The Australian*’s weekly ‘Media’ section – as Callinan (2006) describes, “the perfect forum” for such stories. This segregation however serves at once to de-emphasise the importance of press frustrations and represent the ‘media operations’ at Centcom as incidental to the larger, more important and credible military operations. Importantly however, the inclusion of such stories, away from the main news pages permits the continued enactment of the professional “strategic ritual” (Tuchman 1978) – on one hand allowing journalists to demonstrate their ‘power’ of independent thought as well as the degree to which they are constrained by power – such as the productive power of the military and the news organisational power that requires restrained, ‘responsible’ coverage. Accordingly, Callinan’s story expresses frustration at the taciturn Australian military, rather than criticism at the Centcom arrangements themselves. Similarly, Wilson talks of aiming his reporting at filling various ‘news holes’ in *The Australian* - one being the media story. Murdoch, embedded for the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *Age*, published his meditation on the media at war (*Dispatches from the front*, 05/04/03) in the *Age*’s ‘Insight’ section, well away from the front pages. The power of the story of media management and the
manipulation of information is here de-legitimated in relation to the operational details of the coalition invasion. The story is placed structurally outside the main body of information about the war, parcelled off into a realm of secondary knowledge, an adjunct to the strategic representations promoted by military authorities.

That journalism, according to professionalism represents reality to its audience, yet necessarily also produces that reality is a contradiction central to this thesis' argument. This section has identified the tendency of journalism to produce favourable accounts of military activity within the context of information control. That these accounts are largely disengaged from the complexity of social (wartime) reality and reliant on the simplicity of easily identified and understood characters and narratives is clear. The thesis has rejected the objectivitist pretensions of professionalism arguing that professionalism ‘makes’ these elements of war ‘real’. Central to this argument is the conception of realism as a central problematic aspect of professionalism. Simply, professional journalism derives much legitimacy from its realism. As this thesis makes clear, ‘reality’ is fundamentally contingent. Instead of providing a rich and nuanced understanding of Centcom and, more broadly of war, professionalism limits the depth of understanding through the articulation of a narrow, professionally legitimate reality. And, in these circumstances, both war and journalism, based upon inherently imbalanced source relations (such as those between the media corps and the US military) and moulded to fit commercial and military requirements, take on radically altered social meanings, yet remain representations of ‘fact’. Journalism here is less concerned with external, independent ‘reality’ (in contradiction of journalism’s own tenets), than with the production of an acceptable journalistic product. War, with an emphasis on operational detail and strategy, becomes primarily technical and entertainment and news journalism the product through which it is delivered.

8.6 EMBEDDED

‘Embedded’ serves as another central news location within the Iraq war discourse and experience. This section examines how the professional discourse legitimates this controversial feature of contemporary war coverage. An analysis of ‘embedded’ discourse further illustrates the means by which professionalism makes aspects of war
both visible and legitimate as news products. Embedding as a media practice and military policy has been both heavily criticised as favouring and normalising the coalition military perspective (Reese 2004; Seib 2004) and defended as permitting media access, allowing journalists ‘up close and personal’ with soldiers in a manner not seen since Vietnam (Thompson 2006). Previous models of military-media interaction, such as those employed during the Falkland’s war or the 1991 Gulf War (Tumber and Morrison 1988; Kellner 1992) describe the extent to which journalists were excluded from a close up military experience. In relation to the Falkland War and Gulf War systems of media control, embedding is celebrated. Many of the journalists in this study offered qualified support for the practice of embedding and many offered criticism (see chapter six) based largely on differing perceptions of the degree of journalistic freedom and independence afforded by embedding. Important in the present context is how embedding and embedded journalists produced and legitimated knowledge and how embedding is constructed as a normative news site, articulated into professionalism. The process of embedding with military forces is represented as consistent with professionalism. The account of war produced through embedding is unproblematic for professionalism. Indeed, embedding is articulated as offering the potential full realisation of journalism’s promise, access to the true reality of war. Furthermore, the extent to which an analysis of embedding and journalistic responses to it can usefully contribute to understandings of professionalism and hegemonic practices is also a consideration of this section.

Embedding, with the opportunity to ride with the US military, the ostensibly unrestricted reporting environment and “on the record” communications (Whitman 2003) seemed a vast improvement on previous military-media relationships to many journalists. This innovation seemed to symbolise something of a rapprochement between the military and the media. However, as noted in Chapter Two, for several authors the willingness of journalists to cooperate with the Department of Defense in embedding is indicative of the symbiotic relationship that exists between the media and the military Tumber and Palmer, 2003; PEJ, 2003; Reese, 2004). The criticism that the system of embedding has been designed with military strategic interests and journalism’s commercial sensibilities in mind is cogent. From this perspective the
strategic intent of the Defense Department to co-opt the media has been clearly identified. Nonetheless, journalists involved in this study saw many positive aspects to embedding and repeatedly caution that problems with embedding arise from its use, rather than from the activity of travelling with and being protected by military forces.

“Access is always good…” argues Thompson (2006), indicating the news value embedding held for audiences. Murdoch too states that embedding was a positive exercise, providing “insight” for Age and Herald readers, offering them a close and detailed view of, “Americans operating in a war situation” (Murdoch 2006). Obvious then is a desire and need for a physical closeness with a given ‘reality’ in order to produce credible news, or else run the dangers of reporting at a distance, as occurred in Kuwait and Doha. ‘Access’ is professionally equivalent to gathering ‘facts’ and to ‘witnessing’ events – through embedding journalists were provided a privileged insight into the conduct of war. Through the use of advanced technologies this otherwise invisible reality could be easily and quickly broadcast or otherwise reproduced for consumption. Although Thompson and Murdoch, for example, are aware of the dangers for objectivity threatened by single perspective reporting, access trumps other professional concerns, as ‘reality’ is a journalist’s primary object.

Thompson (2006) argues regardless of the limited perspective embedding still offers a professionally “valid” mode of witness. Indeed as shown above (chapter eight) it is through professionalism that embedding retains its validity. Embedding is made legitimate through its articulation into an equivalential relationship (Laclau 2005) with professionalism. In these favourable enunciations, embedding is subsumed within professionalism as simply another facet of equivalential professional practice articulated as legitimate. The criticism of embedding however, is not that the persistent telling of a story from a given perspective and reproducing assumptions relating to military action (the bravery and determination of soldiers, the threat posed by the Iraqis, the essential humanity of warriors) somehow produces an inaccurate account of independent ‘reality’. Rather, it is that embedding fundamentally structures knowledge produced by journalism in accordance with military perspectives and logic. Such criticisms do not identify problems with embedding but with imperfectly enacted individualised professionalism.
Much embedded reporting has been criticised for naturalising militarism and the logic of war, identifying too closely with and offering insubstantial accounts of military operations, eliding the deeper truths of war (Reese 2004), and offering a preponderance of dramatic, de-contextualised coverage. Journalists however have articulated embedding into the professional scheme, arguing that they were able to remain independent and objective within the context of embedding\footnote{This approach contrasts with that taken by other journalists, uninvolved in this study, but useful for the purposes of comparison. Jules Crittenden of the Boston Globe infamously went over to the 'dark side' by assisting American soldiers in targeting enemy soldiers during fire fights (Crittenden 2003). He unrepentantly declared, "…screw them!" (Crittenden 2003), to those who criticised his lack of detachment. For Crittenden criticisms have no merit when made by those who were not there, who haven’t experienced what he has and been forced to react in life threatening situations, as he was. For Crittenden becoming part of the action is inevitable and remaining detached impossible. Rolling Stone magazine reporter Evan Wright usefully explores the complexities of the professional task of remaining objective and detached. He rejects any search for ‘truth’ within the context of war reporting, and prefers to turn to “imagination and interpretation rather than discourses of realism” (Whitlock 2006; 151). Wright discards any pretence to objectivity, instead practicing an ethnographic style of reporting, pursuing understanding over ‘truth’. A passage from Wright’s memoir is illustrative,}

\textit{Get some!} is the unofficial Marine Corps cheer. It’s shouted when a brother marine is struggling to beat his personal best in a fitness run. It punctuates stories told at night about getting laid in whorehouses in Thailand and Australia. It’s the cry of exhilaration after firing a burst from a .50-caliber machine gun. \textit{Get some!} expresses, in two simple words, the excitement, the fear, the feelings of power, and the erotic-tinged thrill that come from confronting the extreme physical and emotional challenges posed by death, which is, of course, what war is all about. Nearly every Marine I’ve met is hoping this war with Iraq will be his chance to get some. (Wright, 2004; 2)
The reporters interviewed for this study assert that nothing was adjusted and their professionalism was un-problematically transferred to their embedded reality – an important aspect of embedding’s appeal. The same frames of reference, the same approaches to practice were employed as embeds as would had they been reporting, “a triple murder, a bad car crash or a major crime – the same principles apply then as they do when reporting about the war in Iraq when you’re there” (Murdoch 2006), extending the equivalential logic (Laclau 2005) of professionalism into embedding, through an articulation of the professional legitimacy of embedding. Where Wright (2004) and others adapted their methods to fit the circumstances and jettisoning any notion of objectivity, the journalists interviewed in this study persist in their pursuit of objectivity, overlooking the limitations of doing so. Much of what Thompson and Murdoch produced, while for dissimilar media (Thompson for ABC TV and radio and Murdoch for Fairfax newspapers), was surprisingly similar in its professionalism.

Of twenty-five articles Lindsay Murdoch published while embedded for the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *Age*, the majority were concerned specifically with various aspects of military operations. The attitudes and experiences of military figures feature and such reports typically include a description of latest movements, account of military engagements and the reactions or reflections of soldiers (see the *Age*, 22/03/03: 1; the *Age*, 03/04/03: 1). Thompson’s broadcasts for ABC radio were similarly focused, with accounts of his own observations and of military operations predominating (see *AM, PM, The World Today*, 2003). Murdoch does introduce elements of the ‘ethnographic style’ into his reports and attempts to express ‘what it is like’ for US soldiers during war. A typical passage:

The hit-and-run sorties have slowed the push of the 20000 strong 1st Marine Division, which on Tuesday was bogged down for 24 hours in a storm that turned day into night.

“It’s unbelievable…you can’t see your hand in front of you, “said First Sergeant Mike Sator. “Now I know what hell is like.”

The marines could do nothing but sit in their vehicles until the storm lifted yesterday morning. The sand had rendered their night vision equipment, one of their biggest
advantages over the Iraqis, virtually useless. It also had halted most strikes by US helicopters and jets (*SMH, 27/03/03: 1*)

Much of the promise of this approach however, is lost in the construction of marines as characters in the story of war. Although Iraqi’s remain an amorphous, unknown and ill-defined other, American soldiers are humanised through the logic of the ‘up close’ embedded experience. Here soldiers are humanised, persistently identified by name and rank and their experiences and hardships described in detail, in accordance with the accepted methods of identifying soldiers as stated in the embedding guidelines (Whitman 2003). Here, however, to remain ‘objective within the context of embedding’ becomes problematic. Murdoch contextualises his reports with easy, emotive and uncomplicated allusions to America’s other famous TV war, Vietnam, inviting readers to sympathise with the soldier’s hardships, whose predecessors were popularly understood to have been abandoned by the press, politicians and public (Hallin 1986). In doing so the ‘real’ experiences of war are through these persistently sympathetic representations, re-articulated and restated within the complex constellation of Vietnam memories and meanings. References to this conflict are readily comprehended by Western audiences, given Vietnam’s prominent position within Western popular culture, both as a military and political waste, and as a gritty, hard-fought war in which common soldiers suffered immensely.

The units, using light armoured vehicles and rocket propelled grenades, hit the leading forces and retreat copying methods used against the Americans in Vietnam 30 years ago.

US claims that the Iraqi military is using civilians to lure Americans to their deaths have also rekindled Vietnam memories. (*SMH, 27/03/03: 1*)

And although allusions to Vietnam can be construed as mild warnings over the wisdom and integrity of American war policy, no attempt however is made to draw parallels between the saturation bombing of Baghdad with that of North Vietnam, or to compare the terror war brought to civilian populations in both Iraq and Vietnam. Rather, readers are drawn to identify with the soldiers who talk about their families back home, their
fears of being in Iraq and their basic humanity, expressed through their uncomplicated worldviews (the *Age*, 29/03/03: 7). Murdoch’s reporting, with its casual Vietnam references and detail of daily military life, rather than providing unique insight, merely reproduces understandings of military operations and cultural myths, if not of American military righteousness, then certainly of the dignity and courage of the US servicemen. Although this criticism of embedding has been similarly made elsewhere (Reese 2004; Seib 2004; Schechter 2003; Bernhard 2003), this analysis reveals it as relevant in the Australian context. Of greater concern however is the persistence of such reporting modes and the likelihood that embedding will become a structural aspect of war journalism, given the experiment’s perceived successes in Iraq (Lewis and Brookes, 2004) and its successful articulation into the hegemonic discourse of professional journalism.

Thompson adopts a more inquiring position in relation to the soldiers he travels with and towards the war he is part of. His pursuit of professionalism, however, aids the wider process of naturalising the American perspective and war aims. This results from the persistence a persistent American perspective featuring humanised American subjects.

The subject matter of Thompson’s reports is split between his own observations of Iraq and accounts of military action and operations, often featuring a military figure as an interview subject (see *AM, PM, The World Today*, 2003). Thompson’s embedded reporting is interesting too, for his illustration of the uncertainty that surrounds military operations and his ability to reveal the thoughts and motivations of the soldiers he travels with, in this regard Thompson’s reporting makes a valuable contribution. As Thompson (2006) argues, “it was probably not since Vietnam that an Australian audience had been up close and personal with American grunts fighting a war”. A typical example of this follows:

Geoff Thompson: Lance Corporal, is that the first action you’ve seen?

Trent Boheme: Ah, yeah. That’s the first one [sic] I’ve seen since I’ve been here. We had a scare yesterday, but we, you know, didn’t actually get reports from anything getting fired.
Geoff Thompson: What’s it feel like to be seeing that for the first time, and to realise I guess for the first time that you’re really in a war?

Trent Boheme: I like it. I mean it’s a rush. It’s nothing I’ve ever felt before. It’s good. I mean, hoping this is all over soon, but I’m getting joy while it’s here.

Geoff Thompson: So you believe in this war?

Trent Boheme: I don’t really know what to say. I don’t know what to say about that. I mean, Saddam’s got to get taken down, yeah, you know. After seeing the way, you know, driving through this country and seeing the way people are living, it’s sad, it’s pathetic. I mean, Saddam’s got to go, but I don’t know how.

Geoff Thompson: But there’s [sic] a lot of poor countries in the world.

Trent Boheme: You know not every leader of the poor country, you know, is trying to kill the whole world. This guy is. (AM, 28/03/03)

Aspects of this reporting did offer genuine insight. Clearly Thompson is able to illustrate the extent of soldiers’ understanding of their role in the war and the war’s purpose. For example, Thompson illustrates the naivety of US servicemen well, asking whether or not they ‘believe’ in the war they are fighting. This is a genuine contribution of intelligent journalism to the public understanding of war. However the thesis also shows that embedding serves to offer sympathetic and empathetic accounts of soldier’s experiences. Thompson is also aware of the limitations imposed by the circumstances of embedding. He concedes that while offering an interesting view of war, embedded journalists are, “only seeing the American invasion from that one perspective, but that is still a valid thing to witness…in essence I never shifted my basic principles which I base my journalism on, which is objectivity and only reporting what you know to be true, and if its anything more than what you know to be true, allowing that to be clear” (Thompson 2006). As shown previously, the concept of objectivity is not rigidly fixed within the discourse and can be adapted to a journalist’s circumstances, legitimating their approach or perspective and allowing journalists great flexibility. Nonetheless a major criticism persists that embedding naturalises and thus legitimates American military perspectives, providing rich detail and narrow focus, but offering little substantive
understanding of war. In doing so, embedding elides much of the meaning and significance of armed conflict. For Thompson (and as the above example demonstrates), simply putting American soldiers on record was a significant news story and was sufficient to justify participation in embedding. “I knew that it was interesting and newsworthy in itself. Even the angle of the American war machine and the way these guys...certainly at the lower ranks level, have a pretty simple idea of what they are doing – ‘we’re gonna [sic] kill shit, and this is fun’ – basically”, he argues (Thompson 2006). For Thompson such coverage is not problematic, in and of itself, but he is concerned over the generalised trend in saturation war coverage towards easy, uncomplicated representations and highly dramatic, fast paced footage. The modern, “age of reality TV” (Thompson, 2006) demands much more from a journalist in terms of access, as digital and internet technologies have made amateur media production simple, cheap and easy. “These days because of the YouTube phenomenon...you either live or die by your access” (Thompson 2006). It is argued here that the instant and intimate nature of modern communications technologies have collapsed the time and space that buffered journalists and their work in the past. As Thompson has identified, the journalistic imperative is to pursue ‘the story’ more closely, and often more dangerously, while concentrating on dramatic and exciting footage or coverage, often focused on personalities (especially soldiers) in the absence of substantive news detail. Technology changes expectations of war journalism – from TV and film coverage of Vietnam to live footage of the Gulf war to live, unedited broadcasts by embedded journalists – so that developments such as embedding are expected and experienced by news audiences as novel ‘war products’. Cottle (2006; 94) identifies this tendency in the media arguing that the ‘public view’ of the reality and horror of war is replaced by the spectacle and thin immediacy of ‘reality-TV’ viewing and war as literally another media product. It should be noted that although embedding is a site of tension for journalists, this is resolved through professionalism.

The reality (offered by technology) of war coverage is articulated into the ongoing professional discourse and practice through equivalential logic (Laclau 2005). “If you don’t have good access, then people lose interest...the Iraq war and the embedded experience was like “Big Brother at War”, in many ways that’s all part of the
phenomenon,” offers Thompson (2006), alluding to the popular TV show in which contestant’s lives are filmed and subjected to minute scrutiny, for entertainment purposes. While Thompson concedes that such a journalistic orientation may indeed lead to trivialised coverage of war, it also has the potential to be very “powerful” (Thompson 2006) in that it provides as close and detailed a view of conflict, providing audiences with their preferred trivial and exciting coverage.

Thompson hailed the openness of the military in permitting embedded reporters. He emphasises his relative freedom and ability to ‘hitchhike’ with various arms of the military as evidence of being able to report freely and objectively. His reports often featured interviews or commentary with the soldiers he had at hand, some of which provided genuine insight, as described above. Typically however, such reports revealed little beyond the specifics of Thompson’s experiences; his accounts of travelling through the desert (AM, 24/03/03), speculation concerning possible Iraqi casualties (AM, 28/03/03), attitudes and reactions gleaned from soldiers around him (AM, 31/03/03) and imprecise accounts of coalition troop movements (AM, 02/04/03) are typical and characteristic of the narrow perspective of embedded journalism generally.

On the other hand, the openness in reporting military affairs, allowed Thompson to report revealing events to which he was witness, hailed by interviewees as symbolising the positive aspects of embedding. In two reports Thompson documents the accidental killing of Iraqi civilians by American soldiers and the confusion and nervousness that characterises their operations (AM, 10/04/03). These were important stories, drawing attention to the inexperience and incompetence of the American forces, but also revealing contradictory accounts of the fire-fight by various soldiers:

Well, they still maintain they were being fired on. I’ve interviewed all of the marines who were involved in the incident tonight. They’re all saying they saw green and white fire and why they say that is [sic] green and white tracer fire is what comes from AK-47s which is what they say is used here, so that’s likely to be enemy fire.

I never saw green and white tracer fire. Michael Cox, our ABC cameraman here, never saw green and white tracer fire.
Now just talking to the CO, of the place these guys came from, he watched it from a distance. He said the only tracers he saw were the same colour as the ones coming the other way (AM, 10/04/03).

In this episode American soldiers are not only reported to have killed several civilians, but also in the confusion to have opened fire on each other. Thompson states that from a military perspective, while these events were sensitive, “there wasn't any intentional obfuscation of what we were allowed to do – there was nervousness at certain point when we witnessed a shooting of civilians, but from a command point of view they were actually quite open about what happened and they allowed it to be investigated” (Thompson 2006). In exposing military error the openness of embedding (Whitman 2003) was thus realised and the normative function of journalism performed. Thompson's reports, however, also demonstrate great professional detachment and restraint. Thompson was unwilling to delve deeper into the potential emotional aftermath of civilian killing, or the issue of poorly trained, heavily armed American soldiers over-reacting to their circumstances. Rather, soldiers make comment and the issue is left, this ‘event’ contained and parcelled within the short radio report. These soldiers are humanised too, with the simplicity of their outlook and the naivety of their understandings emphasised, while the impact and traumatising effect of civilian killing on the local population is completely avoided and the criminality of their actions unmentioned.

Geoff Thompson: And how do you feel now? You’ve almost certainly just killed someone. How does it feel?

Private Paine: Well, it hasn’t really hit me yet. I’ll just have to wait it out and pray on it.

Geoff Thompson: Is that the first experience like that you’ve gone through?

Private Paine: Yes, it was.

Geoff Thompson: And how did it feel?

Private Paine: It was a rush. It’s like everything just slows down and you think really clearly. You are completely focussed on the situation at hand (AM, 10/04/03).
With limited broadcast time there is only enough space for a brief and superficial treatment of events, relying on an existing mode of enunciating war, which understands such events as ‘tragedies’, rather than crimes or major errors indicative of deeper military-systemic faults. In theoretical terms, episodes such as these are articulated within differential logic (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Laclau 2005), in which they are kept discursively separate from other events and processes, preventing the emergence of a broader understanding of the ‘wholeness’ of war. The following chapter examines this episode in greater detail.

It is possible therefore to understand embedding as a highly visible war reporting innovation and as representing the convergence of professional media and military interests. On one hand the media is accorded respectful treatment and privileged with close access to the military as it conducts its war, ensuring compelling coverage. On the other hand the military and political authorities conducting the war are afforded the opportunity to more clearly and persistently articulate their perspective and also adopt a high moral position with regards to accusations of censorship and crude propaganda. Co-operation with the military is rationalised in terms of access and closeness to the ‘reality’ of war and professionalism is expanded to include innovative coverage forms. For journalists concerned with bearing witness to events and producing truthful representations of factual reality, embedding offers a professionally acceptable exit from the straight-jacket treatment by the military in previous conflicts. The structural relationships of embedding however, when combined with a professional journalistic scheme, serve to make military perspectives, operations and logic privileged narratives within modern war reporting. Crucially, although embedding is articulated as enabling professionalism, professionalism, as noted, remains firmly within military power strategies.

Paradoxically, the problems with embedding (the predominance of American military perspectives) (Thompson 2006; Harley 2006b; Wilson 2006) are overlooked through a reiteration of a commitment to the realism upon which professionalism is founded. Although embedding is professionally highly problematic, it offers access to the ‘reality’ of war the attractiveness of which, both to news professionals and to audiences, cannot be disregarded. Thompson makes the point clearly - when
commenting on the above analysed episode – that the emphasis on military perspectives is a secondary consideration compared to value of ‘insight’ gained through access and clear, truthful representations of events and the value of journalist’s acting as witnesses to potential crimes. As Thompson argues, “it’s embedded reporting that got a soldier shooting a guy half dead on the floor in Karbala or somewhere…we filmed young grunts shooting up a car full of civilians. Yes, it does privilege their perspective but it doesn’t make them immune from criticism or surveillance” (Thompson 2006). Again the normative professional discourse is asserted in defence of journalistic practice and obfuscates criticism. As this analysis has made clear, the presence of journalists at civilian killings may provide surveillance of military excesses, however professionalism also serves to characterise such events in empathetic and sympathetic ways. In this conception, problematic issues surrounding embedding are for journalists technical (relating to how embedding is used) rather than a structural aspect of the system. In this sense, embedding is only problematic when engaged in un-professionally rather than structurally inclined towards the normalisation of war and militarism.

8.7 CONCLUSION
The analysis provided by this chapter has begun to illustrate the extent and the effect of professionalism on war news production. As the hegemonic model, professionalism powerfully produces war discourse, legitimating certain aspects of conflict and leaving others, through its discursive enunciations or silences, invisible. And in this chapter this professional effect has been identified and analysed. Through statements, articulations and antagonistic relations journalists are identified as embodying the normative liberal journalistic ideals; that is, as being qualified, credible and independent sources of knowledge. An analysis of news and professional discourse reveals however, the extent to which professionalism, as a discourse employed to analyse war and conflict is uncritical towards the pre-existing cultural tropes it employs and its reliance on the military for its information, access and protection. Professionalism, with its focus on the idealised liberal norms of journalism, is insensitive to such weaknesses and uncritical towards its own central place in the discursive ‘production’ of war. Rather,
professionals enunciate and articulate the credibility that journalism requires to sustain its public legitimacy.

This chapter has shown that professionalism, as an organizing and regulatory principle, establishes what elements of social reality are legitimate for journalistic inquiry, and what can legitimately be produced as knowledge of this reality. Professionalism produces knowledge about war, which reinforces the correctness of war journalism, in a process of discursive reproduction. In doing so this process limits understandings of war beyond established, resonant and commercially viable journalistic forms. Professionalism can be further analyzed as being generally passive, if not explicitly supportive, towards US/allied military interests, concerns and perspectives – of militarism, in short. This analysis has also illustrated the extent to which professionalism obfuscates the convergence of military and media interests and it has described the extent to which professionalism is both consonant with and obscuring of journalism’s commercial strategic intent.

This chapter attended to four main areas in its analysis of professional news discourse, demonstrating how discourse serves to articulate and legitimate central professional norms. The professional discourse also obscures the material processes and limitations experienced by reporters, presenting highly contingent news accounts as objective ‘reality’. The analysis provided here illustrates the disjuncture between news discourse in the public record and the lived experiences, practices and considerations of war journalists.

As a ‘witness’ to events a war journalist is literally producing reality as he or she reports on occurrences, especially as they actively prioritize aspects of reality for journalistic emphasis, such as the ‘people’s story’. Again the credibility and reliability of these accounts requires professional legitimacy. This analysis however has shown the potential for inaccurate or misleading reporting being represented as news. Simply, professionalism allows journalists and news organizations great freedom in producing occurrences as news in accordance with their priorities, rather than according to an objective measure of news value – again a process that professionalism obscures.

Besides illustrating the extent to which journalists wield regulatory power in relation to knowledge production, this section has also demonstrated journalist's
subjection to regulation and administrative power. This has primarily been shown through an analysis of journalist’s experiences at both Centcom and as embedded. Importantly, the control and regulation by military forces, while an affront to the journalistic identity, cannot be directly addressed by professionalism. Professionalism derives its legitimacy from the pretense of independence and freedom to report without ‘fear or favour’. Reliance on military PR or protection contradicts this central tenet of the discourse, permitting a degree of exploitation by military authorities, as journalists obscure their dependence on the military in favor of access to ‘the military story’. The analysis of the reporting of News Ltd’s Rory Callinan reveals this aspect of professionalism particularly clearly.

Embedding also offered an uncommon closeness and access for the media to the military and symbolised reconciliation between normatively opposed interests. Indeed, the military/political authorities provide the most significant ‘other’ against which professional identities are articulated. Those interests antagonistic to professionalism provide the ‘constitutive outside’ which professional identity and subjectivity requires (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Laclau 2005). For journalists, embedding offered access to the military and the possibility for forms of coverage not possible since the Vietnam era, making embedding an attractive exercise from both an individual and a commercial/organisational perspective. Embedded journalism provided much by way of ‘up close and personal’ war journalism. Nonetheless, embedding largely realised the US Department of Defense’s strategic intention of normalising military perspectives (Whitman 2003) and enabling a sympathetic approach by journalists towards the troops with whom they travelled. Professionalism provides the subject position (Foucault 1972; Laclau and Mouffe 1985) which is legitimately within the military system. Through the logic of equivalence (Laclau 2005) embedding is articulated, is ‘made’ equivalent with professionalism - that is to say professionalism is a legitimating discourse incorporating innovations in journalism practice within it. As also noted however, embedding was conducive to descriptive and realist representations of war which simplified, rather than revealed war’s complexity. Although on occasion embedded reporters were able to offer genuine insight, embedding also illustrated the consonance of military and commercial interests. For news organisations embedding offered the style of coverage
that has come to be expected in the media ‘market’ – as Thompson (2006) observes, Iraq, 2003 was ‘Big Brother at war’, alluding to the close, detailed and dramatic coverage afforded by embedding. The military enthusiastically supported such coverage. This thesis now aims to build on this argument. In the following chapter the focus of the analysis remains on the relationship between the discourse and the news product of Iraq war journalism. However, where this chapter focused on the coverage styles produced, the following section seeks to analysis more fully the articulation of ‘meaning’, and the extent to which professionalism fixes certain modes of understanding war, as it makes war ‘real’.
CHAPTER NINE - THE PROFESSIONAL DISCOURSE AND THE GENERATION OF MEANING

9.1 INTRODUCTION

Following the discussion in Chapter Eight, in this section the generation meaning through the professional discourse is analysed. The analysis continues to investigate how professionalism influences the production of news. The concepts and discursive features with which news events and locations are interpreted and ‘made real’ for news audiences are explored and analysed. Forms of discursive inclusions and exclusions continue to be identified and examined. Through this analysis it is possible to further illustrate professionalism as a hegemonic discourse within journalism that actively and purposefully produces news in a manner consistent with and reinforcing of professionalism, rather than achieving the realisation of professionalism’s normative goals, that is, revealing the ‘truth’ of social reality. Here professionalism continues to function as a legitimating discourse rather than as a critical or analytical one.

This chapter builds on the previous analysis, maintaining a Foucauldian interest in the power of discourse to make visible certain aspects of war, and leave others invisible or non-existent. This is the power of journalism to ‘make war real’. The analysis also continues to include concepts drawn from Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse theory in order to demonstrate the active process of the hegemonic discursive articulation.

The analysis proceeds thematically, again demonstrating how discursive articulations and enunciations affect a variety of Iraq war reporting positions, perspectives and identities. Firstly, the discussion presents an analysis of meanings generated by professional war journalism, which are analysed in terms of the following categories; the institutional pressure and influences on journalists; the journalists as becoming the ‘stars’, or main narrative character in their own reporting; and the tendency towards parochial and overly patriotic war coverage. In these terms the analysis illustrates the significant role of professionalism in producing public knowledge of the Iraq invasion.

Finally, the analysis turns briefly again to the news sites of Centcom and ‘embedding’, in order to demonstrate the extent to which professionalism advances
military perspectives and generates meaning that inculcates a normalisation of militarism through its ostensibly ‘professional’, independent and objective coverage of war. However, not only does closeness with the military inculcate military perspectives and values into journalism, but through exposure and empathetic coverage of military personnel, the military is individualised and humanised through professionalism. This reportage results in the parallel process to the militarisation of journalism - the *journalisation* of the military and the consequent legitimation of war.

### 9.2 INSTITUTIONAL CONTROLS

Both Mark Willacy (ABC Radio) and Jonathan Harley (ABC Radio) discuss the necessary professional tactic of maintaining circumspection in their reports and protecting “editorial standards” (Willacy, 2006b) of the organisations they work for. By restraining their own opinions or perspectives within the meanings that they produced as journalists these standards were upheld. Although avoiding controversial, critical or unpopular positions is a professional concern, in the post-September 11 period era there is a powerful political element to this professional circumspection. In Australia this has especially been the case with the public broadcasting corporation, the ABC (see Chapter Five), which was subjected to political complaints from the then Australian Federal Broadcasting Minister, for its perceived anti-war bias. Willacy describes having to find a more subtle method of reporting on the American arrogance and ignorance witnessed in the immediate aftermath of the fall of Baghdad, so as not to arouse the ire of hostile politicians in Canberra who had actively supported the Iraq invasion. “That sort of optimism,” he writes of an interviewed Marine\(^36\), “is easily bred behind the insulation of an armoured vehicle…but that sort of insulated thinking will not go down well with the supposedly liberated Iraqi people” (*AM*, 15/04/03). Although to a

\(^{36}\)Mark Willacy: Standing on top of his armoured vehicle watching the protest is a Marines petty officer. US Marine: It’s great that they (Iraqi civilians) can come out here and do what they’re doing. Because under the old regime if they’d tried anything like this they would have been shot. Willacy: Are you worried though that if you are forced to stay a few months or even longer that things could turn against you? That any support you have for removing Saddam Hussein could dissipate, could go? Marine: I think the longer we stay and more they find out that we are here to help and we’re not hostile towards them, the better it will go for us in the long run. Willacy: That sort of optimism is easily bred behind the insulation of an armoured vehicle mounted with heavy machine guns and grenade launchers, but that sort of insulated thinking will not go down well with the supposedly liberated Iraqi people.
perceptive listener the implication of this passage is clear, the extent of journalists’ critical capacity is limited. Here the political issues surrounding the ABC provide context:

Richard Alston [former federal communications minister] would have been apoplectic and to be honest I probably would have been found guilty of breeching editorial standards [had a more direct, confrontational approach been taken]…but that comment was not picked up by his bunch of little helpers poring over every comment (Willacy 2006b).

As Harley comments also:

You certainly don’t want stridency. Clearly the tone is really important. I’ll remind you that Richard Alston’s office waged a major assault on the ABC’s coverage of the war...Do you feel a bit restrained? Yeah (Harley 2006b).

Clearly then, a professional concern to avoid ‘flak’ (Herman and Chomsky 1988) acts to blunt the observations and analyses these reporters can potentially make public. There is a difficulty, in so far as objectivity demands an unengaged, unmotivated position vis a vis that which is being reported. As Harley states, ‘tone’ is of central importance when constructing accounts of war. This restraining, disciplinary (Foucault 1977) aspect of professionalism is argued to prevent journalists “overcooking” (Harley 2006b) ‘the story’. However, this restraint also limits the abilities of reporters to offer more incisive, direct and thoughtful analysis. Indeed, that journalists are restraining themselves for political reasons is not made clear. This does not produce false accounts of events or reality however. Rather, the tendency of professionalism and the restraint practiced by public news organisations is too elide potential deeper meanings and realities in favour of often simplified, brief descriptions and definitions. It is these representations which produce the ‘reality’ of war. A clear example of this tendency is found in Willacy's

---

account of a fire fight he witnessed soon after returning to Baghdad, following the American seizure of the city. In interview this episode is retold with almost comic relish:

You’ve read the transcript, there was one guy standing tall like John Wayne with a pistol unloading across the river. Now if the source of the fire was that serious, I don’t think you’d be standing up there with a pistol. The way they [American soldiers] responded was patchy and funny in a lot of ways. The Americans stopped after a while and they realised that maybe whoever they were firing on could have left in the first two minutes of the engagement, but they were too busy pouring thousands of rounds across the river (Willacy 2006b).

When reported for the AM radio show however, the episode is treated with an objective credulity and seriousness, and articulated within the confines of the professional discourse; the perception of reality experienced by Willacy is disciplined (Foucault 1977) by professionalism:

It didn’t stay quiet for long; just minutes after we checked into our hotel on the Tigris River a battle broke out right next door. Well, you can hear the marines firing from down below us. They’ve just moved into some scrubland near the Tigris River. They’ve moved their APCs from below our hotel window towards the river. They’ve dismounted out of the APC and are against defence [sic] facing over to the western side of the river. They’re directing small arms fire over there as well as heavy machine gunfire (AM, 14/04/03).

Although the objective ‘fact’ of the marine’s engagement is communicated, a more illustrative articulation of the event is suppressed. The effect being the event is accorded legitimacy as a military operation, as a battle, part of a wider effort to suppress Iraqi military forces, rather than cowboy-style, testosterone fuelled overkill, indicative of a wider military attitude – credibly characterised as ‘gung-ho’ and with grave implications for any planned occupation of Iraq⁴⁰.

⁴⁰ See Evan Wright’s Generation Kill for an account of the Iraq invasion which does not shy away from illustrative, ethnographic reporting style and which does not moderate the accounts of brutality, chauvinism and bloodthirstiness among American soldiers.
The effect of political and institutional pressure, articulated as discursive needs, clearly restrains journalism. Here, the discourse of professionalism demands moderation within journalistic articulations so as to avoid criticism – in this case politically motivated attacks by the authorities that initiated Australian involvement in Iraq. The following section demonstrates how the discourse serves to construct the war journalist as the central character in the wartime narrative.

9.3 JOURNALIST AS ‘STAR’
Peter Wilson (News Ltd) was perhaps the best placed Australian journalist in Iraq to provide insightful, broad coverage. He was personally committed to covering the ‘people’s war’ (Wilson 2006a), travelled with an accompanying photographer and translator, operating ‘unilaterally’. Wilson's reporting is more complex and nuanced than that of, for example, Ian McPhedran, who was confined to Baghdad. Wilson offers insight into a wider range of issues pertaining to professionalism. Like other journalists, Wilson has argued in favour of a ‘realist’ professional method in which the rational, empirically trained professional records reality and transmits this unadulterated account to the public. Although the impossibility of literal objectivity in reporting is acknowledged, this notion maintains a commitment to ideological neutrality and fact based witnessing, recording and observation that obviates ‘bias’. Furthermore, this approach actively reproduces the journalistic archetype of the independent reporter.

As Wilson (2006b) argues, “You’ve got to acknowledge that it is not going to be an overall, universal objective picture, but you can do that objectively, if you are determined just to write what you see”. This appears an acceptable approach to covering war. The effect of this orientation is to naturalise war and the war experience, through the breakdown of war into episodes, or series of events, each reported and described largely in isolation. Here it is possible to discern the logic of difference (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Laclau 2005) at work within news discourse. This logic serves to conceptualise war as disconnected events rather than as an ongoing political and military process. In difference, the ‘human story’ becomes separated from the military-political policy of war, as has been noted (see Chapter Six). This episodic treatment of war further breaks down equivalences which may exist between policy
matters and operational details and the lived experience of war. Episodic treatment fails to provide a unified meaning and connections between the human cost of war and political decision-making and administration. Rather, as war becomes a narrated, journalistic adventure, difference replaces equivalence with separate events and episodes of war, narrated by a journalist, who becomes the central, archetypal (Whitlock, 2006) figure in the ‘war story’. This ‘objective’ approach de-contextualises the war, the political context falling away, leaving a journalist’s journey as the central focus and permitting the rise of the journalist (in this case Wilson) as the central character, or ‘star’ on whom the narrative focuses, and to do so within professionalism. The soldiers and civilians encountered along the way provide colour and interest to what is otherwise Wilson’s war and is disconnected from historical and political contexts. The professional task here has become less the fulfilment of normative aspirations of professionalism (the enhancement of knowledge and understanding) but the maintenance of a credible journalistic performance. Whitlock (2006; 134) writes this tendency in journalism, “nurtures personalising narratives that have the potential to mask or distract from more systematic and critical representations of the military and political domains in the conduct of war”.

Early in the invasion a news style that tries to illustrate the conditions and include local detail is employed. However, while this writing style attempts to capture ‘the peoples war’ and fulfil Wilson’s basic reporting aim, stories of this period are persistently infused with a sense of exotic adventure in which he, as the writer, plays the main role and is the source of the newsworthy detail:

Southern Iraq is not just a scary, dangerous place right now. It is downright spooky. Sandstorms have turned the sky murky, orange backdrop as British troops, hungry peasants and determined loyalists of Saddam Hussein’s regime eye each other off nervously. Raging oil fires light up the gloom in places, throwing up fast-rising plumes of black smoke to mark the vandalism of the Iraqi soldiers who set fire to them. And by night the danger rises as the thump of artillery from battlefields to the north is joined by gunfire and occasional mortars from Saddam diehards mounting guerrilla attacks on British troops (The Australian: World, 28/03/03; 8).
Rather than news, the above lead constructs a composite image of southern Iraq in which the journalist’s experiences are news. Although the truth or falseness of representations is beside the point with regards to this thesis stated interest, such imagery is formed from an utterly subjective impression of what it is “like” in Iraq. This subjectivity, masked by professionalism, serves a number of purposes. Such a description provides a superficial and subjective context of drama, tension, excitement and adventure. As Whitlock (2006) suggests, a context more fully referent to the wider military and political circumstances of war is avoided in serialised reporting. On one hand this serves to provide a context in which ‘war’ as an idea is naturalised as a series of events or experiences and is not understood as the outcome of political processes. On the other hand, such a context also provides a compelling scene in which the main characters of ‘the story’, in this case journalists, play their archetypal roles in the war drama.

This dramatised adventurism is further evident as Wilson becomes a more central character in his own story. Although the early period reporting is by no means void of such tendencies (“At 3.30pm on Wednesday, local time, photographer John Feder, Arabic translator Stewart Innes and I slipped across the border from Kuwait by tailing a US military convoy…” The Australian: World, 28/03/03: 8) it is later, after being arrested and transported to Baghdad that Wilson’s reporting becomes almost solely the narrative of his own experiences, rather than the reporting of external events and issues, although it should be noted that Wilson personal experiences and external events did indeed overlap (Wilson was, for example, on the scene when the Palestine Hotel was shelled by American forces, administering first aid to the injured journalists)41. Nonetheless, other of Wilson’s experiences made the newspaper also as news; they had become an “ordeal…endured behind enemy lines” (The Australian: World, 07/04/03; 11) and the story of his arrest by Iraqi authorities was reproduced in a 3000 word feature. For Wilson however, the activities of the media are only enunciated as becoming relevant news when, “[they tell] people a broader truth, if it shows them what

41 A major controversy of the Iraq war in which an American tank shelled the hotel housing the majority of the world press corps. For an account of this episode see Wilson, P (2004) A long drive through a short war, South Yarra, Vic., Grant Hardie Books.
it’s like and what’s going on there then it’s worthwhile…if it is just about, “hey, I went there and did this, then it’s not worth it” (Wilson 2006b). Here professionalism proscribes the inclusion of subjective experiences as newsworthy in accordance with the broad conventions of objective journalism. In this context the professional scheme comes evermore to the fore as techniques are applied to disguise the contingent, subjective and incomplete accounts of war in a discourse of witnessed events, verbatim interviews and factual accounts. Indeed, employing this thesis’ discourse-theoretic conceptions, it possible to usefully understand Wilson’s articulations as making ‘equivalent’ (Laclau 2005) his own experiences and uniting his narrative with the discourse of newsworthiness, under the central journalistic signifier, ‘truth’.

9.4 PAROCHIALISM
Parochialism is a clear tendency amongst the Australian news agencies and is a prominent meaning generated within a professional approach to covering war. Although visible throughout the news generated from Iraq, parochialism is most clearly evident in news coverage of Australian forces. Although cultural proximity may be a commonly accepted news value (Harcup and O’Neil 2001; Galtung and Ruge 1965), the tendency in this form of overtly nationalistic and militaristic reporting is towards overtly patriotic, uncritical and disproportionate coverage. Parochial coverage tends to be descriptive and uncritical, compounding the generalised tendency to normalise war and militarism described throughout this thesis. Indeed, a characteristically Australian journalism style is visible within the Iraq war discourse, especially in that pertaining to Australian military personnel. This style may be described as slightly irreverent towards figures of military or political power and characterised by a forthright approach to language use. This rhetoric can be interpreted as echoing the Australian folk-mythology associated with Australian enlisted soldiers, known colloquially as ‘diggers’, who’s ‘larrikinism’, mateship, but ultimate conservatism is popularly held to embody the idealised Australian character (Tranter and Donoghue 2007).

Several journalists participated in parochial reporting, ranging from potentially inconsequential coverage of Australian naval activities, as discussed above (Willacy, 2006b), celebratory and disproportionate accounts of Australian navy divers (The
Australian, 31/03/03; 2), comedy stories concerning the US navy’s use of dolphins for mine detection work (The Australian, 31/03/03; 12) and patriotic profile pieces focused on Australian units (The Australian, 21/03/03; 5). Much of this style of reporting has been condemned as “gratuitous” (Willacy, 2006b) and “disproportionately large” (Harley, 2006b). News Ltd’s Rory Callinan (2006) concedes candidly however, “I think that (romanticising the military) is definitely a problem…I look back over the stuff I did and think, “Oh, you know, probably should have used a few less adjectives in some of the stuff”.

Callinan’s writing stands out as the most consistently patriotic. The activities of Australian soldiers were his primary reporting concerns, even though he was sent to Iraq without instruction to specifically cover “Australians at war”. The exploits of Australian soldiers are celebrated in several articles. The following passage, demonstrating the tendency of reporters to mythologise war and its participants is illustrative. This news report is ostensibly devoid of news-information aside from articulating Australian soldiers into the national sporting, anti-colonial identity (Tranter and Donoghue 2006):

Well before the invasion of Iraq began, Australian troops had already gained a reputation as victors on the sporting field.
Australian troops dominated an informal sporting competition being held among the coalition forces based at Doha in Qatar, according to a British military spokesman.
The comments were made as it was revealed last night that British and Australian military officials were considering giving a joint press conference.
“I told them we will do it (hold the joint press conference) but only provided they don’t bring any sporting equipment”, Group Captain Alan Lockwood said (The Australian, 22/03/03: 7).

Other journalists reported similarly. The cumulative effect is a tendency within the Australian press corps towards uncritically patriotic reporting, providing much space to military perspectives and interests. Importantly too, passages such as this serve to articulate the Australian war experience into the national hegemonic discourse and mythology surrounding Australians at war. Essentially this myth – a central feature of
the hegemonic Australian national culture and character – presents Australian soldiers as irreverent, egalitarian and less deferential towards traditional forms of authority and order than their UK or US counterparts (the myth of larrikinism), but nonetheless brave, tenacious and taciturn soldiers (Tranter and Donoghue 2007).

Callinan offers that the general tendency to champion the “Australian troops during war” is most likely a result of journalists being “caught up in” the experience of reporting of war, as he concedes he was (Callinan 2006). Nonetheless, the point is also made that newspapers “pick that sort of stuff up” (Callinan, 2006) and journalists will naturally reproduce what makes it into the paper, tending to reflect institutional or editorial news values and needs. In this sense, parochial reporting is a consequence of professionalism, rather than assertive Australian nationalism. Indeed, journalists interviewed for this study repeatedly emphasise their purposeful and intentional avoidance of the ideological boosterism associated with Fox News.

Although a central mainstream news value of cultural proximity and ‘relevance’ (Harcup and O’Neill 2001) may operate, generating Australian stories for Australian audiences, much of this coverage was disproportionate and “gratuitous” (Willacy 2006b). Others have argued that the information lock-down attempted by the Australian military had the effect of magnifying that information that was released making coverage of Australian stories disproportionate (Harley 2006b). As noted, Willacy produced a series of articles concerning the HMAS Kanimbla and the operations of the US Coast Guard (AM, 31/03/03; AM, 01/04/03; AM, 03/04/03), which he called, “the most boring bloody story I covered the whole time” (Willacy 2006b). Likewise, virtually all Callinan’s reports focused activities of the Australian forces, primarily the Australian SAS and the RAAF (Royal Australian Air Force), including pilot profiles (The Australian: Local, 27/03/03: 2) and commanding officer profiles (The Australian: World, 31/03/03: 14). Wilson too produced a series covering the activities of Australian navy divers he encountered while pursuing the ‘people’s story’ in southern Iraq. In this series the Australian divers' intent to stay in Iraq, their assistance distributing food aid and, perhaps most curiously, their disdain for the utility of American mine-clearing dolphins formed the central news qualities. As Wilson writes:
The US Navy’s mine-clearing dolphins have been the surprise media stars of the Iraq war, but they have not exactly won over Australian divers working alongside them. The polite way to express their scepticism about the mine-clearing skills of the dolphins is to question their reliability and cost efficiency, but there is another way to put it. “Flipper’s f**ked, mate,” was how one diver saw things yesterday (The Australian: World, 31/03/03: 12).

These sections have shown the extent to which professionalism leads to certain specific coverage forms and styles which directly affect the meanings that are produced concerning war. Here parochial coverage has been shown to result from both professional needs and values and from the closeness that exists between journalists and military personnel. ‘Access’ has been shown not to yield neutral news-information, but a normalised, military-oriented account of war. In the following section this analysis is continued, turning specifically to the coverage of Centcom and ‘embedded’ journalists to understand how professionalism generates specific meanings concerning these significant news locations and coverage forms.

9.5 THE MILITARISATION OF JOURNALISM
As discussed above there exists a general tendency amongst war journalists to naturalise and normalise war in the process of reporting it. Professionalism, I have argued, plays a significant role in constructing these accounts of war. Reliable and culturally resonant images are conjured, often eliding meaning or reproducing stereotypical understandings. Through de-contextualised, journalist-centric reporting styles and a tendency toward parochial, patriotic stories and features, coverage of war leads to opacity, rather than to clarity. As shown, the reality produced through professionalism is highly contingent. The journalism produced from Centcom and by embedded journalists is similarly problematic. Here the limitations of professionalism are exposed and exploited by systems of media control. Nonetheless professionalism is maintained, effectively reproducing those strategic meanings pursued and promoted by media managers and press officers and continuing to limit understanding of war rather than enhance it.
Centcom has been both described as a “professionally challenging” (Harley 2006b) place to work and as “horrific” (Callinan 2006). As noted in Chapter Eight Centcom directly confronted normative journalistic values. The heavily regulated environment, scores of media managers and Hollywood design lent Centcom a surreal media compound aesthetic. Journalists found the work environment contrary to their values of openness, accountability and verification, despite US military attempts to present the centre as a useful, normatively legitimate media centre. As Harley (2006b) states, “there’s just no narrative at Centcom”, alluding to the story-less nature of the centre, isolated as it was in the Qatari desert and providing a platform for American generals to pronounce on the invasion’s progress. Those stories told were reported according to military interests and priorities. That is, without instituting formal censorship, journalist’s articulations from Centcom were carefully managed to remain within military hegemony.

Although the Centcom experience was antagonistic towards professionalism, and ran contrary to much that professionalism values, little attempt was made by journalists to expose and interrogate this aspect of the coalition war and media strategy. Rather, coverage of the invasion from Centcom continued in its ostensibly neutral, objective approach to news events. In this sense coverage was characterised by articulations that demonstrated journalistic professionalism yet remained within the hegemony of military normalisation. Professionalism in this sense is unable to address that which manipulates it. Indeed, journalists attempt to retain their credibility by arguing that through diligent and committed professionalism ‘the story’ can still be told. As a consequence of this continued adherence to professionalism much Centcom reporting was either blow-by-blow accounts of coalition military advances and operational matters or profile and feature pieces on Australian soldiers. That is, given the context of control, professionalism becomes concerned with articulating uncritical and at times, favourable accounts of military action. As this interpretation of Centcom journalism argues, this disciplining of journalism was achieved even as journalists were consciously seeking to avoid the use of strategically crafted language and messages, as were reproduced during the first Gulf War. As Bormann (2006) states:
I went through that during the Gulf War where we started seeing this stuff creeping into journalistic language, and I just thought that in 2003 as it was then, we should be a bit too clever…certainly too smart to fall into those traps

Many of Harley’s radio broadcasts consisted of accounts of coalition military developments, contextualised by comment from military officials, were they available. Harley’s reporting was representative of sober, serious news reporting and demonstrates an awareness of the problems Bormann identified. However, even while this reporting may have shrunk from the overt patriotism of other Australian journalists, his reports are nonetheless essentially conservative and reproductive of the military perspective, articulating accounts of Centcom from within the hegemony of US military logic:

Jonathan Harley: It was another disciplined public performance by general Tommy Franks in the face of growing scepticism about Operation Iraqi freedom and a mounting propaganda war with Iraq. But he promised to speak the truth from his Hollywood designed platform at Central Command.

Tommy Franks: This platform is not a platform for propaganda, this is a platform for truth and so what I will do is I’ll try to provide you the best balance I can and that is what I have asked our people here to do.

Jonathan Harley: The war in Iraq is being fought on many fronts and by both sides (AM, 25/03/03).

Although Harley was willing to occasionally allude to coalition propaganda tactics and the use of public relations techniques, the wider issues of the military media strategy and the structural control exerted by the military remained unaddressed. Indeed, within news reports the awareness of crude propaganda techniques is articulated, however the professional discourse restrains journalists, preventing them from assuming overly antagonistic positions. For Harley, his awareness of the coalition information control and manipulation remained implicit in reports, and although the opportunity for more
critical perspectives arose, such alternative perspectives were subordinated to an ‘objective’ reporting style that obviates such tendencies, making them incidental to the reporting of military information. Professionalism asserts itself here over journalistic awareness of manipulation, both restraining journalists and normalising military-media arrangements. As Harley (2006b) states, journalists are fully aware of the media management strategies that military power enacts and clearly understand the compromised position of journalists within these strategies:

Look, the first casualty of war is truth. We know that. We know what the exercise is. We know its about PR and propaganda. So do you feel sullied by that? Yeah, a little bit. But you’re part of it as well, and I think you present it for what it is…I can’t any journalist in 2003 going to that experience and not being aware of that exercise.

However, as Harley adds, the role of journalism is nonetheless to report on military pronouncements and moderate critical perspectives:

I think you’ve got to keep [a] perspective on it [military communications strategy]. When you’re in Centcom and you’re reporting from military spin central…you always have to work that into your copy, but you just can’t make that your copy, because it becomes repetitive (Harley, 2006b).

Thus, not only does professionalism restrain journalists, but it also offers the rationale for restraint. In effect, professionalism encourages journalists to be aware of the forms of control and propaganda that beset them, but, as ideological fantasy, professionalism articulates an awareness of journalism’s contradictions, yet ensures journalists participate in military strategy nonetheless.

Similarly, Callinan was acutely aware of the control and strategic, hegemonic intent that was enacted at Centcom. He was also soon aware of the redundancy of the limited Centcom perspective, when political sources were giving more detailed information in Canberra, London and Washington, than was available in Doha. Furthermore, efforts to cover the Australian military’s activities were continually hampered by the draconian information controls, resulting in a “completely ridiculous”
(Callinan 2006) situation. Nonetheless, the majority of Callinan’s reporting focusing on the activities and profiles of Australian personnel and a mode of coverage concerned with battlefield information, military activities and official comments prevailed. The ‘otherness’ of military authorities and their being ‘outside’ (Laclau 2004) the normative journalistic identity has elsewhere been articulated so as to provide a stable professional identity (see Chapter Eight). Critical and reflexive attempts to understand Centcom beyond the details of military operations are almost completely absent, and can be understood as discursively impossible in the context of a clear awareness of military strategic intent. Indeed, the strain placed on professionalism does not result in antagonistic journalistic articulations which challenge the position of military and political power, but in ever more circumspect journalism. As Callinan (2006) frankly concedes, “I suppose you reach a point where you don’t want to (report critically)…I can see a point where you might get so desperate and might start thinking, “should I go a bit soft on these guys and they might start looking after us, or maybe take us to the next level” (Callinan 2006).

The effect of the professional discourse is a reporting style and approach that is willing to concede to military authorities the ‘benefit of the doubt’ and the power to control the news narrative. Furthermore it reports their pronouncements and activities with a minimum of criticism, interest or vigour. A typical example of Callinan’s reads both as a military PR release and an ‘adventure story for boys’:

Fourteen Hornets have been deployed to the region in what is the largest Australian air force contingent to go to war since Vietnam, according to the Defence Force.
Wing Commander Steve, whose full name cannot be published for security reasons, said the Australians had undertaken defensive air missions protecting “high value assets” like airborne early warning and control aircraft.
The Hornets, which have a top speed of Mach 1.75, are equipped with air-to-surface missiles, laser guided and conventional bombs and are armed with a 20mm nose mounted cannon for ground and airborne targets.
Wing Commander Steve said the pilots might stay in the air up to eight hours at a time depending on the missions, but remained alert due to the adrenaline rush (The Australian: World; 21/03/03: 1).
The media were put at an immediate disadvantage by the total control over both information and journalist’s access to it, as was Centcom’s intended function. Here journalists were completely unable to compare official pronouncements with some independently verifiable reality or range of sources. An information ‘bubble’ was inflated according to the needs of military and political power, in which journalists remained trapped. However, rather than precipitating a radical reassessment of their professional role, journalists were content to maintain their conventional position as conduits for official information. For Harley the monitoring of language used by military sources was a central task, in order that the more egregious misuses of language – a consideration clear in journalist’s minds, given the experiences of the Gulf War. Reproducing US accounts of Iraqi militia groups as “terrorist death squads” (AM, 07/04/03), would not “fly” (Harley, 2006b) or enter into public discourse as concepts made real by journalism, for example. As noted, however, professionalism also restrained Harley from pursuing his awareness of Centcom’s propaganda function more explicitly. As shown Callinan’s generally strongly patriotic and supportive reporting of the Australian military operations was of considerably stronger tenor than that of Harley. However, both journalists are strikingly similar in their avoidance of critical perspectives on the activities at Centcom, remaining within the ‘sphere of legitimate controversy’ (Hallin, 1986), safely reporting on military operations, press conferences and, in Callinan’s case, rich patriotism. Both reporters acknowledge the manipulation and control to which they were subject. The journalistic commitment to professional practice restrains their ability to substantially criticise this area of the military campaign as doing so would necessarily entail the assumption of an opinion or perspective, proscribed by professionalism. As shown, in the absence of substantive material and access to sources the tendency is towards parochial coverage of military personnel and operations.

9.6 THE JOURNALISATION OF THE MILITARY

In this section the character of embedded journalism produced by Australian journalists is assessed. It is argued that the embedded perspective, legitimated through professionalism, not only incorporates journalism into military operations, but journalises
the military. This means producing journalism that humanises and individualises soldiers so as to produce knowledge of war that overlooks and distances the audience from the political and military processes of war administration and strategy.

Embedding with military units held similar appeal for journalists as Centcom. Unprecedented access was to be gained by those journalists and news organisations willing to agree to the Department of Defense Media Support Plan (Whitman 2003), which outlined the relationship between embedded journalists and their military hosts. The system of widespread embedding represented a degree of sophistication on the part of American military-media managers. Rather than indulge in crude forms of censorship and overt control (such as characterised previous conflicts), censorship became unnecessary as the professional media’s own predilections for drama, visual spectacle and immediacy limited the potential for critical embedded perspectives (Cottle 2006; 95).

The description of embedding as a novel military-media exercise is to some extent spurious. The media and press corps have long travelled with soldiers and reported war from military perspectives, and examples abound in the history of media-military interaction (Knightley 2004). Nonetheless, the embedding program instituted during the Iraq war, 2003, is notable for its official sanction and very large scale; some 600 journalists embedding for the duration of the three week invasion and conquest of Iraq (Carlson and Katovsky 2003; ix). For journalists their continued credibility and legitimacy as reporters would stem from their ability to continue to report ‘professionally’, that is freely, openly and on the record, without official interference (Carlson and Katovsky 2003: ix). Embedding has attracted strong criticism for encouraging partial, cheerleader journalists, reproductive of a discourse of American military righteousness (Seib 2004; Reese 2004; Schechter 2003). Such explicit cheerleaderism was not evident in the reporting of Australian embedded reporters. And, although the journalists interviewed for this study insist that embedding must be considered in the context of the ‘bigger picture’ or the wider coverage operations of a given news organisation, embedded reporting should be understood as strongly contributing to the normalisation of military perspectives, fundamentally altering public understanding’s of war.
As noted, journalists interviewed for this study assert that their professionalism remained intact during embedding. “The short answer is that I didn’t adjust anything (about my practice) – I just went in there as an objective professional journalist”, says Thompson (2006). Similarly, Murdoch (2006) argues that the same principles and practices apply to embedded journalism as do to any other form. Essentially, for these journalists professionalism is transposed into the embedded context unchanged, thus producing ‘embedded’ as an un-problematic news location, like any other, and amenable to professional reporting techniques. The professional model in the context of embedding however, offers a limited perspective and one that, through the pursuit of professional norms, articulates the journalisation of the military.

Enunciating embedding as legitimate, Murdoch (2006) and Thompson (2006) both argue the exercise was free from overt control over what could be reported, beyond particularly sensitive operational details. Embedding is articulated here as both a positive development, permitting the all important access a journalist requires, and as consistent with professionalism. Evidence of this apparent openness is provided by Thompson’s ability to report on the killing of civilians (AM, 10/04/03) and Murdoch’s reporting of the use of napalm by US forces (Sydney Morning Herald, 22/03/03: 1).

The ABC’s Geoff Thompson considered his role as an embedded reporter in light of the “reality TV” phenomena and the so-called “YouTube” generation of internet communications and veneer of increased authenticity lent by ‘unedited’ coverage. The traditional skills of journalism, verification, analysis and contextualisation are ever more important for Thompson in the modern era of instant global communications, as a means of distinguishing journalism from other forms of communication. “These days, increasingly, having worthy generic shots and worthy interviews and subjects doesn’t really cut it anymore…you either live or die by your access”, argues Thompson (2006). And, journalist’s expertise continues to play an important role in making sense of ‘reality’ for audiences; “I think it’s really easy to underestimate the filtering process…taking white noise and turning it into something actually intelligible and interesting and illuminating” (2006). Murdoch emphasises the freedom that embedding permitted, stating, “…on the ground there was no censorship, I could quote anybody that said anything, there was only one strict rule…but if you abided by that, you could file
whatever you like [sic] (Murdoch 2006). Professionalism thus persists in its relevance to the embedding context for these journalists. Indeed, in the complicated and confused context of war and real-time communications, the journalist’s role as arbiter of news and understanding is maintained. As this section details, the persistent representations of the embedded experience concentrate on the operational and narrative aspects of the invasion rather than dwelling on substantive issues war’s impact on either soldiers or civilians. Furthermore, within this study, the embedded reporter’s abilities to engage with critical perspectives were thrown into particular relief by their presence at notable military controversies, such as the checkpoint killings of Iraqi civilians by US military reported by Geoff Thompson.

Lindsay Murdoch’s (embedded for Fairfax Ltd) reporting most clearly illustrates the attempts by embedded reporters to protect their identity by adhering strictly to the prescriptions of professionalism. As Murdoch has stated his reporting focused simply on what he could see, that which was evident before him, reiterating the realist perspective at the heart of the professional discourse. An important consequence of this approach is the unavoidable focus of such a reporting style on the Coalition activities operations and perspectives and for which the experiment of embedding has been heavily criticised (Tumber 2004; Reese 2004; Seib 2004; PEJ 2003). Murdoch’s reporting is almost exclusively concerned with military operations and detail. The following account of military activities from early in the invasion is typical:

The Iraqi gunners fired first, soon after US President George Bush had announced the attack on Saddam Hussein was underway.
It was a fatal mistake.
The Iraqi artillery unit, preparing for the American invasion, tested the range by firing registering shots at a spot where the American tanks were likely to cross from Kuwait. American radar picked up the incoming shells and pinpointed their source. Within hours, the Iraqi gunners and their Russian-made 112-millimetre howitzers were destroyed, as the Americans unleashed an artillery barrage that shook the ground and lit up the night sky with orange flashes.
“Dead bodies are everywhere,” an American officer reported by radio (the Age, 22/03/03: 1).
According to the Project for Excellence in Journalism (PEJ) report, embedded journalism had “all the virtues and vices of reporting only what you could see” (PEJ 2003; 1), providing little analysis, a narrow range or sources and the avoidance of graphic material in favour of the dramatic, an analysis supported by the current examples. Centrally, critics argue that embedding led reporters to identify with soldiers, encouraging uncritical reporting that failed to contextualise the complexity of war. Rarely, if ever, were audiences reminded that the discovery of torture facilities and mass graves and the use of unconventional tactics by Iraqi forces did not justify the invasion (Seib 2004; 60-61). Australian embedded reporting must be seen in this context.

An interpretation of Murdoch’s reporting reveals little interpretation or discussion of war, beyond its description and it’s articulation into a dramatic narrative. This analysis supports the PEJ’s findings. As such, this coverage tended to limit description to operational matters. His reports are leavened with significant amounts of ‘colour’, and those discussions of war entered into were concerned primarily with tactics, often including American justification for certain actions. As such, this embedded reporting must be seen within the context both of professional norms. It should also be understood as a discourse producing military normalisation, naturalising military perspectives and maintaining the hegemony of military logics. For example:

Further south, a four and a half hour gun battle broke out at the strategic port city of Um Qasr, one day after US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said the allies had won control of the city.
Tanks and aircraft attacked targets where at least 120 Republican guards were dug in at Iraq’s only deepwater port.
After two air strikes by British harrier jets, each dropping one 500-pound bomb, some Iraqis could be seen waving white flags and surrendering.
Referring to the air strikes, Captain Rick Crevier, commander of Fox Company of the 2nd Battalion, 1st US Marine Regiment, said: “It made sense for us to do this. Rather than send men in there, we’re just going to destroy it” (the Age, 24/03/03: 3).
Such normalisation and legitimation of the American/coalition experience is not only a key criticism of embedding – the experience, and thus coverage, is structured to favour the American perspective (PEJ 2003; 9), but also of the professional conception of journalism. In Murdoch’s case this meant the facts, “just what I could see every day, just what I could see and what I could quickly get out…” (Murdoch 2006).

Geoff Thompson’s (ABC Radio) reporting was also less inclined towards normalising American military logic, although through less celebratory coverage. Here, however, a concern for clearly enunciating one’s professionalism leads to a more deeply inquisitive reporting style than Murdoch’s. Ultimately however, Thompson’s reports are similarly weakly empathetic towards the soldiers and avoid a deeper and more inquiring position, in favour of pursuing correct professional practice. In this sense the very ‘quality’ of Thompson’s professionalism obviates the expression of deeper understandings beyond superficial accounts of military activity. In such accounts articulating the individualised soldiers experiences - the ‘reality of the troops’ into the discourse effectively journalises the military. By privileging and making visible military experiences and perspectives professional journalism actively supports the strategic intent of the military communications policy (Department of Defense 2003).

Beyond describing the embedded experience, as Murdoch’s reporting did, Thompson is concerned to convey something of the nature of the American forces with whom he travels. As previously noted, with regards to the American military, Thompson considered embedding to offer the best coverage opportunities since Vietnam of the “American war machine” (Thompson 2006b). An interest in being ‘up close and personal’ with soldiers is evident from Thompson's earliest embedded reports. And embedding is justified in these terms – focusing on the narrow experiences of individuals or small groups of soldiers.

For Thompson, through embedding the ‘objective truth’ of military life, in the form of first person interviews, is accurately represented:

Geoff Thompson: Lance Corporal Timothy Galuga is just 21-years old. How do you feel about what’s likely to happen in the next 48 hours?
Timothy Galuga: I'll see what happens, I'm ready to go. I've been ready to go, we've all been ready to go, just waiting for the ok to do our job and take it from there.

Geoff Thompson: Any concerns about the unknown?

Timothy Galuga: Ah, no. You know, fear of the unknown is normal, everyone has fear about that, but once you get used to the surroundings, you know, everybody will be alright. That’s what marines do; we help each other out because we’re all a big brotherhood here. You know, if somebody is lost out there, we pull them back in. We make sure everyone is alright you know. We'll be fine (AM, 20/03/03).

This interest in the soldiers themselves goes beyond Murdoch’s concern over hardships and operational detail and attempts to explore the innocence, ignorance and inexperience that were manifest among American soldiers. As Thompson (2006) argues:

But I knew that [interviewing naïve American soldiers] was interesting and newsworthy. But you don’t need to grill Americans for them to say things and couch things in a way that was interesting. I wasn’t goading them or anything; you didn’t need to do that.

This reporting strategy served Thompson well, permitting many broadcasts in which the complexities, or lack thereof, of American attitudes were demonstrated:

Geoff Thompson: Within hours of going to church, Lance Corporal Charles Robertson is receiving orders to kill people he has never met and whose bodies he will probably never see.

Charles Robertson: Well, you have to definitely know that, believe that you’re doing the right thing out here and pray a lot and get peace from God that you’re doing the right thing ’cause if you don’t think you’re doing the right thing and then you go to church and you worship and then you’re killing somebody, then. You know, it’s something that causes a big conflict.
But, it’s different to think about it ‘cause, you know, usually you think about going to church in your nice clothes on a Sunday morning at home and going back and eating dinner with family. But out here you go to church and then three hours later you’re sending rounds down, raining shit on people.

So, it’s different. There’s not an emotional, it’s not much of an emotional conflict for me because like I said, I think I’m doing the right thing out here. (AM, 31/03/03).

Such reporting is professionally accomplished. Verbatim interviews convey ‘realism’, while the reporter remains aloof, allowing the ‘facts’ of the interviewees responses ‘speak for themselves’. Importantly for professionalism, verbatim interviews offer audiences direct access to ‘reality as it is’ and they offer an ostensibly unadulterated account of newsworthy information, in this case insight into the thoughts and feelings of American soldiers. From this perspective, embedding has been celebrated as allowing a close and detailed understanding of military activity (Thompson 2006; Murdoch 2006; Campbell 2006). However, while this is achieved, this closeness to military operations and personnel, and a keenness to report ‘up close and personal’ must also be considered not only to systematically privilege coalition military perspective, but to normalise, humanise and empathise with the subjectivities and experiences of (American) soldiers. Professionalism here, in its attempts to describe the war experience honestly and to offer new insight, also serves to humanise and empathise with the war effort, without a deeper consideration of the consequences of such a posture. As similarly noted by Reese (2004; 250) coverage of war in this manner integrates the, “logic of military conflict into society, making it difficult to separate out the merits of the larger policy which became hopelessly woven into the larger story”.

As noted and discussed above, Thompson witnessed and reported on the killing of civilians by American soldiers. The treatment of this issue usefully encapsulates this criticism of embedding and professionalism and demonstrates clearly how the relationship established between soldiers and embedded journalists may impact the reporting of war. In reporting the 10 April killings, Thompson (AM, 10.04.03) contradicts the soldiers accounts of the fire-fight, stating clearly that, “they’re all saying that they saw green and white tracer fire [that] comes from AK-47s, so that’s likely to be enemy fire. I never saw green and white tracer fire. Michael Cox, our ABC cameraman here,
never saw green and white tracer fire." However, having established the poor judgement of the military unit, Thompson goes on to excuse the incompetence that his interlocutor suggests;

Geoff Thompson: I think what’s happened is that they got very excited and I think that they were very anxious...basically they were trying to keep civilian vehicles away. They did warn the vehicle, they said, “back, back, back” but you must remember it is dark. The vehicles have got headlights coming up the back of the vehicle [sic].

Linda Mottram: So, you’re talking about highly trained American marines who are in a state of nervousness and excitement, who seen unable to determine what exactly is coming at them and who are even made more jumpy by civilian headlights from cars in a suburb, hardly an unsurprising encounter?

Geoff Thompson: That’s right. They have their, I mean I think their operational procedures are to keep civilian vehicles away. There’s an assumption that civilians will know what this means, that they will know what it means when a marine waves them down in the other direction. Clearly, this incident, this clearly tragic incident has proven that’s not the case (AM; 10/04/03).

This episode is one that has been often referred to by Australian journalists as representing the capabilities of embedded journalists to report the realities of war free from censorship. This story has been celebrated as evidence of the permission granted to more critical perspectives by the American military (Campbell 2006; Kerr 2006; Gawenda 2008). Indeed, Thompson (2006) argues that, “we filmed young grunts shooting up a car full of civilians. Yes, it [embedding] does privilege their perspective, but it doesn’t make them immune from criticism or surveillance”. Critics, however, have pointed to the dangers of embedded journalists becoming socialised into military life and establishing relationships with soldiers beyond the impartiality demanded by professionalism (Tumber 2004: 202-203). Reese identifies this as the “militarisation of journalism” where a relationship develops between soldiers and journalists and a naturalised logic of military operations and culture imposes itself, “working against
alternative frameworks of interpretation” (Reese 2004: 250). Thompson himself admits to feelings of compassion and empathy for the soldiers involved in the shootings:

I felt sorry for the young grunts…I felt sorry for them – I’ve been in those situations before, where it all gets blurred and everyone gets very excited and the blood’s flowing and rumour and misjudgement bubble to the surface very quickly. Coming off that battle high they couldn’t with any sort of sober perspective actually look at what happened, so yeah, I felt sorry for them…” (Thompson 2006).

It is possible then to get a sense of deeper questions going unanswered, as journalists report on the factual occurrence of events such as these, yet explain away the very real and violent deaths of civilians through statements of ‘excitement’ or ‘misjudgement’ on the part of the soldiers. Indeed, this episode is articulated in news discourse as ‘clearly tragic’ rather than militarily incompetent. Here the soldier’s incompetence and the horrors of multiple civilian killings are elided, replaced with rationalisation and humanisation of the soldier’s action. Such representations, rather than posing deeper questions about the preparedness of the American military, the degree of care taken by the invading forces or the wider implications of violence on civil society, normalises the extreme violence of military operations.

Thus, embedding, while holding out a promise of close, open and ‘never before seen' coverage of Americans at war, rather generated a reporting style that offered limited deeper understandings of war. Embedding appealed directly to professionalism, couched as it was in professional discourse, offering new possibilities to earnest war journalists. Rather however, as many critics have observed, embedding freed military authorities from accusations of “crude censorship” (Cottle 2006: 95) by offering greater access to information than previously, yet in a context that was favourable to the strategic intent of military communication planners. As has also been noted, embedded journalists provided a war narrative that offered little in the way of contextualised understandings of war’s meaning (Lewis and Brookes 2004). The evidence provided by the present study supports this argument. As shown above, embeds, while close to the gritty details of military life tended to normalise war and provide sympathetic portrayals of the soldiers with whom they travelled. And although genuine insight is offered by
some embedded reporting, the individual perspectives of soldiers are articulated into mainstream public knowledge and ‘journalised’ through empathetic and compassionate coverage. Such a tendency must be understood in the context of the professional discourse. Although embedding offered apparent openness to journalists and offered them the professional freedom they enunciate as centrally important, professionalism ensured that the more complex issues of context, significance, the possible outcomes and ramifications of invasion were avoided. Importantly, critical perspectives were avoided in favour of the ‘objectivity’ of military facts and events, progress and infrastructure, drama and personalities.

9.7 CONCLUSION

Building on the arguments established in the previous chapters, this section has demonstrated how meaning is enunciated in mainstream news from Iraq, how professionalism serves to legitimate the construction of these meanings and how these may be understood as functional within wider military strategy.

Professionalism creates a distinctly conventional understanding of war. A ‘behind the lines’ perspective, or ‘people’s story’ is considered valuable and useful. So too are the new and inherently newsworthy locations and experiences made possible by the construction of Centcom and the military embed system. Indeed, all these modes of understanding the war, and the meanings attached to them are held to be creative of knowledge. However, as this analysis finds, rather than expanding substantive knowledge about the Iraq war experience, professionalism at once obscures its own contingencies, such as the control and discipline exerted upon journalists by their employers. Professionalism generates meanings that while productive of information, limit rather than enhance substantive knowledge. By placing the reporter at the centre of a new serial, war becomes a personalised narrative in which a ‘star’ journalist is the central character. Although this form of journalism may impart noteworthy detail, war itself becomes disconnected from wider (political) processes only to be understood as a series of dramatic, subjective events.

Professionalism enunciates a journalism that is unnecessarily patriotic, uncritical and disproportionate. Although the Australian component of the Coalition forces was
comparatively small, coverage concerning Australian activities, both military and mundane was persistent and widespread. Journalists are aware of the dangers of being ‘caught up in’ the excitement and fervour of war however they nonetheless reproduce such excitement and adventure as ‘news’. On one hand this is due to the professional demands of mainstream news organisations, either “picking that sort of stuff up” (Callinan 2006) or attempting to keep up with the competition, as Willacy’s experiences make clear. Indeed, Australian angles are a professional’s comparative advantage in a media saturated environment. The effect however, as evidenced by the analysis, is a continued predilection for uncritical journalism that both naturalises and trivialises the war experience, while celebrating the Australian military contribution.

Such normalisation of militarism is further evident in and a distinct feature of, the reporting both from Centcom and from embedded journalists. Both of these locations of news confront journalists with a range of difficulties and constraints. However, rather than present critical perspectives, professionalism enunciates meanings that elide any deeper understanding of war beyond the personalities, experiences and operational details that characterise both forms. Although they were aware of the constraints placed on their reporting at Centcom (and indeed of the propaganda function of both the military press centre and the media corps), journalists opted to treat the operation as legitimate and the news produced as credible. In effect a ‘straw man’ of access and crude propaganda is critiqued within the sphere of legitimate controversy (Hallin, 1986). This enables the expression and articulation of normative, professional identities, while deeper issues such as the systematic manipulation of information, the conditions of journalism production or the relationship between the military and the media goes unexamined for fear of appearing biased or unprofessional.

In the case of embedding, an arrangement of protection and control of journalists by the military, the exercise was treated as any other assignment – journalists remaining “self-consciously un-reflexive” (Pedelty 1995) towards broader implications of presenting humanised, naturalised and often sympathetic accounts of (primarily) American militarism. Rather, the ‘fantasy’ (Žižek, 1989) of professionalism is emphasised – reporting is based explicitly on witnessed events, and distance is established through the use of superficial language designed to keep the media and the
military separate (such as distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them’). Such rationally enacted and purposefully enunciated professionalism overlooks the persistence and power of providing the military perspective so clearly, repetitively and empathetically.

Other scholars have identified how embedding inculcates a militarisation of journalism through the immersion of journalists in military environments under the protection of military personnel. This chapter has identified a corollary to this process. In so far as journalists become militarised, soldiers are also articulated into news discourse as individuals, and humanised through the expression of their perspectives, fears and thoughts. In this way the military is successfully journalised by professional journalism and this process realises the military strategic intent, expressed in the guidelines to the embedding program (Whitman 2003).

Indeed, although journalists are concerned to maintain a clear distance between themselves and those they cover. However, the personalised and humanised reporting of soldiers and military activities undermines any separation. The obvious danger here and one realised in the coverage of the Iraq war, is that as journalists bond and begin to identify (“I felt sorry for them”) with soldiers. In these circumstances the professional scheme and its goals are displaced by a journalistic form that while asserting its professionalism serves to rationalise and normalise the deadly horrors of war.
CHAPTER TEN – CONCLUSION

10.1 OVERVIEW
The purpose of the thesis has been to present an argument concerning the influence of journalistic professionalism on Australian news journalism during the invasion of Iraq, 2003. In doing so the thesis has addressed and answered the research questions and made a timely, original contribution to the field of war journalism studies. The thesis has identified space within the existing literature which demonstrates the utility of employing discourse theoretic concepts and analytical strategies in the analysis of news production. The thesis has also outlined its understanding of these discursive concepts and strategies and it has deployed them in its analysis of Iraq War journalism. Through this analytic strategy the effect of the professional discourse on the production of war journalism has been demonstrated and examined. The analysis has yielded new insight into both professionalism and war journalism. Professional war journalism, rather than achieving of the normative aims of liberal journalism, serves the discursive needs of both journalists and news institutions, legitimating and justifying their practice. Furthermore, the discourse of professionalism ensures journalists ‘overlook’ the role they play in, on one hand producing a palatable ‘war product’ for consumers of war news, and on the other, contributing to military and political strategies of normalizing, legitimating and ultimately supporting the logics of contemporary war.

10.2 METHODOLOGY
This thesis has demonstrated the utility of the discourse analytical perspective in the study of journalism, providing constructive critical direction to the field. In this thesis I have combined a variety of analytical perspectives and strategies. I have drawn on in-depth interview material, an analysis of news text and an analysis of the institutional-bureaucratic context of news production in constructing and articulating my argument. This range of analytic approaches to professional journalism, placed within historic and contemporary contexts, has facilitated an analysis of greater depth and complexity than one solely reliant on one or other aspect of news production. Importantly, these methodological considerations have been made with reference to the existing literature.
concerning both the ‘ideology’ of professionalism and contemporary war journalism. As the thesis is concerned with the manner in which war is ‘made real’ for audiences through the statement and articulation of discourse, a methodological approach which produces a discursive account of war and makes this accessible to the researcher, such as that employed in this study, is considered appropriate. The thesis’ method is purposefully critical and has reflexively constructed a critical account of Australian war journalism in order to identify limitations within contemporary professional practices and identities.

10.3 THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

Theoretically, this study has demonstrated the utility of employing discourse theoretic concepts and analytic strategies to contemporary war journalism. This contribution has developed space and direction for critical scholarship of journalism. In particular, I have demonstrated how critical energies have exhausted ‘ideology’ as a useful analytical concept for journalism studies. I have shown that critical progress can be made through the employment of theoretical concepts drawn from contemporary discourse theory, which theoretically privilege the process of making and articulating ‘meanings’ over the structural imposition of ideology. Having provided a brief genealogy of the critical concept of ideology, I have carefully explicated my understanding and use of discourse theory. Drawing on Foucault’s discourse and social theory I have shown the existence and the general formation of the professional discourse as both emerging historically and within contemporary Australian journalism. Furthermore, I have shown how sensitivity for the relations of power and the conditions of the professional discourse’s employment or articulation plays a significant role in the production of war news. Specifically, I have shown how the discourse serves news institutional power, rather than facilitating the fulfilment of normative journalistic functions, such as the provision of neutral, independently newsworthy information. The discourse both produces ‘useful’ journalists, while permitting the maintenance of an independent and objective identity. This analysis has been augmented by the inclusion of concepts drawn from the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe (1985), whose expanded notion of the discursive and means by which discourse is circulated has permitted the conceptualisation of news
professionalism both as hegemonic within the discursive field of journalism and consonant with contemporary forms of administrative, political and military hegemony.

10.4 THE THESIS IN CONTEXT
Both the methodological and theoretical approaches of this thesis are justified with reference to the existing literature in the field of journalism and communication studies. I have located this study at the nexus of three traditions within media analysis in order to demonstrate the critical progress that can be made through the combination of sociological, cultural and institutional foci. The use of discourse theory in media analysis has illustrated a means by which the other perspectives can be united, as discourse theory, with its pre-occupation with the generation and circulation of meaning necessarily draws on sociology, cultural studies and political economy in identifying the location and effects of discursive articulations. Specifically, I have shown how within these older traditions of media analysis, criticism reliant on the concept of ‘ideology’ has predominated. Ideology critique relied on monolithic conceptions of power. By contrast, the theoretic approach employed here has illustrated the consonance of discursive needs of journalists with military-political and administrative power, rather than domination by ideology. Furthermore, seldom has discourse analysis been applied within the field of war journalism studies and this thesis has purposefully and constructively illustrated the utility of this theoretical approach to the study of the generation and circulation of news-meanings during war and conflict.

10.5 EMPIRICAL OBSERVATIONS
Empirically, this thesis has drawn on a wide range of material in order to both answer the thesis’ research questions and to clearly illustrate the development, organisation and operation of the professional discourse within contemporary journalism. The empirical observations were presented in five chapters, which employed this thesis’ stated methodological and theoretical approach in order to elucidate the emergence, structure and operation of the professional discourse in war news journalism.

In Chapter Five the thesis presented an account of the historical emergence of emergence of the professional discourse within Anglo-journalism and its establishment
as a hegemonic discourse within journalism. This account demonstrated the emergence of professionalism, as a specific set of journalistic practices and ethics, in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries to be largely a product of commercial needs and interests, which sought mass appeal and audiences for newspapers. Professionalism, however, also appealed to the scientific, positivist orthodoxies of the era, which optimistically held that the truth and reality of human experience may be laid bare through the application of scientific, objective methods of observation. By the mid-twentieth century professionalism prevailed as the hegemonic discourse within mainstream news journalism. This was, as Hallin (1992) has characterised, journalism's high modern period. This chapter then provided an account of the professional method, detailing its central positive pre-occupation with ‘facticity’ and its disavowal of non-objective approaches to reporting news and demonstrated how professionalism has become sedimented as an occupational ‘ideology’\textsuperscript{42}. The professional ideology, as professionalism came to be characterised, has been widely criticised as encouraging status quo, inherently conservative news representations, unable to move its social and political analysis beyond the ‘balance’ of competing, often unequally powerful views. Chapter Five then placed professionalism in its contemporary context, in the age of post-modernity and neo-liberal globalisation. Here I argued that professional journalism, facing challenges from cultural, social and economic changes, remains founded on nineteenth century professional ethics and values. Professionalism, hamstrung by these outdated commitments, is unable to adequately address the complexity and multi-perspectival nature of the modern era. Moral, social and cultural norms and absolutes have all been called into question by the socio-economic and philosophic changes of the later-twentieth century. This section also provided an examination of the contemporary Australian news media relevant to this thesis. I briefly examined the challenges faced by contemporary Australian journalism, such as corporate domination of the media sector and government hostility to public broadcasting. These are particularly Australian expressions of global trends. In this context, contemporary forms of administrative, political and military power resist

\textsuperscript{42} Here ideology is used, as it is in Chapter Five, as a descriptive term which is borrowed from the literature of this period. As shown this thesis rearticulates ideology critique through discourse theory.
simplistic, objective analyses. The employment of sophisticated and impenetrable information and communications strategies during conflict and war highlights these difficulties for journalists and highlights journalists’ position of structural weakness in relation to military authority. Furthermore, as has been shown, professionalism in journalism is incapable of resisting the turn towards the spectacular and dramatic. In the context of war, lifestyle and tabloid features, such as military profiles and parochial reporting have been successfully integrated into war journalistic forms. Indeed, in the globalised era, news journalism has been criticised for offering highly commercialised high-tech, 24/7 ‘news products’ rather than adhering to its normative values of insightful, critical news and analysis. These criticisms have guided this thesis’ analysis of contemporary Australian war journalism. Notwithstanding these criticisms however, the discourse of professionalism protects journalists from potential criticisms as they invoke the hegemonic identity of independent, objective and moral journalists to defend and justify their practice.

In Chapter Six the existence and general formation of the professional discourse, as observed through in-depth interviews with Australian journalists and editors was demonstrated and examined. This was done in accordance with the thesis’ stated methodological aims of problematising professionalism and providing an alternative account of war to that observed in news reports. I was able to show the discursive formation of professionalism, as enacted during the Iraq invasion, was comprised three major discourses: objectivity, independence and newsworthiness (news values). Within these discourses, concepts and strategies (Foucault 1972) and nodal points (Laclau and Mouffe 1985) were identified which serve to organise and regulate what may or may not be included within professional journalistic output and from which the journalistic identity is constructed. For example, this section demonstrated the importance of the concept of ‘reality’ in reinforcing the empiricist, positivist approach journalists undertake in reporting and transmitting ‘truthful’ news. Likewise, a moral commitment to reporting and illuminating the ‘people’s story’ during war demonstrates the importance of an emotional, empathetic approach to covering war and its substantive effects. Concepts and articulatory strategies such as these clearly illustrate professionalism as a positive inclusionary regime, seeking to bring journalistic practices
and forms within its legitimating, discursive bounds. However, as this section has demonstrated also, the discourse privileges certain aspects of war news coverage, such as Central Command and embedding, as legitimate, normalised news locations, in which normative professionalism can be un-problematically exercised. In this sense the professional discourse is invoked to justify contingent, circumstantial journalistic practice and to reinforce an image of journalistic independence in the face of widespread military control and information management. Furthermore, the discourse is shown to operate as an exclusionary regime which is used to de-legitimate aspects of wartime reality and coverage so as to establish an ‘other’ against which the professional identity is defined and legitimated. The de-legitimation of non-professional, Iraqi and counter-hegemonic perspectives (such as ‘alternative’ readings of certain events – the Firdos Square statue destruction for example) provides the most clear examples of this process. Chapter Six demonstrates professionalism both as sedimented as a hegemonic journalistic form and also as a discursive ‘regime of truth’ (Foucault 1980) which controls, organises and regulates the production of Iraq War news.

In Chapter Seven the analysis moved from a description of the professional discourse to an account of its operation. This analysis attended to the individual enactment of professionalism and to its operation both within the context of news institutions and within the wider field of military and political power. Initially the power journalists possess to produce war news was examined. I argue journalists, deploying the professional discourse, wield considerable power in making war ‘real’ for news audiences. This ‘power to represent’ however, is also the power to exclude and control what becomes news of war, and this power has also been illustrated, for example the exclusion of defining civilian casualties as anything other than a “clearly tragic incident” (AM, 10/04/03). Indeed, this section makes clear that not only does professionalism exclude potential news-meanings, but also that in realising their power and expressing their professional identity journalists tend to function as ‘useful’ within military and administrative strategy.

Chapter Seven goes on to demonstrate how journalist’s agency and autonomy is limited by their location within news institutions. However, I have shown that the discourse provides the means by which this disciplinary power is overlooked by
individual journalists. Although coercive power may be an affront to journalistic identity yet it is rationalised by professionalism. Furthermore, administrative power is identified as that form of power which exists as already within professionalism. That is, professionalism implies a commitment and ability to reproduce news institutional norms, and the most highly regarded journalists are those who have most completely internalised this commitment, thus overcoming the tension between individual and institution autonomy and power. This commitment results in attractive, saleable and spectacular coverage that is articulated in easily processed and comprehended forms and which avoids complexity and nuance yet fulfils news institutional requirements. It is a feature of administrative power that it permits the pursuit and realisation of autonomous professional identity, yet obscures the compromises and relations of subordination that characterise war journalism, such as those that exist between the media and military authorities. This chapter concludes by arguing administrative power, produces ‘useful and ‘docile’ journalists. The high value news coverage that news institutions pursue necessarily entails journalistic forms which are useful within the strategic intent of military and political authorities – such as normalising military logic and providing humanising coverage of soldiers and military operations through ‘up close and personal’ reporting. In conclusion, Chapter Seven argues that professionalism is consonant with the broader cultural and economic conditions of neo-liberalism which individuate human responsibility and agency, obscuring the role played by professionalism in reproducing these larger systemic hegemonies.

The final chapters of analysis dealt directly with the production of Iraq War news in order to demonstrate explicitly how the professional discourse serves to produce or make the Iraq War ‘real’ within news discourse. Chapter Eight was concerned with illustrating how the discourse legitimates certain aspects of war coverage while Chapter Nine has analysed the news-meanings and effects which were produced through the discourse. In Chapter Eight the discourse has been shown to privilege and legitimate certain contingent aspects of war-reality, such as the ‘people’s story’ and the centrality and importance of journalist’s authority as witnesses to produce accounts of war for news audiences. The analysis has shown that although many representations of Iraqi civilians relied heavily of cultural stereotypes and bald chauvinism, and that the witness-
authority of journalists yielded many inaccurate and unreliable news accounts, these representations were justified with reference to professionalism. The discourse was demonstrated as centrally important in maintaining and reinforcing journalistic legitimacy and authority in these circumstances. It is through professionalism that the archetypal journalistic identity is maintained and reproduced. This analysis clearly shows the strategic, legitimating function of professionalism. This is especially evident in the analysis of Centcom and embedding. Here the discourse is shown to be crucial in justifying and normalising the participation of journalists and media organisations in media-information strategies enacted by Western military-political power. As the analysis has argued the discourse of professionalism provides journalists with the capacity to ‘overlook’ their involvement and functionality within military communications strategy.

Chapter Nine analysed the professional production of news-meaning during war. In this section it was shown how the operation of institutional controls restrain journalistic meanings within relatively narrow, conservative and, importantly, unprovocative limits. The analysis also showed how alternative potential meanings are subordinated to professional definitions. This analysis illustrates that war is ever more portrayed as a dramatised spectacle, disconnected from wider issues of military and political policy. This effect of professionalism is most notably illustrated by the emergence during war of the journalist as the ‘star’ or ‘celebrity’ within his or her own narrative.

This chapter also demonstrates the professional pre-disposition, as a result of journalist’s subordination by military power, for military-centric and disproportionately patriotic and parochial coverage. As I have shown, such a predilection amongst journalists naturalises and trivialises war while humanising individual soldiers and celebrating Australian militarism.

Lastly, Chapter Nine has demonstrated how professionalism ensures journalists can report from controversial locations, such as Centcom and embedded journalism, both maintaining their legitimacy yet avoiding controversy or substantive criticisms of military policy and operations. Professionalism permits the ‘performance’ of independence and criticism, such as identifying the crude propaganda strategies
employed by military authorities, yet avoids substantive issues such as interrogating military policy or exploring the relationship between the media and the military, for example. For several interviewees, their role was effectively limited to policing language use, determined as they were to avoid the pitfalls of previous wars. In this sense professional discourse inculcates the 'militarisation of journalistic consciousness' (Kellner 1992; Reese 2004) in which, while egregious misuse of language is prevented, military policy, operations and logics are normalised within news discourse. In relation to embedded journalism, professionalism provides both the rationale and justification for cooperation with military authorities. Contemporary technologies, audience expectations and competition between news organisations are argued to 'demand' participation in such programs. Indeed, embedding is held to yield important insights into war, according to this study’s interviewees. Professionalism however, is invoked to protect against accusations of pro-Western bias or ‘cheerleader’ journalism. Through professional practices and ethics, journalists argue, remaining independent of and critical towards those military units with which they travel is entirely possible. However, as Chapter Nine demonstrates, a commitment to professionalism means journalists, while aware of their subordination to military power, overlook both their rationalisation of military logics and operations and empathise with and humanise individual soldiers. In this sense professionalism enacts the ‘journalisation’ of the military, presenting a sanitised, sympathetic representation of militarism, yet doing so from a superficially professional position.

10.6 THE ROLE OF PROFESSIONALISM IN WAR JOURNALISM

Journalism therefore, is not dominated by monolithic ideology and nor should professionalism be understood as an ideology to which journalists are committed. Rather, as this thesis has shown, professionalism in journalism should be understood as a pragmatic arrangement of discourses, concepts and strategies which facilitate the production of journalism’s object, news. In this thesis I have shown professionalism to have emerged from specific historic, cultural and economic conditions. In this process professionalism’s utility in producing a standardised, saleable news-commodity is central. As I have argued, this aspect of professionalism has been exploited to the
extent that the commodification of journalism has outweighed other considerations, such as public service. Professionalism is thus the central operational ethic within news institutions and among news professionals. In this sense professionalism not only facilitates the bureaucratic and rational organisation and dispersal of news-producing resources, but has also become the measure of the extent to which journalists have internalised the norms, values and practices of a given news institution.

Professionalism therefore provides coherence and purpose to journalistic activities. Professionalism is both a frame work of intelligibility and a ‘horizon of possibility’ (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). Journalism’s task, in general terms, is to make sense of a chaotic and complex reality for news audiences. In performing this function, professionalism appeals to scientific discourse and notion of public service and democratic/liberal freedoms to justify and legitimate its practice, ethics and the privileged social position of journalists as producers of knowledge.

However, as a ‘regime of truth’ (Foucault 1980) professionalism also excludes and de-legitimises potential aspects of news reality and does so, this thesis shows, with self-serving expediency rather than with reference to external, objective norms. Indeed, exclusions are justified by reference to journalistic norms, which professionalism itself defines. In this sense professionalism provides journalism with a legitimate defence over accusations of improper execution of its normative role – what Tuchman (1978) has called the ‘strategic ritual’ of objectivity.

Professionalism is clearly also productive. Through its operation it not only excludes certain aspects of reality from its purview, but provides legitimacy for that which is included. The contingent, pragmatic and situational needs of professional journalism are legitimated and justified through the discourse, yet overlooked also. As this thesis has demonstrated professionalism is invoked as justifying the activities of the journalistic ‘witness’ and the production of the morally concerned ‘people’s story’ of the Iraq War. The professional discourse crucially legitimates controversial journalistic activities too, such as coverage of military affairs and operations through press conferences (Central Command) and through embedding. As I have argued such news locations are articulated as professional journalistic ‘needs’ and pragmatically legitimated through articulations of journalistic independence and neutrality. As this
thesis has demonstrated such journalistic forms usefully function within military-political strategy and as such the needs of professional journalism are held to be consonant with the needs of military-political power.

The thesis has made clear that professionalism is a contingent, pragmatic discourse which is hegemonic within journalism and as such professionalism wields the power to define the activity of journalism itself. The discourse regulates how a legitimate professional identity must be constructed, as certain journalistic norms and values are sanctioned and others are disavowed. The discourse both includes and excludes certain activities, methods and identities, yet makes this selectivity opaque, through articulations of professionalism. Consequently, this analysis of professional war journalism, rather than providing an objective view of complex political, military and social affairs, demonstrates the constraint of journalism within the regime of professionalism. Indeed, the hegemony of professionalism within journalism ensures journalism’s object – independent reality, and in this case, war-reality, is produced in accordance with discursive needs rather than through fidelity to this external, positive reality. It is in this sense that the professional discourse ‘makes war real’.

It is also a central argument of this thesis that a commitment to professionalism and its internalisation as the central hegemonic discourse within journalism prevents any critical re-consideration of journalism’s socio-political function by journalists themselves. As I have made clear, this is not journalism’s ‘ideological effect’ (Hall 1977) in which journalists unknowingly reproduce the dominant cultural ideologies of an age, but rather the operation of the ‘ideological fantasy’ of professionalism. Following Laclau and Mouffe (1985), this thesis has conceived of the discursive as coextensive with the social. Thus, no meanings or identities are available from a position outside discursive constructions and articulations and thus all meaning is always already ideological (Laclau 1990; Žižek, 1989) and that ideology no longer implies its opposite, truth. Rather, the failure to recognise the radical contingency of meaning and identity, and of the discourses through which they are articulated, has been conceptualised as ‘ideological fantasy’. Professionalism, this thesis has demonstrated, is a discourse that carefully restrains critical self-reflection and provides the conceptual means with which to ‘overlook’ journalism’s limitations. It is in this sense that professionalism in
journalism, as a hegemonic discourse which is operative within wider conditions of socio-political hegemony, can be characterised as a ‘fantasy’ which fails to recognise its own contingency and is consequently unable to address its own shortcomings, which the thesis has examined.

There exist therefore several implications for professional journalism. As has been stated, this thesis has conceived theoretically of meaning and identity as radically contingent, yet in the context of professionalism sedimented into hegemonic discourse. As shown, professionalism powerfully produces both journalistic identities and news meanings. The thesis has shown hegemonic professionalism to be historically, economically and culturally produced, as well as reinforced by the institutional and structural power relationships that characterise contemporary war journalism, such as a reliance on military protection and information.

An investigation of the conditions in which such forms of counter-hegemonic journalism may be possible, and a study of those counter-hegemonic articulations that were visible during the Iraq War would be constructive future research and would build purposefully on the findings of the present study. Such research, building on the present findings may provide direction for journalism’s future development outside of the professionalism.

10.7 THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE THESIS
In producing this thesis I have contributed to the field of journalism/communication studies in several constructive ways. Firstly, the thesis has identified the need for theoretical and methodological development. The thesis examined the useful contributions made by media sociologists, cultural theorists and political economists and demonstrated clearly how contemporary discourse theory may be used to enhance the critiques provided by these perspectives. In particular, the thesis illustrated the utility of discourse theory in moving criticism of journalism and the media beyond problematic ideology critique. The thesis has also demonstrated how the discourse perspective permits understanding the role of journalists during wartime beyond the paradigm of dominance, in which journalists are considered hopelessly exploited and controlled by
military and political power. Rather I have shown the coincidence of professional journalistic and military-political strategic interests.

Secondly, the thesis has contributed meaningfully to the methodology of the study of journalism in general, and of war journalism in particular. My study has sought discursive forms and articulations, produced in in-depth interviews, and cross-examined this material with reference to war news production, located in news articles and transcripts produced by those news professionals who participated. This material has been purposefully located within both historic and contemporary cultural and economic contexts. In this regard, and with the aim of understanding the emergence, form and operation of the professional discourse in contemporary war journalism, the methodology is held to be innovative.

Thirdly, the study of discursive practices and their influence on the production of journalism is held to be innovative within the field of journalism studies and particularly in regards to studies of war journalism. Where previous studies have emphasised the ideological nature of professionalism, this study has critiqued this perspective and offers a novel means for both understanding journalism and a contingent set of articulatory practices and provided the basis for future productive examinations which privilege the capacity of journalists and news organisations to apprehend, produce and articulate journalism outside of the strictures of professionalism. The thesis emphasises the importance of reflexivity within the activity of making news ‘real’ for audiences and incorporating these reflections within the news making process.

Lastly this thesis has answered the research questions which were formulated to guide the investigation of the operation of professionalism in journalism. In answering these questions the thesis has provided a timely empirical examination of Australian war journalism as observed during the Iraq War, 2003. The interview data from which these observations were drawn is provided as appendices.

To these ends this thesis represents a useful contribution to knowledge.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

INTERVIEWS

FIRST ROUND

Trevor Bormann (ABC) – 15/06/08
Eric Campbell (ABC) – 19/05/06
Jonathan Harley (ABC) – 15/06/06
Peter Kerr (Fairfax) – 18/05/06
Ian McPhedran (News Ltd) – 17/05/06
Lindsay Murdoch (Fairfax) – 19/05/06
Mark Willacy (ABC) – 02/07/06
Peter Wilson (News Ltd) – 19/05/06

SECOND ROUND

Rory Callinan (News Ltd) – 18/12/06
Jonathan Harley (ABC) – 30/11/06
Ian McPhedran (News Ltd) – 18/12/06
Geoff Thompson (ABC) – 30/11/06
Mark Willacy (ABC) – 07/11/06
Peter Wilson (News Ltd) – 05/12/06

THIRD ROUND

Michael Carey (ABC) – 22/12/07
Michael Gawenda (Fairfax) – 07/01/08
Peter Kerr (Fairfax) – 22/12/07
NEWS ARTICLES AND TRANSCRIPTS

NEWSPAPERS
The Australian 20/03/03 – 20/04/03
The Age 20/03/03 – 20/04/03
The Sydney Morning Herald 20/03/03 – 20/04/03

RADIO TRANSCRIPTS
AM, Australian Broadcasting Corporation 20/03/03 – 20/04/03
PM, Australian Broadcasting Corporation 20/03/03 – 20/04/03
The World Today, Australian Broadcasting Corporation 20/03/03 – 20/04/03

SECONDARY MATERIAL


Heights, NJ, Pearson.


International Peace Research, 1, 64-91.


Henningham, J. (1996b) Australian Journalists' Views on Professional Associations. *Asia Pacific Media Educator*, 1, 144-152.


Seib, P. (2004) Beyond the Frontlines: how the news media cover a world shaped by


Siebert, Fred S., Peterson, Theodore and Schram, Wilbur, (1956) *Four Theories of the Press*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press.


Singer, J. (2003) Who are these guys? The online challenge to the notion of journalistic professionalism. *Journalism*, 4, 139-163.


Journalism Quarterly, 67, 973-983.


Giles Dodson: What I wanted to ask you, what I wanted to start by asking you was what were you most proud of or what do you think you achieved best during you your time in Iraq and your reporting from there?

Ian McPhedran: The obvious thing is that it rounded the picture out for everyone, to have people on the ground from the enemy side, or the other side, if you like, of a war is quite important. Otherwise you get just the one perspective, now given that most of what we were told or most of what we reported on was propaganda, we were able to get beyond that by going out and seeing for ourselves some of the things that were going on and talking to the local people. That provided a very important perspective on the coverage for the readers back here…

GD: Sure, sure. How possible was it to get round the controls that the Ministry of Information would but on?

IMc: Well, it was quite difficult and ultimately led to my demise in being thrown out of the country. But you know there is always ways and means of doing things if you are prepared to take a few chances and stuff, but the media people at the ministry of information did provide us with quite good access with bus trips out to events, but you could never be sure who it was you were talking to once you got there. But if you scouted around the edges of that and did your own thing to a certain extent and got around with your own car and driver, then you could pick up a few things and get a bit of a picture.

GD: And it was possible to get your own car and get a bit of freedom then?
IMc: It wasn’t really that possible once the bombing started, because it became a little bit dangerous. It was increasingly difficult um, but you know, we managed and in the end we got round and did a few things.

Pause while Respondent takes another call.

IMc: So, where were we? Yeah, it was ok to get around on your own a little bit, but [it] became increasingly difficult and because obviously the drivers were at home with their families as the bombing became more intensive.

GD: Yeah, sure, listen I’ll get back to your experiences in Baghdad and thereabouts in a minute, but I wanted to talk about professional journalism, in a more sort of wider sense [sic]. What do you consider a professional journalist to be?

IMc: Someone who reports the news without fear or favour.

GD: And presumably you consider yourself a professional journalist?

IMc: Yes.

GD: How central are the values, the traditional, the values which have traditionally identified journalism to your practice?

IMc: Very very central, I mean without that we are lost, without that, and facts we are lost. So I think that is a primary pillar, alongside factual information.

GD: And how would you define objectivity?

IMc: Well, the ability to put your own prejudices to one side and to report what you see fairly, in a balanced way and objectively.
GD: And in the context of war, it’s a fairly unique set of circumstances, totally different from reporting the day to day affairs of a government or events. How relevant or possible is objectivity during war?

IMc: It’s challenging because as the situation deteriorates and you become a captive of either the military on either side or the political elites on either side. It becomes increasingly difficult. The embedded journalists working with the American military units, their objectivity was obviously hampered by what they were seeing and what they were shown. The same with us on the other side, except we were able to scout around the edges, as I said earlier.

GD: Sure, so your experiences in Iraq would have confronted these values, your professional values?

IMc: Well, I suppose, it’s not something you think about when you’re sitting under four hundred cruise missiles and bombs every night, mate. It doesn’t really, [sic] your conscience is not really thinking “oh my God, am I being objective?” What you are trying to do is to stay alive … and report what you are seeing.

GD: That’s the thing though, from accounts that I have read from journalists is Baghdad for example, being confined to a hotel for example or being under the guidance or control of the ministry of information and being restricted in what they can do. It does limit the possibilities.

IMc: It does, it does. But you know at that point it becomes a matter of doing what you can. And you can find information away from the propaganda or the party line if you are prepared to take a certain amount of risks as well. But it does become increasingly difficult as things degenerate.

GD: I mean, in that context what become the most important stories and the most sort of important sources to be using, that sort of thing?
IMc: It's always primary sources. In my view it is the human element. Obviously we can talk about buildings being bombed, telephone exchanges being destroyed, but the real stories are the collateral damage the children, the families being caught up in this war and the stories in the hospitals and of the victims and so on. But you have to be very careful that you are actually seeing what you purport to be seeing, and what they purport you are seeing, you have to take a very, very critical eye to what you are being shown and what you're hearing. But I think the human story is the obvious story when there is any sort of conflict.

GD: You mentioned embedding before I know you were operating independently, but what is, or what was your attitude to that exercise?

IMc: Well, I don't agree with it, I wouldn't do it. But I can see that it is part of the overall picture. Obviously if you are offered the opportunity to do that and you have the resources, then you would do it. But obviously if you weren't able to do it all then embedding would be the last thing you would do….in my view.

GD: So you are of the opinion that it privileges the military perspective?

IMc: Well, it's the only perspective there is, there's no other perspective. You're seeing what they are seeing down the sight of a gun or a tank and you know each element of military operations sees only a tiny, wafer thin fraction of the overall picture. So if you are stuck in a particular situation, living under a tank or whatever then it's obviously very limited.

GD: How much contact did you have with your superiors, with your editors, back, in Australia?

IMc: I had a satellite phone contact, several times a day.
GD: And was there direction coming from them in terms of what to cover?

IMc: No, they left that entirely in my hands because they understood that in a situation like that it’s very difficult for them to second guess what’s actually going on

GD: And they were happy with the style and scope of your reporting?

IMc: I think so, I presume so, I didn’t get sacked so I think they were happy.

GD: Well, it got reprinted all over Australia, I have been going through reams and reams of your stuff – there’s certainly lots of it.

IMc: It got a good run around the place and that’s fine. I think the stories were quite strong.

GD: We were talking a little before about objectivity and we were talking about what that means and the definition of that. Impartiality is a big aspect of that. How difficult is that to sustain, that sense of impartiality when you’ve got civilian deaths and a war, the legality of which is in question in dispute to begin with?

IMc: Well, I think you have to maintain impartiality as much as you can, some people become tied up on one particular perspective, but I tried to maintain my impartiality and just report what I was seeing and not making any judgements about the rights or wrongs of what I was seeing and just reporting what I was seeing. You know those sorts of commentaries are for others in other locations at other times but when you are on the daily round of a situation like that there is enough to keep you busy just covering the news and reporting what you are seeing without getting too tied up in sort of moral questions or whatever, so I think that was a secondary issue in terms my coverage, I just tried to do a reporting job, a very basic reporting job.
GD: Fair enough, yeah. And were you reflecting on how your stories, your news would be received back in Australia?

IMc: Not particularly, no. I wasn’t really reflecting on anything really, just trying to make sure I was, I had something to eat and wasn’t hit by a bomb. I just filed the stories and what happened to them after that it was a matter for the editors.

GD: Did you have at all a chance while you were in Baghdad. I’m not sure if you were able to watch CNN or anything like that, but did you get much of a chance to see what else was happening from Centcom or from other parts of Iraq?

IMc: No, no, once the war began we didn’t have any coverage on anything at all, it all died they pulled the plug on everything. We only had what we were told by our own organisations. If you had the technology you could do streaming through the internet, but I didn’t have that technology.

GD: Presumably, you were aware obviously, perhaps in retrospect, of what was going on in other parts of the Gulf, for example in Centcom?

IMc: I became aware of that quite early because one or our reporters who’d been there arrived in Baghdad soon after the liberation of Baghdad and was able to explain to us exactly what happened – the sort of appalling treatment the journos [sic] got down there.

GD: Was that Rory Callinan?

IMc: Yes

GD: What’s your opinion or how would you describe the goings on at Centcom, the strategies employed.
IMc: It would have come as no surprise to me because I have been dealing with defence forces for a long time and these people’s job is to obstruct and obfuscate and that’s what they did very successfully.

GD: How is it possible for journalists to combat, um, or try to uncover in those sorts of circumstances.

IMc: Well you then have to do what Peter Wilson and John Feder did. I don’t know if you have talked to Peter, but he escaped from that controlling situation by driving off into the desert and then getting captured and almost killed, so to get around it you have to put yourself at fairly high risk. It’s not very good, but that’s the only option you’ve got when you’re being messed around by these people.

GD: I plan to talk to Peter soon. But you also had a bit of a close escape so to speak.

IMc: Yeah, I did. I was obviously removed from Baghdad on day ten or eleven of the war by the Ministry of Information, expelled from the country, so I had to drive out through the war to Jordan. An experience I wouldn’t want to repeat.

GD: Why was it exactly that you were thrown out?

IMc: Because I did something outside the rules of even though I thought I had been granted permission to do it. In other words there was a face saving issue when one of the other officers caught me outside the compound without a guide and I explained that I had permission from one of his underlings, but that wasn’t of course good enough. I the Iraqi hierarchy scheme of things, he made a loud song and dance and from that point on I was basically doomed because I didn’t want to be locked up in jail as the Americans were coming through the front gates.

GD: So were you given a choice to leave or be locked up?
IMc: Basically, yeah.

GD: Um, how were you able to maintain reporting from Amman?

IMc: I just did reporting round the edges from there. The story was in Baghdad and in Iraq and I was out of the picture for the ten days I was in Amman, I just did a little bit of commentary and a little bit of feature writing but I couldn’t do any daily reporting because there was absolutely nothing happening there. I was just the most frustrated person on the planet, until I managed to get back in ten days later.

GD: During for example, war when you are talking about bombs falling on people’s heads and being ushered around by ministry of information people or the many great limitations on what you can do. My impression from a lot of the reporting of Iraq was that it was extremely descriptive rather than being in anyway analytical or providing any context to what was going on, is that something you think is bound to happen during war?

IMc: Yeah, I think so. You have to read the stories from the embedded people, you have to read the stories from the free range people, you have to read the stories from the behind the enemy lines people – like me – once you’ve read all those stories you might get a better picture of what’s going on, but remember, the propaganda feed from the Coalition side, the Americans and the Australians, was also pretty strong. There’s a lot of bullshit going on during a war and you’ve got to try and build the picture from as many reports as you can possibly absorb. But anyone who thinks you can just sit in Baghdad, in Iraq, during a war and do analytical, nice think pieces and nice pieces of analysis is not only a little bit naïve, but probably a little bit stupid.

GD: Were there stories then that were not pursued, that were newsworthy or should have been spent more time on?
IMc:  Oh, I’m sure, but there is only a certain amount you can do. While something interesting is going on one level, when a bomb blows up a building and blows up a whole bunch of people that’s an interesting story and it kind of takes precedence. I am sure there were things that were missed, particularly in the aftermath, but there’s only a certain amount you can do and it’s just total chaos in a situation like that – it’s quite extraordinary.

GD:  Just a couple of things to end on – I know you were working for a newspaper, but the demand for ongoing news were perhaps not so great as for the TV people.

IMc:  Well, there were no TV people there from Australia, so I had the added problem of having phone calls coming from radio stations and TV shows all round Australia trying to take advantage of our presence there and I tried to be cooperative with those people as much as I could on the radio or the 7.30 Report or whatever it was, but at the end of the day, your primary job is to work for your organisation, so you’re a bit limited in what you can do, but they pulled all their people out so they can’t then be expecting us to act as their correspondents there.

GD:  Would you do it again?

IMc:  Yes, I would. It was a great story, I mean it’s a tragic situation, any war, but from a journalist’s point of view, a reporter’s point of view, it doesn’t really get any better than that. You’ve only got to wake up in the morning and there it is, or hope you wake up in the morning.

GD:  Listen, I will end it there, thank you.

THE END
APPENDIX II - INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

TREVOR BORMANN (ABC)
15 JUNE 2006

Giles Dodson: What I wanted to start off by asking was, just more generally than your specific experiences of reporting and producing from Iraq and the region – perhaps you can tell me what it is you are most proud of, or your most important or valuable achievement of your time reporting from that region during the war?

Trevor Bormann: I think the satisfaction in doing stories that involved human beings and Iraqis themselves, rather than the usual big picture coverage or geopolitical stuff, because we were in Baghdad and a very good situation to cover events on the ground, it was gratifying just to see how normal Iraqis were dealing with it and what they thought of the events.

GD: Was that the invasion period?

TB: Well, we were there for several weeks before the fall of the regime, and during that time it was very difficult to get a clear insight into what people felt and they were thinking about in terms of the impending start of hostilities, because under the regime we were fairly restricted in terms of who we spoke to. There was always a minder with us and people in the street, people that you did meet, citizens of Iraq were very reluctant to, I suspect, to exhibit their true feelings about the situation, but once hostilities began and the regime fell they were much more open and forthcoming about how they saw things.

GD: And what was the change did you notice?

TB: Look, generally extraordinary relief that the regime had fallen, but it took many weeks for, it took several weeks for, after being conditioned and living under the regime
for so many years, they were quite weary about you know, feeling that they had been liberated – for weeks and in some cases months afterwards, but generally relief that the regime had come to an end, but it took quite a while, but also great consternation that war was here and infrastructure was destroyed and lives had been lost, but the general feeling was, at least in the early stages was that it may be a worthwhile price to pay.

GD: Just to talk about, I will try to come back to your experiences and the ABC’s reporting from Iraq, but more generally in a broader sense thinking about journalism, what in your opinion, constitutes or what is a professional journalist? How does a professional journalist define oneself?

TB: I guess someone who has a high sense of morality, a high, developed sense of value judgement, someone who prides themselves in their own integrity, someone who has a quest to be reasonably objective, but also one who can make observations and judgements and is not afraid to be subjective at times, on the basis of your experience.

GD: Do you think that those are sort of more important, that sort of moral, vision is more important than an adherence to any sort of formal rules or established practices of journalism?

TB: I suppose what I mean by morality is more my morality rather than what I perceive others to be [sic]. By moral I mean being true to myself, and to the integrity of my profession, you know trying to be reasonably balanced while at the same time not frightened to offer my opinion in an analysis and interpretation of things.

GD: How central is objectivity to that practice of journalism?

TB: I think objectivity is a bit of a cliché in a way, people have this idea that there are two sides to every story and the truth lies somewhere in between and that’s objectivity, I don’t see it that way. I think objectivity is being true to your own observations, I think it an organisation makes the commitment to put you in that situation, and if you are
prepared to take the risk I don’t think you should be, I mean, I think you’ve got to add value to that and I think you are quite entitled to make opinions on that, on your observations and think you have to be fairly fearless in that.

GD: Presumably in a war situation these, the attempts to do that come under fairly strong challenge, I would have thought it must be difficult to maintain, to keep those values relevant or possible during war.

TB: Yeah, that’s right. It was open slather, in the days during and after the war there weren’t those pressures there. There wasn’t any organised military briefing for example, so the attempt by the military or by anyone else to spin the story was something that we didn’t encounter, because we were just going out each day, more or less just going onto the streets and getting our stories.

GD: And just reporting what you saw?

TB That’s right. That’s what was gratifying about the situation we were in, as opposed to a situation of a journalist in Doha, reporting the briefings or someone embedded for example with the military, there were different pressures that existed for those people, but in my situation it was reporting in its purest form I guess.

GD: What is your attitude towards the experiment that was embedding, that was considered so successful by some and so parlous by others?

TB Well, I think it has a role but it should be seen for what it is. It is an insight to what’s happening at a particular place at a particular time, so it’s one view and I don’t think you should rely too heavily on that because it is very limited. I have a bit of problem quite frankly with the concept of it. Because I think I saw other people doing it, not in our organization so much, but a lot of the American embeds, the reporters were quite seduced by the idea of being with the military and after a while they looked like soldiers and they spoke like soldiers and they would say things like, “we’re doing this
and we are doing that”. And you had to say who’s we? Are you part of the military or are you and objective independent journalist travelling with these guys?

GD: Well, how can that be mitigated, do you think, that sort of seductive aspect of it?

TB: Well I think it’s very difficult because after a while you establish relationships with the people that you travel with, these are momentous times, you establish trust and relations with the soldiers themselves and I think you know of a conscious level the journalist might try and be objective, I think unwittingly you are seduced by the whole situation and its difficult to distance yourself and I can’t think of a way to mitigate from it. I think the other problem with embedding is the very nature of travelling with a military group – the weapons fire out, but like the soldiers, you don’t see the other end. You don’t see the schools in ruins, you don’t see the hospitals hit in misdirected bombs. And like the soldiers you are somewhat sanitised from the true horror of what you are doing, so it’s a limiting perspective I think.

GD: It seems to me, talking about notions of objectivity, it seems also absurd to speak in one breath about being embedded, and at the same time maintaining some sort of objectivity, even though you can argue you are reporting just on what you see, its taking the larger equation half of it has been removed, exactly that ability to see the effects of what’s happening.

TB: I think so, and in the case of soldiers it’s deliberate. Because if they are exposed to the horrors that would harm morale. It’s like an arcade game to them – the gleaming weapons fire out but you don’t see the other end. Having said that, there are occasions where it works the other way. Geoff Thompson, who was our embedded person, shot an extraordinary story with Michael Cox the cameraman on a checkpoint.

GD: Indeed, yeah.
TB: You’re familiar with that obviously. It certainly didn’t make the military look very good. It saw them panicking, and it saw them involved in a very tragic, a very tragic mistake indeed. So it can be, it can offer different insights it depends on the situation.

GD: Indeed, do you think the formalised arrangements of embedding where people applied to be admitted to certain military units and various organizations were given their quota of journalists allowed in, is that not just a formalisation of a relationship that has gone ever since journalists went to war.

TB: Look I think so. The Australian media was very much an afterthought of that process. Obviously the American networks and the Brits, because they were more engaged militarily they got what might be described as the most exciting embeds, the ABC got the transport support group, which is hardly an elite fighting force, but having said that, they witnessed some reasonable activity.

GD: What I was trying to get at was that relationship between the military and the media is very difficult to have it in any other way. For example, looking at footage from Vietnam, and you have the journalists who apparently much more free in their movements, but still controlled of under the protection of the military. Do you think there is any way past that?

TB: No I don’t, because what the military say is that you can’t go out there on your own because it’s too dangerous, so you have to be with us because we are here to protect you. Well, that’s true but they are also there to restrict what you are doing, especially in a war in a desert. There’s not much latitude to roam around by yourself, it’s too dangerous, so they do have you over a barrel in a sense.

GD: Another aspect of the coverage on the conflict I wanted to talk about was down at Centcom and I know you weren’t reporting from there yourself, but I am sure you have an opinion about what was going on down there. How plausible do you think it is to talk
about objectivity, balance and fairness and this sort of thing given the situation, where some people have described it as being spoon-fed?

TB: Yeah, well, I think you know once upon a time the public affairs people from the military who did the briefings were people medically unfit for the infantry and that was the job they fell into. Now they are highly skilled public affairs people, who I think are probably more talented than many of the journalists, by what we saw there. They are very skilful communicators and they are very good at the spin. Now I think it works for them on quite a sophisticated level and quite a subliminal level. It’s all about language and I think now, if we want to talk about the information war, I think language is as potent as bombs and bullets and missiles. And I think it’s a language that the media can embrace and it comes out of those briefings. I was part of the briefing process during the Gulf War and the military would talk about “target rich environments” which meant they had plenty of things to shoot at, and when the bomb missed and hit a school they would talk about “collateral damage”. These are quite sexy, clinical terms that describe something very horrible.

GD: And also capture the public’s imaginations with something exotic from the military.

TB: Well, journalists can’t resist these phrases, because it sounds impressive, it makes them sound as though they have an intimacy with the military

GD: Indeed.

TB: And it self-perpetuates, because when the military hears this kind of talk, well this is a journalist who knows his military stuff, it’s a cycle.

GD: It becomes symbiotic.
TB: Yeah, but when it becomes a mainstream part of journalistic language everyone is sanitised, or gets a sense that it’s not as horrible as it is, and these very seductive terms become part of our mainstream language. At the ABC there was an issue with calling it the War on Terror, because it...

GD: Naturalises that term?

TB: Lets face it there’s a war in Iraq, there’s a war in Afghanistan, there’s a campaign on terror and that takes many forms, but it’s a rhetorical term. It’s like the war on drugs, that’s not a real term either. So it’s a term that everyone loves.

GD: How can journalists avoid being seduced? Presumably if you want to be, perhaps if you’re not such a reflective journalist or a thoughtful journalist perhaps, then it’s very easy to reproduce this sort of language, but presumably there are plenty of people out there who try to avoid this sort of stuff. How is it possible is it for journalists who want to, to avoid the privileging of the official line and the use of that sort of language?

TB: I think it’s quite easy to do – you avoid using the “War on Terror”, you might call it the “so-called War on Terror”, because it is a phenomenon, the phrase itself is a phenomenon.

GD: It’s a policy title or something like that.

TB: Exactly right. You are just very selective about how you characterise the situation, what’s happening in Iraq now it’s an insurgency. We don’t call them terrorists, even though in a strict dictionary definition it fits into that. We just a little more critical I think and little more careful of the language we use when we characterise things.

GD: And that’s a particular conscious of that at the ABC, when you are briefing journalists of putting together a show, that sort of thing.
TB: Yeah, we are because I went though that during the Gulf War where we started seeing this stuff creep into journalistic language, and I just thought that in 2003 as it was then, we should be a bit too clever and in 2006 we are certainly too smart to fall into those kind of traps.

GD: Another aspect of all this, or sort of dovetailing with this discussion – there is the famous episode of Michael Wolff from the New York Magazine, getting up and asking the question, “what are we doing? Why are we here? This is absurd and ridiculous that we are not getting any information while we have this million dollar press briefing centre” Is it possible do you think for journalists to pursue alternative lines of questioning and take alternative viewpoints?

TB: Well I suspect not there, where there is little chance of corroborating what they have to say. But I think what you do, you can build up a bit of a picture by the various forms of reporting. So you have the briefings, that is one source, you’ve got maybe an embed, that’s another source, in the case of the ABC we were in Baghdad. We were there, we could offer first hand reporting, mind you we knew what was happening a few blocks around where we were, and to the various parts where we went but it was very difficult to build up a big picture because of the security issues, but I think out of all those different situations the journalists find themselves in hopefully you get a fairly rounded picture from all that.

GD: Sure, given the ABC has a lot to do with television and imagery, there’s another debate going on, especially about the use of TV and the use pictures from the embeds and picture of bombs falling in Baghdad in the evenings, of a fantastic image, but almost de-contextualised with very little informative quality about it – a gun firing in the desert or a bomb dropping on a building in Baghdad, how possible is it to maintain that visual aspect but have it based in some informational value. Do you think?

TB: Well, I think...
GD: It’s thrilling to watch that sort of television, but at the same time it tells you very little.

TB: Well, yes and no perhaps. It is so commonplace now that it is daily life in Baghdad, and because of that you probably don’t see so much of it. When you do see it it’s wrapped around other elements of the story. The last time I saw it was a couple of days ago when Bush turned up in Baghdad to meet the new prime minister. So there was a situation where the story was about Bush’s visit, so we got a bit of an insight into the new Iraqi government and the new prime minister, but it was wrapped around this imagery of two more car-bombs in Baghdad, another day in Baghdad. Look, it’s very difficult but that is life and reality in Baghdad so I think it’s still worthy to use that stuff but it is often in the context of another element or level to the story.

GD: You were talking about Bush arriving and sort of being able to tack on stories to that, his presence, perhaps not so much in the context of war whilst it was occurring but in terms of the immediate post-war situation in Iraq. There is a criticism of journalism being too heavily event based, needing a hook to peg a story on, how restrictive, or do you think that is a valid criticism and if so how restrictive is it and what can be done to avoid it.

TB: Look its probably valid, and the reason that I guess your choice is limited, is that it is dangerous for foreign media to be travelling so that material tends to come in from Iraqi cameramen who freelance to get that. I know certainly in my experience there we did two different things, what we would do is a wrap up or an “around the grounds” as we used to call it of the big picture in Iraq and we would be told by Sydney, emailed a list of other elements to the story that we should incorporate into our main story, but we would also make sure we include an element that we actually shot ourselves a vignette, and that was the main obligation and the main story in the seven o’clock news. But after we met that commitment we would go off and do little human stories, little vignettes and what some might call good news stories, we did a piece on the Iraqi soccer team
back together after being systematically abused by Uday and Saddam for years and years and years, and we did rebuilding stories as well, so on the spectrum of negative to positive there was a mix there.

GD: You mentioned before being sort of advised from the ABC in Sydney, as to sort of not what to do but given direction. How conscious were you during the war were you as to how the ABC’s coverage was being received in Australia, especially given the context of the then Broadcasting Minister’s quite savage attacks on the ABC about their coverage. How conscious were you of the way that stuff was being received in Australia?

TB: Not very conscious to be honest, we were just too busy for reflection at that stage. I guess it was an assumption on my part that the ABC would be criticised just as they were during the Gulf War, it seems to be an expectation now that in times of war politicians become very jingoistic and some sections of the community become very jingoistic and an easy target is the ABC. We just assume that happens I suppose.

GD: And that doesn’t have any influence that concern, not concern - that knowledge that criticism will be coming.

TB: Well, no it’s nothing that really permeates to you either directly or indirectly. You just have a pretty good sense of what judgements you should be making on the ground and what stories are interesting and what aren’t. What are proper and what aren’t, but it really doesn’t colour the kind of stories you do or the approach you take.

GD: I will just wind it up here, but what was it that defined newsworthiness for you once you were covering stories out of Baghdad – was it the human aspect?

TB: Yeah, because of our special place there and the circumstances in which we were there, we saw our role and our main job as getting stories from the ground, specific little vignettes of how Iraqis were dealing with this, so we would go into the
suburbs to get stories. We had fixers who were hearing about things happening, so although for a while we did string together the big picture stories based on information that was fed from Sydney a lot of our time was spent on the more, happening on the ground stories.

THE END
APPENDIX III - INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS
JONATHAN HARLEY (ABC)
15 JUNE 2006

Giles Dodson: I thought I might just ask you, given that you were based at Centcom – is that correct, from my understanding?

Jonathan Harley: Yeah, that’s right.

GD: What was it that you were most sort of proud of, or what did you think you can consider your most valuable achievement, in reporting from Central command?

JH: Not missing a deadline. Feeding the beast. Well, look, that’s right, when you are doing a gig like that it’s about, you know, staying up right and producing, you know, your job there is to produce; reams and reams and reams of audio material that will piece together the impossible. A combination of the little that you know and the most likely. Sorry I am not being very coherent here, I’ll just focus for a moment. The problem about a situation like that is that you know so little. The actual war, in that case, was 1000 kms away. So there is an extraordinary tyranny of distance and ideally a place like that is supposed to give you the global overview, because in any conflict you are always in a compromised position anyway, so you might be with one unit and it might be calm and peaceful and happy chappies, and over the hill the there might be...

GD: A bloodbath?

JH: A full on, as you say, a bloodbath going on. So any position in a conflict is compromised, but the problem with a place like Central Command is that you have, you just…I don’t think you have anything effectively, because you’re at the whim of what you are being told and there is no way of verifying it, we know the nature of war. We know the nature of propaganda in war, that’s what it is, I really don’t think there is any other
word for it, because that is the correct characterisation, so...when you are faced with unverified official accounts I think it's not exactly going to be a journalistic peak.

GD: No. How did you manage to sift through the information that you were given to try and piece together something which was a credible news item?

JH: What you are doing is extrapolating from a number of various sources. So you have the official interpretation, but you also have all the other material that is coming in from the other areas of conflict. So have in TV terms obviously you’ve got the BBC, CNN as your two mainstays and you’ve got less reputable sources like Fox and all the other networks as well, and Al Jazeera and a huge number of satellite sources, and the wire sources like AAP, AFP etc. So you can distil all of that, and you do in that sense have a lot of global material to sift through, but it’s fundamentally no different to any of the material you can get in Sydney or Tokyo or London.

GD: What you are adding to that is the information you are getting from the Central Command briefings?

JH: That’s exactly right, but I wouldn’t describe that as information.

GD: Ha ha.

JH: Well, you know.

GD: No, I understand what you mean.

JH: You know that’s their account on it – what you are getting is effectively their grabs, to punctuate and to glue together a story.

GD: Is that, is dealing with that, something called an official briefing, but not actually providing much in the way of information, is that an affront to journalistic sensibilities, or
is it just something that journalists must deal with in the modern era, so to speak, just part of journalism?

JH: I think the answer to both those questions if yes. It is an affront, and it should be an affront, and the day it seems normal and acceptable is the day you really need to move on. But equally it is something that you need to deal with and something that you need to dis-assemble and interpret.

GD: It seems to me, and I watched quite a lot of the stuff on TV coming out of Central Command, and the same can be said for many different of those official type briefings, you know, even press briefings from Canberra are probably on a similar scale, or the White House, that sort of thing – then you see things like the film made about Al Jazeera, the film ‘Control Room’. And it showed you the behind the scenes information being put out, the Al Jazeera and all the other journalists talking in the back rooms with these press officers, in that big building. Now that’s not really made clear in the mainstream news that this is going on, it seems to me the picture you get is of General Whoever, standing in front of the, on that podium, telling you like it is, and all the journalists trying to ask questions, yet there is this whole other level of activity going on which is not made clear.

JH: Yeah, but I think that can be said of journalism generally – there’s a process and with journalism you are distilling a story, and I don’t think you want to ….

GD: Should that process not be made transparent though…

JH: Well, I think it is and its horses for courses, if you go through the whole process of doing the story, then there goes your bulletin, I mean a bulletin is really distilled accounts. That’s one form of storytelling and I think if people are going to be a lazy media consumer, then they are going to get a lazy media product, and what I mean by that is that if you complain that the six o’clock news doesn’t give you that transparency and accountability, it’s pretty easy to go and get something. The biggest priority is to be
accurate and to be succinct and give people a quick hit, but the problem is you can’t - that’s the biggest accountability, its correctness. You know, fundamentally that’s the calling and you can go and watch ‘Control Room’ or whatever or go to the Web and read a whole lot of other stuff, so I am really wary of making the media the story, because it’s not always the story. It’s part of the story, and I think people are much more savvy not and when they watch or read they actually incorporate into their understanding the way.

GD: Whatever they’re watching has come to be on their television.

JH: I just think people have a much more sophisticated understanding of the way the media works now and the ways those in authority work with the media and work to manage the media, so I am not sure that your nightly bulletin is the place to do that…but the 7.30 Report – you’ve got room on the 7.30 Report to if you’ve got 7 or 8 or 10 minute you can work that into you story.

GD: You were talking about correctness as being a central value, what are the other central values do you think that define a professional journalist, or what is a professional journalist?

JH: Well, accuracy, truthfulness, integrity and what I mean by that particularly is the trust that you build with you build with your audience, also the trust that you build with your sources, ultimately I think that is the only currency that you’ve got as a journalist, in terms of getting stories, that ability to work with people and bring them into your confidence

GD: Your credibility?

JH: And not to expose them. But I also think it’s about good storytelling and making it accessible, taking people on a journey. So it’s a combination of values and skills.
GD: How important is that thing people call objectivity?

JH: Oh, look I regard that as something always to be aspired to but never achieved. You know, objectivity is almost like enlightenment. We know now that you’re never going to; there is never anything purely objective. I also think that there is a discipline in seeing things both ways.

GD: Is that a change throughout journalism do you think, that more sophisticated understanding of goals and the practice.

JH: Yeah, absolutely, and its most perverse it manifests itself as an abandonment of that aspiration and value of objectivity in its most perverse form becomes something like Fox News, where it’s just thrown out the window.

GD: How did you experiences in Iraq, or not in Iraq but in the Gulf confront those values. Accuracy, and honesty and integrity and the aspiration towards objectivity?

JH: Well, trying to be as upfront with folks about what’s going on, about the reliability of what you are getting and I think that’s a real balancing act, trying to find some authority in what you say, but not pretending. But I think you can write that in, I really do. I think in those situations you really want to write it as hard as you possibly can. And you want to really push the envelope and really try to minimise your complicity.

GD: How able are journalists like yourself, in that situation, to not so much subvert, but not be seduced by the official military perspective? The use of the language, the images in particular.

JH: It just depends how good you are.

GD: I beg your pardon?
JH: It just depends how good you are. I just think that’s just part of the skill, to unravel the language, the sanitising language, but look, it’s got to be said that, you know that in the wake of the war the Federal government absolutely pulled no punches and really tried to discredit our coverage.

GD: I was speaking earlier with Trevor Bormann and I asked him that question, I said how conscious were the ABC or individual journalists about the way in which their coverage would be received in Australia – was there any thought given.

JH: At a political level?

GD: Yeah, at a political level, but, both political and publicly.

JH: Look I just think you’re always got that in your head, your writing for an audience.

GD: Was it a foregone conclusion that the ABC would have complaints brought against it?

JH: Oh look, you always get complaints about anything and think that’s a particular, I think that’s a particularly great thing about the ABC – because people do feel a real ownership of it therefore they quite rightly want to express how they feel about stories and coverage and think that is a really good thing and it part of the accountability of a public broadcaster. And in a war that is always going to be more heightened, because the stakes and the emotions are always more heightened in a time of conflict. But no, I don’t think anyone foresaw the Federal government’s assault that was orchestrated out of Richard Alston’s office.

GD: Going back to Central Command, there is, I suppose, what you might call an infamous episode of, I think it was Michael Wolff of the New York magazine who got up and asked the question, you know, “what are we doing here? Why do we bother with
doing this?" I mean how possible is it for journalists to pursue alternative lines of questioning, or actually ask those sorts of questions?

JH: Well, I suppose you could argue that because Michael got up and said that, it’s totally possible.

GD: But was he not removed or told he wouldn’t have any more questions or something.

JH: No…well, you know, he certainly wasn’t removed.

GD: Or treated with utter distain?

JH: Well, it’s a double edged sword, the officials might have regarded him with distain, but many journalists regarded him as a hero. You know, you’re not going to please all the people all the time. You know, certainly there was and is a pattern of them asking journalists who they think are going to give them a soft ride and removing those who don’t…the biggest sort of hierarchy that made it more difficult was that the big networks would get a front row seat, the American networks would get the front row seats, there was this very clear hierarchy, which had the ABC way back in the 25th row or whatever, so there its always harder to get your question through the forest of hands…

THE END
Giles Dodson: Basically my research project is looking at the professional values of journalists who spent time in Iraq and the news product that was a result of that, so I have been interviewing people from the ABC and from News and a few people from the SMH as well, and I have got to you, so what I might begin by asking you was what was it that you were most proud of or what was your most valuable achievement in your time in Iraq, spent reporting in Iraq?

Lindsay Murdoch: Surviving.

GD: Please go on.

LM: In a way being embedded was frustrating, in that I couldn’t see what was going on in the wider invasion and I was seeing what was going on directly in the battalion that I was in. So that was very much the limiting factor, but that said I was basically in a position. I saw a lot but a little, if you like. Alot in that the battalion I was with was pretty much at the head of the spear of the invasion, because what it was doing was setting up protection for the units that were basically at the front, and then we’d leapfrog another battalion and set up protection again, so I did see pretty much what was going on at the front of the invasion, but and also I was, you know the nature of embedding you see, or you’re living, I was living with marines, eating with them, travelling with them, digging my own foxhole with them, so you become quite close. I was able to see how the Americans operate in a war situation.

GD: Do you think, in terms of the value of that, do you think it was a valuable exercise to go through?
LM: Look, yeah, people have criticised the embedding but it’s a naïve and misguided view, because embedding was very very helpful to the *Age* and the *Herald*, because it gave one insight into what was happening. Not, you wouldn’t. if you only had one person covering the war, and only one source.

GD: You wouldn’t do it.

LM: You would not embed. But as part of a package, as part of overall coverage, it’s very very valuable it gives you a great insight into what’s happening at the spear of the invasion and you can’t get, we had somebody in Doha – Tom Allard and basically he was so frustrated because he was just getting fed propaganda, really. But I think you’ll find he was very very frustrated by the lack of information that the commanders, that the commanders were giving out. And, it was all skewered towards propaganda. On the ground there was no censorship, I could quote anybody that said anything, there was only one strict rule and that was in your copy, when you file it you could not give an exact location, but if you abided by that, you could file whatever you like.

GD: Were you able to talk to civilians at all?

LM: Well, that was hard. I did, but not as often as I would have liked, because of the sheer mechanics of it - I don’t speak Arabic, nobody else in Iraq speaks English, nobody I saw spoke English. The Americans had very few interpreters, no interpreters were in my unit.

GD: So you’re hamstrung then.

LM: Its very difficult – we’d go into a village or go into a town and roll through, or maybe we’d be set up on the edge of a town and there was some contact, but you’ve got to remember that most of the time, when we’re going through these towns and villages, sometimes we came under fire, we didn’t know who was friendly and who
wasn’t, well to the Americans, not to me, but it was basically I never got I never got real access to the Iraqis, it was hard, all visual.

GD: Yeah, I understand.

LM: But when we got to - coming across the desert - when we got to pretty far the tip of the spear, with the division I was with the people the Iraqis looked a bit shell shocked, they were staring, but when we got to Baghdad I actually jumped from one unit to another to get into the centre of Baghdad, things had changed by then, people were coming out and throwing their hands in the air, completely thrilled to see the Americans and that’s all faded away now I think, but that’s what it was like then.

GD: In terms of being embedded, a lot of the criticisms that were made, was that it favours the military perspective, there is a sort of logic of the military way of doing things come through, patriotism especially of the Americans – the sense of “our boys” our “our troops” comes through – what do you think can be done to mitigate that or what did you do to minimise the potential for that to go on?

LM: That’s, that’s certainly true, particularly of US television and networks like Fox, that jumped on the patriotism thing. Fox is Rupert Murdoch’s channel and they really went for it, you’d see some of the footage.

GD: I remember it well.

LM: They were pushing that. From my perspective point of view, I had boundaries that I set, for instance when they were talking about the enemy I always spoke about the Iraqis. I never, I set myself apart from them, in all my dealings. Basically when you go into that sort of situation, you’ve got to set your boundaries and make sure that your professionalism stays intact. And, what you’re writing basically all the emphasis is on the Americans, because that’s who I am with, because that’s the only way it can be. So whatever they are saying, whatever they’re doing, the way that they are going about the
war, that’s all I saw and that’s all I reported. But I don’t have any qualms about saying
that it is embedding, and that means that you’re reporting is going to.

GD: Be heavily focused on the Americans?

LM: Be all about the Americans, basically.

GD: I remember reading a long article of yours and I believe Geoff Thompson
touched on the same stuff, he was also embedded.

LM: We caught up with him. He was further back and somehow got up to the unit
where I was.

GD: Yeah, both of you from memory, in at least one piece each made quite clear that
limitation of your reporting.

LM: That what?

GD: That limitation, you spelt it out quite clearly.

LM: I did, yeah.

GD: You know, this is what I am doing and these are the limitations of it, how
important was it for you to actually get that out to, to be published for the public to
understand the position that you were in.

LM: Oh, that was an important piece at the time because there was a lot of criticism
and discussion about embedding. In my view people like, what’s his name, Wilson,
from the Australian.

GD: Peter Wilson, yeah.
LM: [Paul] McGeough...had some snide remarks at some points, no not snide remarks but a little bit of faint criticism of embedding, but um, that’s um, you know, they had different roles in the war, they did it tough, but so did I. I was out there as it was happening, living it as a soldier. I’m 50 – lost a stone and a half. I got no favours from the marines, I’ve got to pull my own weight, they do nothing for you, they don’t carry your bags, you’ve got to dig your own foxhole every night, sometimes you move 3 or 4 times in a night after digging your hole, you have to keep your machinery operating, in dust storms, keep it charged.

GD: How difficult was that?

LM: It was one of the biggest nightmares. Quite often the laptop wouldn’t work because it was full of sand. The main thing was to keep the sat-phones charged. I had two sat-phones, one buggered up straight away. I relied on this old Nera sat-phone. Whenever you stopped, you had to try and use that time to get your phone charged or to file, one of the other biggest problems was, one of the major problems was there was an absolute ban on any light at night, so I couldn’t sit anywhere and write a story, or write some notes or go and get something to eat – as soon as nightfall fell, I was trapped absolutely trapped, I couldn’t do anything.

GD: Did that actually affect what you could file?

LM: Absolutely, I could only hear what was going on the radio. See the Americans, they’ve all got night-vision goggles, we’d be going through places and they’d be talking of things they’d seen and I couldn’t see a bloody thing. And I had to wait til morning to get some copy and to work out what was going on, what was happening and to file a story. But inevitably, just on dawn, just as I was trying to grab something to eat or something, we’d be off again. Sitting in the back of a Humvee, couldn’t do a thing. And all this time I am weighed down by a bloody chemical suit, gas mask at the ready, and quite often they’d go “gas, gas, gas” and you’d have to sit there for hours with a gas
mask on, feeling like shit because I am claustrophobic. And um, then um couldn’t file copy, deadlines rushing past, couldn’t even get a call out. We sat in one sandstorm for a day and a half. We couldn’t get outside, just sitting upright in a Humvee.

GD: Jesus.

LM: So it was physically it was tough, and as I said I got no help from the marines because they had their own job to do. They gave me space here and there; they were conducting a war, so there weren’t any briefings. Basically what I was writing was, no one was telling me what was going on.

GD: No no no, just what you could see

LM: What I was doing was I was writing I was picking up from the radio and by earwapping really.

GD: Listen just to talk a little more generally about journalism, rather than your specific experiences in Iraq, although it all touches on the same thing. You were talking about trying to maintain your professionalism, what is it do you think that defines a professional journalist. Or, what is a professional journalist?

LM: What is a professional journalist? Well, getting a story that is fair balanced and accurate. That’s always been my criteria, and getting it first. You know, writing stories about things that are going to interest people and hopefully reveal things that people don’t want revealed, and hopefully the world will be better for it. That’s the bottom line.

GD: How central are the values which are sort of traditionally symbolised by the idea of objectivity. You know, fairness, impartiality, balance and truthfulness, to your practice?

LM: I don’t really understand what you mean?
GD: Well, how central are those values to you practice?

LM: Well, they are the values. That’s what journalism is about.

GD: Objectivity?

LM: Absolutely, well that’s all part of it.

GD: How possible then, or how relevant is that in the context of war do you think?

LM: The same goes, if you’re writing a story about war, I don’t think there’s [any difference]. The same principles apply to writing a story in Australia – the same principles apply when I was writing a story thirty years ago, writing police stories for the Melbourne Age. It might be a triple murder, it might be a bad car crash, or a it could be a major crime – the same principles apply back then as they do when writing about the war in Iraq when you’re there. It’s the same thing, you somebody is doing bad things to other people, you’re there, you report what you see and what you can get and you do it fair balanced and accurate, they’re the three criteria I have always based it on, and getting it first.

GD: Yeah, right.

LM: And I don’t think there is any difference. And I have been a correspondent for a long time, I was for a decade, in South East Asia and I have always maintained it’s just an extension of reporting in Australia, there’s no difference, the principles aren’t any different and that includes war.

GD: What was it that defined what was newsworthy for while you were in Iraq, or was it simply what you could see?
LM: Just what I could see every day, just what I could see and what I could quickly get out, with the limitations that I had.

GD: So there was very little, choice in terms of the choice of sources and the angles you could use on reporting what you could see in a sense.

LM: Yeah, that’s exactly right, that’s the limitations of being embedded. You don’t have a lot of sources. My sources were the marines, and a very small part of that, of the whole bulk of the attacking force. So I am just reporting what I could see in my vision, that’s all. That’s all, that’s why I come back to the point about embedding, it’s only, it can be only a part of the coverage.

GD: Something you were probably not experiencing directly whilst the war was under way, but a lot has been said, at the time especially, and you talked about it before with Tom Allard in Centcom, but how would you describe the ‘news management’ or the attempts of the Coalition officials to spin the war?

LM: Um.

GD: Because that wouldn’t have affected your coverage?

LM: I wasn’t getting any spin.

GD: No.

LM: Where I was on the ground and no one was spinning it, there were no spin doctors, these were soldiers. It was what was happening up front, raw. When we were going into it we spent a long time in Kuwait getting equipment and you know, getting ready, and there wasn’t a lot of spin there either, they were just getting us ready to be able to go into units. I never really saw any of that. At one point, I’ll tell you an interesting little story though.
GD: Ok.

LM: We got onto a [sic], as I said were pretty much the head of the spear, the attacking force, and we're going down this road and the Lieutenant in charge of my unit didn't mind if I sat in on his briefings, but that was a little difficult because I was travelling in a Humvee. But whenever my captain went over to have a briefing, I'd try to go, then I'd get a bit of a broader view of what was going on. Like he'd say, “oh look there's a problem down in this town, there's a fight down there”, or “the Republican Guard are basically running away everywhere”, so I'd get that sort of stuff. We went down and got onto one of the major freeways, a lot of the travel in the desert was along the freeways, and I basically knew where we were and we just sat there for a long time, and the lieutenant made a beeline for me and he said, “hey Lindsay, look, this is highway”, I forget the name, I think it was highway 1 or 3, he said “we're going straight down there into Baghdad, you can report that”.

GD: Oh yeah?

LM: And I said, “report that?” I thought, “hang on”, this is all about location we have had it drummed into us we couldn't report the location where we were, so I was suspicious of that and never reported it, and subsequently, the order came back, the word came back, the order came out and we turned around and hightailed it straight down the highway, took a big exit and straight up another road, another freeway.

GD: Yeah.

LM: Now, I don't know, but I suspect the word went out, “tell the media, they can say we're going straight down Highway One”. So the Iraqis would be waiting there, when in fact, they were happy for the word to get out. But then we came back and charged in another direction. So I suspect they tried to use the media for their own purposes at that point, but I never, I don't know for sure, but I never fell for it, because I didn't want
to be used, but that was pretty interesting for the Americans, and the Australians would probably do the same thing, you know if it benefits them they will use the media.

GD: And, presumably there is many pitfalls for the unwary, presumably a lot of journalists are taken for a ride?

LM: Well, I don’t know how many did on that occasion, there weren’t many journalists around at my location, well there were but we weren’t talking to each other, we were in our own little units.

GD: But for example, when you get to Baghdad, I am not sure where you were, but when the events took place, for example the toppling of that statue, in the Firdos Square, also the attack on the Palestine Hotel where a lot of the journalists were staying, with the statue there seemed a lot of credulity among the press to begin with and only a few days later do you get the long shots of the very few people actually gathered around, and the Americans yanking everything down – do you think credulity of the press is an issue or a problem?

LM: Well, I wasn’t.

GD: Not specifically you, but just in general terms a willingness to believe the official sources?

LM: Not from the Australians. I think all that patriotism and that was kicking in with the Americans, but the Australian journalists, the ones who are sent into a situation like that usually have a lot of mileage and don’t fall for traps. We’re brought up with a keen sense of cynicism I suppose, that’s the nature of Australian journalism, because all the politicians insist on lying to us all the time. Not lying, but trying not to tell us the whole truth.

THE END
Giles Dodson: What I wanted to begin by asking was, to start by asking you was, what was it that you were most proud of, or what did feel was your greatest achievement, I suppose from your time spent in Iraq, during the war?

Peter Wilson: Getting out, basically escaping both the control of the American and Iraqi controlling systems and working unilaterally, working independently.

GD: I was reading a little of your book last night, and following also what you had written for the various publications – how easy did you find it do that?

PW: Very very hard, I mean that was the hard thing. There were thousands of journalists, literally thousands of journalists covered the conflict and I think it’s estimated that about a hundred managed to get into the country and travel unilaterally, most, I forget the numbers now, there were 2000 registered with the Americans in Kuwait trying to get over the border and, the figures are in that book somewhere, something like 150 got across the border but most turned around and went back when they realised how dangerous it was, so there was not all that many who actually got in. You could get into the north, because Saddam never controlled it, but it was the south I was interested in, covering the people’s war, you know, what impact it was really having on the people.

GD: Right, that’s where the story was in your mind?

PW: Yeah, exactly, I refused to be embedded. There is a role for it, but I didn’t think my role was to cover the soldier’s war, it was to cover the people’s war.
GD: Why do you take that perspective or hold that point of view? Is that to do with your values as a journalist, what you think is most important or does it come from a personal perspective?

PW: Yeah, because, there was, yeah, it’s my values as a journalist, I am not particularly anti-war and I didn’t cover that war being against it or for it. I really was, I could see the complexities of it, I didn’t think it was my position or my job to develop an ideology either for or against the war, but what I thought journalists needed to be doing was giving people back home an accurate picture of what effect the war was having and the attitudes of the Iraqi people. One of the things that really shocked me was, how few of the journalists who got into the country actually bothered to take translators with them, to talk to people. It’s like, why are you there? If you are not there to talk to the people, you know, why not stay home? Or just watch TV, if you’re just there to look at it, instead of trying to understand local attitudes.

GD: Did you ask any of those people, you must have run into a lot of other journalists while you were there.

PW: I got frustrated after a while, in the week or so we were in the south before going into Basra – increasing numbers, when you come across foreign journalists, because we’re all scurrying around like rats, trying to not stay in one place for too long and you’d come across them, exchange information and scurry off again. And increasingly they were trying to use my translator. To try and get him to go and ask some Iraqi people what their names were or what was going on or what they thought about what was happening, the invasion and so on, and I allowed that to happen for a couple of days, and then eventually I just got pissed off with it and said, “If it wasn’t important enough for you to bring someone, bugger off”. Because your time was limited and he wasn’t there to help every English TV channel or whatever.

GD: Just to talk a little more generally about journalism rather than your experiences in Iraq which have just touched on a lot of the things I would like to talk about. What in
your opinion makes a professional journalist – what is a professional journalist in your opinion?

PW: A professional journalist is someone, a professional reporter, and you know there’s and important distinction to be made, opinion writers and analysts are also professional journalists with different roles. A professional reporter is someone who not just has the skills, because a lot of people have the skills, but has the attitude that this is not about me telling the world my unique wisdom and about how I understand everything, it’s about me just trying to understand what’s going on, as objectively as possible and communicate that without imposing my views on it.

GD: So the next question is exactly that, how central are the values symbolised by objectivity to your understanding to your own job and to your own practice?

PW: Absolutely. Absolutely central – it’s a big part of what I see my challenge to be and what I do every day is get it right rather than set the world to rights myself. I used to be an industrial relations reporter for a long time in Australia and I would get very frustrated when, in particular, would ask for comment pieces on every story – and my view was The Australian why should the reader be labouring with my opinion, who cares what my opinion is? You know, I am much more comfortable doing an analysis piece – what does this latest development in the story mean, but opinion pieces and comment pieces are not really what I think reporters are for.

GD: Then do you think in day to day reporting, and in reporting from Iraq, there is a place for analysis within the objective scheme?

PW: Yes, exactly. Analysis which is intended to elucidate and educate one step further, adding value by telling people what you think, what the news event means and what it will lead to, rather than going, “wow, I think this is terrible”. You know, you can’t be absolutely value – it’s not about being value free, if you were covering Germany in 1939, hopefully you would have given Hitler a bit of a whack.
GD: Well that’s what I was going to say, in the instance of the Iraq war – you’ve got an objective journalist, so to speak, weighing up both sides, every side of each story, or the many sides of a story, trying to be as balanced and as impartial as possible, could potentially end up on one side with the Iraqi propagandists view and on the other side with the American official line from Centcom and really be no closer to anything of any value?

PW: Well, that’s right, you are not there just as a tape recorder, but hopefully you will be putting them in context – that’s also objective to say “the Americans, despite overwhelming evidence that villages had been destroyed, insisted yesterday that there had been no damage.” You know, there are ways of expressing the truth, while, or what you believe to be the truth…which is very different from expressing your opinion, which is, “the Americans, who are always liars…”

GD: I agree. How did your experiences in Iraq, driving around there, in the battlefield or even before, trying to get across the border, that sort of thing and then subsequently being arrested and taken to Baghdad I mean how did those experiences confront your professional values, of objectivity and trying to get to the story?

PW: They really actually strengthened them, I came away thinking, “yeah, it does matter, it was worth it”. You know we had an absolutely horrible time, and all three of us have been affected in different ways. But yeah I certainly came away thinking it was worth it, it mattered. I didn’t want to fit in the, cover the war like most of the people in Baghdad had to, which is sort of sitting there in a hotel, you couldn’t go out without Iraqi minders, most of them were covering it off the Internet, sitting there with computers and turning material around with a Baghdad dateline, and I didn’t want to be driving around cheerleading for the British or American soldiers and only seeing what they let you see and if you were embedded you didn’t have a translator and couldn’t go off and talk to the locals. And so trying to just tell it straight and cover the people’s war was I think at
the end of the experience that decision was validated in my mind, and it was worth the effort.

GD: And what influenced you in terms of the sorts of stories you would do, or the sorts of choices that you made when reporting the war. The sorts of stories and the sources and the angles all that sort of thing, was that driven by your interest to tell the human side of the tale completely.

PW: Exactly, the Australian angles, the human angles, but also you know as a foreign correspondent I came to it from a, I came to it as a foreign correspondent, where some people were there, went as defence reporters. Tony Walker from the Financial Review, was there as a sort of political/security reporter, he covered it by, not going anywhere near the country, but by going to countries around it and speaking to military officials and doing analysis, so the way you do your job depends your background and your approach. I’ve been a foreign correspondent for thirteen years, in Tokyo, Washington and now London and what the mentality that that gives you is that you’ve got to try and play instead of one instrument you’ve got to play the whole orchestra, you know the jack of all trade and the master of none – a finance story one day, a sports story the next afternoon, a magazine piece on a musician the next day, politics in the afternoon. I think if I was trying to characterise the collection of stories in Iraq it was trying to do a broad a range as possible. In Umm Qasr I did a couple of light stories about, the Americans had trained a dolphin, a dolphin to detect mines, and someone sent me an email saying the story was the funniest newspaper story he’d ever read, reckons he burst out laughing on a Melbourne tram, reading the story about the Australian soldier saying “Fuck off Flipper! I’m not trusting my life to a bloody big fish”. So you know it was pretty mixed up, but you’re right most of it was either looking for an Australian angle or people. I was trained on the Melbourne Sun. Which was actually called the Melbourne Sun News Pictorial and I have got a big awareness of the importance of photographs, so our stories were very heavily photographically driven. You know the impact of interviewing somebody and here’s his face, or a story about a family fleeing Basra and here they are.
GD: You were very lucky to be travelling with John Feder the photographer, yeah?

PW: Exactly.

GD: That came about more or less unexpectedly didn’t it?

PW: I was expecting to be in Baghdad on my own and John was supposed to be in Doha with Ian McPhedran, but with problems getting visas it all got swapped around and I ended up doing exactly what I wanted to do, which was be in the battlefield, and have a photographer and have a translator, um and I was very very keen to work with John, often reporter photographer teams don’t…you know they do their own thing [sic]. A lot of reporters, especially broadsheet trained reporters are not that big on photos, where as we really, it’s been the best working relationship I have ever had…and I had never met John before, but we’d work stuff out together…if we interview this guy, can we get a photo of his family, let’s go to his home. It was unusually photographically driven. There is one story that really epitomises that – it was basically just a series of photos, what we call headshots of buildings, we were driving back from the hospital one day in Baghdad, after the fall of Saddam and we drove and we were racing to get back to our hotel before curfew and we drove past this enormous building, office building, absolutely pristine and it was surrounded by American soldiers and of course it was the oil ministry and we just said “Fuck!” because it was such an amazing contrast to everything around us, but we couldn’t stop because we had to beat the curfew, but I said to John, “Look what we’ll do tomorrow is get a photo of that and drive around Baghdad and get photos of all the shattered buildings.

GD: And contrast it?

PW: Exactly, just dress it up as a contrast and the Hobart Mercury was the paper that swallowed that vision totally and their front page was exactly what we thought it should be, which was sort of eight photos of buildings with a strip across them saying burned,
so it says “Education Ministry – burned”, “Hospital – demolished”, “School – looted” and then in the middle sits this one pristine building and it says “Protected” – the headline is can you tell the difference between these buildings. So you know I thought that was a powerful piece of journalism, but it was photography. Photography with captions.

GD: To talk a little bit about, sort of on that theme, given that the war was the most controversial conflict, you know in 50 years, perhaps so to speak, in a generation anyway, when the invasion began, the legality of the war was unresolved, then you’ve got instances like you just described, fairly illustrative, examples, but there are arguments for and against the reasons why Americans bomb the things they do, but the legitimacy of the war, was that something that was a concern of yours whilst you were there, doing reporting on the spot?

PW: Yes. Like I say I didn’t think my view was before the war decide if I was for it of against it and then see everything through that prism, obviously you are thinking about it and trying to decide, “is this right?” “Should I be taking an aggressively critical position?” The view that I came to was shaped by what I found talking to Iraqi people, which was that, it could have worked, it wasn’t inherently illegitimate, that the war if it had been done properly, if the occupation had been handled professionally and properly it could have been worth it – go in get Saddam and get out again, you know, set the place up so it could run, support it and get out while providing full support for the Iraqis, would’ve been exactly what most Iraqi people wanted. It would have been perfectly legitimate. The problem was and I found that by talking to Iraqis in those early days while the war was still going on, I was saying what do you think about this and their attitude was, they did have an open mind, their attitude was, “well, you say you have come as liberators not as invaders, well if that is true then that is great, get rid of him and bugger off”. They had an open mind, and watched and waited and you could see that open mind closing, which was heartbreaking because we blew it. We made all these promises. We said stay at home and we dropped pamphlets and radio broadcasts saying, stay out of the way, we are not coming to fight you we are coming to save you, stay out of the way and we will provide law and order, food, water, electricity
we will look after you and within days, we made it clear that we broke those promises that the Iraqis took as evidence that we were lying, that we were coming as invaders and to get the oil.

GD: And did that, obviously that happened towards the end of the conflict, once Baghdad had fallen – did that change the angle of stories? Did that, once Baghdad had been taken, did that mean that there was a whole bunch of different things to focus on?

PW: It was huge, there was no break, because suddenly you had the looting, you talk to people about things they couldn’t talk about before. You could talk to people who had been too scared to say anything in the past. Like all the coverage from foreign journalists in Baghdad before the war, they couldn’t interview people without a minder being present. So you know, it had been very hard to get honest, accurate representations of what people were saying, whereas now, bang! Saddam was gone and the city was wide open, it was paradise, there were so many [stories. Any idea you could have there were stories. Like one that I did that I wish I had put even more time on was the story going into the Iraqi foreign ministry and sorting through paper that were all lying around. I wish I had found something related to the Australian Wheat Board.

GD: Absolutely. A letter from Alexander Downer, or something like that.

PW: Absolutely. And there were lots of documents there but you only had so much time because the city was being looted and fighting was going on and you’d say, “Fuck, what are the Americans doing?” What do the people think about this and what does this mean for the future of the occupation. It was a very, it certainly wasn’t as if the war was over the moment that statue came down.

GD: Just to bring it back to experiences of war and how various people reported on the war, what’s your opinion of, obviously I understand it, but just to spell it out, what’s your opinion of the embedding process and the embedding exercise?
PW: I think its fine as an adjunct to journalists attending briefings. It should be seen in that light, you know it’s better than journalists just going to military briefings in Doha, but it is in no way as good as or a replacement for journalists travelling independently and so while, on one hand I think there is a role for it as that sort of adjunct, my great concern and the reason I am very very down on the embedding system is that the intention is to use it as a replacement.

GD: Yeah, right. And you would have experienced it yourself, given the insecurity for journalists out there running around like you were.

PW: Oh yeah, and there have been academic studies here where - at the University of Cardiff they interviewed embedded journalists and one of their conclusions was that it made it more dangerous. That fact that they are protecting the journalists in their care led the Americans to be more…

GD: Blasé or gung ho?

PW: Yeah and you’re either with us or against us. I think in a way it probably goes to the particular culture of the American military where, like the marines, that whole thing about the band of brothers, we don’t leave our dead on the field, and it’s us versus the world, which is very different from the British culture, you tell the British understood that everyone around them was still a human being. Where as to the Americans everyone else is an alien and you’re either an American or a potential enemy and the press, as one by-product of this embedding system, we found ourselves very much on the wrong side of that divide and their attitude was we will feed and protect and essentially die for these journalists that we’ve got in our tanks but anyone else, out there – “fuck you, you are a potential enemy”. You know, they killed more journalists during the war than Saddam did.

GD: Yeah, indeed, indeed. That leads into again, the American – the Coalition, Australia was there as well – the attempts to manage the news, which we saw through
partly the embedding process but also at Central Command down at Doha, quite notoriously a difficult place to get information out of, I mean how – one question is how does that confront your ability to do your job as a professional journalist, having that obfuscatory machine coming at you all the time and two is there any way for the press to get around it at all?

PW: Well I think it, and not just in this context, in politics as well, I think it’s the biggest threat to journalists today. As journalists we tend to get obsessed with other things, like…

GD: Freedom of speech?

PW: Yeah, legal threats and owners getting too big and cross media regulations and stuff, when sure they are important issues but I think the absolute biggest threat is that at the moment is one, PR is the enemy of journalism, and two, they are winning because they are getting bigger and stronger and richer than us. You know I am a Nazi on this point, I believe journalists who become PR people shouldn’t be allowed back – I don’t think it’s just another branch of journalism. I think its anti-journalism.

GD: What can be done?

PW: Well, not much.

GD: Also in the context of a war like Iraq.

PW: Well, more resources, the only way, both in a war like Iraq and elsewhere I think two things: One, the industry has to recognise that danger and governments and militaries are pouring enormous amounts of resources and managing to lure away highly skilled journalists to work against us, so we can’t give up, you can’t surrender in the face of that you’ve got to put more resources in. And secondly, professionally I wish journalists attach more opprobrium to going to work in PR and you know, this is not a
popular opinion, I have a lot of friends who work in PR. But you know, in Canberra particularly I resent the ease with which people go and work for governments and then go back to the press. I think if you are going to go and work for a political party against the press then other journalists within the profession should say, “well ok, you’ve doubled your salary, and you’ve got new contacts or whatever, we can’t stop that, but we can see you as no longer a journalist”. So you know - you can’t come back. Phillip Morris tobacco company has offered to triple your salary to go and work for them for a couple of years, well, fine, you go, but just be aware that not too many of us are going to be looking to employ you when you want to come back.

GD:  What I wanted to ask you to finish off was, was there any concern over how the news that was being generated from all the different people stationed in and around Iraq was being perceived back in Australia?

PW:  Was being perceived by who?

GD: By anyone, by the public or the government, especially given the experience of the ABC, who were criticised quite heavily by, I think it was the broadcasting minister, for their coverage of the war, was that a concern at all for people working for News Limited?

PW: I am not really sure what you mean – were we trying to make a point in our coverage? Or trying to appear?

GD: Was there any concern over your coverage, was there concern over how that was being received back in Australia. Because I’ve spoken to another journalist, and he said, “look, mate, there’s no time to think about that sort of stuff when you’re driving around in the desert”.

PW: Well the only concern is, you’d see something and you’d feel passionately about it and you’d think “Fuck! You know”. The point I’d made before, we’d broken our
promise of food and electricity to these people, this is really bad, people back home should know this. So you would try very hard to get that point across that “hey listen, there are potential problems here and this occupation could be a lot harder than everyone hopes, because people are getting pissed off, they’ve decided we are here for the oil, because we’re fucking them around, this matters this matters [sic]. It’s very hard, and in a way, you’re trying to influence your readers or make a point to your readers.

GD: But also maintaining that degree of detachment that objectivity demands of you as a journalist, yeah?

PW: Yeah, but that can also be you know, quite an objective analysis – that you know, it’s not based on me going there being pro-war or anti-war, it’s based on getting there and listening to people speak and hearing them say that and going, “Fuck!” That means the way we blithely just ignored these warnings and that there are children and families without water in Iraq it’s going to have a really long term impact, by treating them badly in these first couple of weeks we could be building a huge problem, which is exactly what was happening, we are turning public opinion against ourselves here. This is a bad issue, a bad strategy what happening right now. Its, yeah, it’s not just report the facts objectively, but I think it’s still objective, in that you’re saying what you’re seeing, you know being objective doesn’t mean you’re just a tape recorder.

GD: Listen just to finish off, I know you’re busy and probably got others things to do, but just wanted to ask you a couple of questions.

GD: One was the toppling of the statue of Saddam and the second was the shooting by the tank of the Palestine Hotel, I wanted to know what was your take on all that and with the coverage, especially of the statue, when subsequently people saw the staged look of what was going – any ideas as to why it was covered the way it was?
PW: Well, it was a lovely, it was a microcosm of a lot of the problems, toppling that statue, they way the Americans showed their insensitivity by the way they at one point got up and put an American flag on Saddam's face. You know, this is stupid. It wasn't supposed to be an American invasion, showing the world, hey this is what happens when America conquers Iraq. And then they got up and did it. The grunts driving the big truck got up and did it, and someone said, hold on, pull that flag down. Ok, so having shown their true attitude to it someone got up and pulled it down. All the questions about was it a rent a crowd mob, well I think the truth is probably somewhere in the middle – a lot of the people were very working class people from, that area, but I am sure there were also people in the crowd who were brought in.

GD: Why do you think it played the way it did in the media, I mean initially it was you know, "Iraqis topple hated symbol of Saddam Hussein" then a few days later you had these questions coming out, yet at the time journalists seemed almost too willing to, they needed or wanted those images, you know?

PW: Well exactly, as you said it was an iconic moment and icons tell stories and people wanted a moment that symbolised what was going on, like the fall of the (Berlin) wall, the images we see of people swinging sledgehammers at the wall, were not the first images of the wall being destroyed. The wall had been breached elsewhere. But that's what we see, as the fall of the wall.

GD: It seems like a weakness in journalism, a desire for those sorts of images also.

PW: Yeah, images and events. There needs to be events they sum things up, it's not just the visually driven nature of the media, you know. It was an event, the war ended at 3.37pm – boom. They also serve their purposes. That image sums up a broader truth, that Saddam did fall, both his statue and his government. So yeah they are never perfect, but I wouldn't be totally down on the use of them. On the Palestine Hotel, I write about this quite a bit in the book, because a lot of people think it was, a lot of
journalists still think it was a deliberate attempt by the Americans to intimidate the press
the press who were not with them, whereas I don’t – I think it was...

GD: Sheer incompetence?

PW: Exactly, it was typical of what was happening to Iraqis all across the country. We
just got a taste of what killed tens of thousands of Iraqis. It was you know some 19yr
old grunt with loud music pumping through his head who saw something and just went
bang! You know if they went in there, not knowing that, and not caring that the single
biggest building, the tallest building in Iraq was packed with foreign journalists, and
therefore the just fucking shoot it. What chance did the average the Iraqi family, driving
in a family a car, that might or might not be a terrorist vehicle, have? You know? It was
just trigger happy, fucking bang bang bang, oh there’s a glint of light on that balcony,
bam, hit it. And the way they then lied about it, putting up this amazing barrage of lies,
a rocket propelled grenade, or sniper fire came from that balcony and that’s why we
shot it. “Oh, yeah, well from that distance it’s impossible”. “Oh, it was a sniper spotter;
we thought there was someone up there with binoculars guiding snipers”. If there was
one building in Iraq where there were not snipers or Iraqis working, it was that one,
because every room had journalists in it. And the way they just spun it out, once again
it come back to that issue about the skills that they have, the American military have
developed in press manipulation, they realise that if you can, they just rushed out an
initial lie, because they have learnt that if you can respond to a story for the first news
cycle or two, it just goes away and when the truth comes out later on it doesn’t matter.
If you can stand up some lie straight away – they were making defences and answers in
Doha within minutes, when how could they know what happened, they couldn’t! It was
just a random – a tank just turned around and fired. And generals were standing up in
Doha saying, well it was because…blah blah blah…It’s so obviously, so blatantly
obviously making it up [sic]

GD: Again that seems a weakness of journalism, in that it is susceptible to those sorts
of manipulations.
PW: Well that’s it! This is the problem. The anti-journalists have realised that they have worked out their strategy based on traditions and habits of journalists. That one, we will publish a response, from the accused and two as time goes on the story loses significance, and a correction published three weeks later does not address the initial thing. And they’ve learned that by hiring journalists, by having very good journalists working for them.

GD: Would you advocate some change to way in which journalists do their job, or the way in which reporting is done?

PW: No just doing it better, with more resources, being aware of those dangers. We have to keep giving a response, you can’t do anything about the fact that when the true story emerges a month later it doesn’t undo to damage caused by the lies at the time, you can’t do anything about that. But all we can do is be more sceptical, more accurate, more probing and that means more resources and better journalists, more better trained [sic], better resourced journalists because the people we are up against are bloody well resourced as well and nowadays, the depressing thing is bloody well skilled. That’s where top journalists tend to see their career paths going. Journalism has become a young man’s, a young person’s profession, because it’s so hard and the hours are so rigorous and uncomfortable stuff – I’ll do that for 15 years and then I’ll grow up and get a real job, working nine to five as a PR person. There are not many journalists still practicing at the age of fifty – or even forty. If you compare between the ages of twenty five and forty there’s a huge drop off and between forty to fifty it’s almost minimal and if you’re not Paul Kelly and editing a newspaper, you’ve generally moved on…

THE END
Giles Dodson: I thought might begin by asking you what was it that you were most proud of or what do you think your greatest achievement was in reporting from Iraq in 2003?

Mark Willacy: A very good question. I think the ability to get out and about and talk to people, normal Iraqis. It was difficult before the war with Saddam’s Information Ministry goons shadowing you everywhere. But I had a tiny bit of Arabic, which you know, you roughly communicate with people without your minder knowing. After the war it was good you could get out and truly talk to people and find out what their aspirations were. I think the stories I am most proud of are the stories of ordinary people. It’s hard to say, because I won a Walkley for the coverage, but the coverage was so broad I think I submitted three reports and one was about before the war when Saddam’s people were on the PR offensive and trying to convinced the world they didn’t have weapons of mass destruction and they took us to this plant and we had a look around, it was a bit of a joke and then during the war and after the war when I went out to Abu Ghraib pretty much before anyone and saw these cemeteries and all these people had come out to find their relatives and there was just mass hysteria there. They were digging with their bare hands, that was a good story and one I was proud of. Also there was one story I remember about the Americans, they denied throughout the war that they ever used cluster bombs on any population centres and we went to a neighbourhood in Baghdad where they were embedded in people’s gardens and on people’s rooves. There were kids with their stomachs torn open. So you know I was fairly proud of those sorts of stories, but it’s hard to pin one particular issue down.

GD: Yeah, sure. Did you find that like after the war or post-regime did you find it easier to do your reporting? Did you find that the Americans were open and forthcoming with information, that sort of thing?
MW: Yes and no. It was easier in that you were not shadowed by and Information Ministry minder and a regime that was totalitarian in its nature. It was more difficult in that you had to be very very careful about your own safety. The one good thing about Saddam’s regime was that foreign journalists were...when you’re in a dictatorship like that your safety was assured, although there was an Iranian journalist who was hanged there a few years ago. But yeah, the safety issue was one we had to watch out for. One extremely close call we had was with the US where they nearly shot us, dragged us out of the car.

GD: Yeah, I remember reading an account of yours of that, or perhaps it was a broadcast transcript or something, but year, that was a close call.

MW: The Americans in the immediate post-war period were very open, you could walk up to them and I remember running into an American soldier down along the Tigris and he said, “Come and see what we’ve found”. And he took us to this house and it was just stacked with rocket propelled grenades and launchers and AK 47s and millions of rounds. They’d obviously just stashed it. So yeah, they were really open, it was only after, when I went back a few months later it was a bit more formalised, and you had to have press credentials everywhere you wanted to go.

GD: Did you find with the safety issues there were things you would like to be covering that you weren’t covering because, you were concerned about being harmed?

MW: No, it was more to do with the way you approached it. You were very cautious you didn’t scream about in a car, you’d put TV stickers on your car, and we had a white flag in the car too, if you approached a nervous looking checkpoint you’d wave the flag and drive slowly, you’d even hop out of the car 100 meters down the road so they could see you were a Western journalist. But there were cases of people being shot, Iraqis generally, for tailing a convoy too closey. Geoff Thompson did a very good story about that when he was with a convoy when that happened.
GD: Listen, more generally, you know about journalism, what in your opinion is a professional journalist?

MW: Is a professional journalist?

GD: Yeah, or what are the characteristics of a professional journalist?

MW: I think the characteristics of a professional journalist, is someone who is dedicated to the craft, now that’s a very general statement, but someone who is committed to the truth and committed to people is interested in people, is sceptical of government and bureaucracy and authority. Not cynical of course, but sceptical. Someone who is willing to do primary reporting and get out there, into the field or to meet the people who are in the story. And someone who, I don’t think anyone can be objective, I really don’t – I think that someone who could mask or hide or suppress and bias or anything like that and to approach the story in an honest way, you know we are all human beings. Having worked here with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict you’ve got to learn to be thorough, and you’ve got to learn to be dispassionate in a lot of ways.

GD: Reading about journalism and talking to journalists and that sort of thing – objectivity is either sort of a central value or a value which can be pursued but never attained.

MW: Yeah, I think it’s the latter. To be brutally honest I really do. I don’t think we are objective about anything in our lives pretty much.

GD: How is that negotiated then, as a journalist and especially as a journalist in a situation like you just described, in Palestine and Israel or a very very controversial situation like the Iraq war. How is it possible to maintain any sort of professional credibility if one accepts already that one can’t be objective?
MW: Yeah, well it’s a battle a daily battle and you’ve got to approach each story and interview with that in mind and especially with an organization like the ABC you have to be extremely careful and extremely thorough and I think that was borne out by Richard Alston’s complaints about our coverage. And a couple of people were caught out, but luckily, I had a couple of complaints brought against me, but they were dismissed at every level of the inquiry. Look, it’s a hard question, I have biases and am not objective as a human being about certain things, but as a journalist – one way I do it is that if I have a sympathy one way or another, if I have a sympathy on a particular issue I will go harder on the people in that issue to satisfy myself that doesn’t mean I will give the other people an easy ride. But it’s just a matter of I want to get to the bottom of it and make sure I have thoroughly investigated everything these people say or the issue. And any journalist who tells you they’re objective or that you can be objective is telling you a bit of a white lie. I just don’t think objectivity is achievable. It’s one of those things if you’re in the field and you are seeing things with your own eyes and you’ve reported on the story for three months or years or whatever, you know very well who is right and who is wrong. The good thing about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is that there are people on both side who are right and people on both sides who are wrong.

GD: Does objectivity become replaced by values of honesty and credibility and integrity and those sorts of things?

MW: Yeah, I think you have to open and thorough and you know you have to…you know if I do a story on the death toll amongst Palestinian children I always do another story about the Israeli children who have died in this conflict. You know that’s a fairly obvious way of trying to be balanced or objective, but that’s not to say I agree with the Palestinians or the Israelis what I don’t agree with is the killing of children by either side or it’s a legitimate issue to explore. And who kills the children?

GD: Do you not encounter the danger though, almost as you’ve just described, two sides to every story – the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is almost the ultimate in this sort of debate. But you can take it back a few steps and talk about an environmental debate or
a labour debate, that sort of thing, and when you are talking about the interests of someone who is polluting a river versus someone who doesn’t want the river polluted and there aren’t necessarily two equal points of view, this is a complex negotiation, that weighing up a two sides of a story or three sides, or whatever.

MW: That’s right, journalism is a tangled web and you know you’ve got to sort your way through it. All I know is that here, you know we have had to jump though so many hoops, with the lobby groups on both sides, they are trying to manipulate and pressure you to use certain language. One word – terrorist – is a weapon. You know the ABC’s been in the firing line quite a bit over the different definitions we use.

GD: Did you find that in Iraq that you were very very careful about the sorts of language that you used and about how your news was going to be received.

MW: Yeah. Well there was one occasion, with the cluster bombs story, the Americans. Let me back track a minute. The American military use a lot of words and phrases like target “rich environment” and “collateral damage” all this sort of rubbish intended to dehumanise the whole thing. Anyway we questioned the Americans about it and the Americans said something along the lines of we only know of one case of collateral damage, and I said in my report, “collateral damage is a rather offensive way of saying someone who they didn’t mean to kill or harm was killed or harmed”. To me that was probably the product of three months reporting in a very difficult environment, but I found that offensive and I sort of stated it and a few people didn’t like what I said, but I think after three months on the road, fatigue and anger tends to get the better of you.

GD: And I would think that once you’ve actually spent the time doing the reporting you can actually back up what you’re reporting with knowledge. You’re almost entitled, perhaps, if you can to make those sorts of calls. Listen how, how was it possible, like we talked about before for a professional journalist to combat the efforts that are made to manage and manipulate the news, you know, generally but also in a specific instance
in Iraq you have propaganda coming from both sides, the official sources spinning the war, the various circumstances, how is it possible for a professional journalist to do their job in that environment?

MW: Well, it’s difficult – but I actually think the manipulation is more serious in the power centres of Washington, London and Canberra than in Baghdad. Because in Baghdad you’re getting out and meeting people and the people at the grassroots, to use that hoary old cliché, that, who are affected by what Washington or London or Canberra or whoever is implementing. But obviously there is a lot of pressure on journalists in Baghdad to, you know, pick up the language of the bureaucracy, of the military and apply that because it tends to keep things fuzzier.

GD: Again language is a big issue there – because you’ve got, just take for example Central Command during the war, you know people talking about collateral damage, target rich environments, smart bombs all that sort of stuff – how possible it is for journalists to not take that language on board? Because it’s very seductive imagery.

MW: It is, it’s very seductive and especially what we saw was the phenomenon of the embedded reporter and constantly referring to “we” and “us” in terms of the unit they were embedded with. That’s why I think with embedding there’s a great ethical dilemma there for journalists and why I refuse to do it and why I want to be based in Baghdad – to be what the Americans called unilateral. The Americans don’t like unilateral because unilateral cannot be controlled, they can be discouraged, they can even be threatened, you know? But yeah, I think in Qatar for example in Central Command there, there was a lot I saw a lot, well Fox News is a disgrace and it’s not hard to see why for anybody with any basic journalistic training, they adopted all that language and it even crept into the BBC and that’s where I reckon the danger really is as a journalist is to be involved in those sorts of scenarios.

GD: Does that mean not working for those sorts of organizations?
MW: Or not getting posted to those sorts of places. You know to that particular assignment, but again you can’t really avoid some assignments, but yeah for sure, I would never like to work for CNN or Fox – I think you’d be compromised. The other thing is, when I was in Baghdad – the Americans might have had a briefing, but I never went to it. You know, I would rather get out and about on the ground and if I want to know what the Americans said at the briefing, I’ll check AFP or Reuters and maybe get a grab from APTN or Reuters who were there and then put it in my report if it was worthwhile. But I prefer to talk to ordinary Iraqis or the GIs out in the street and see what they’d seen. In the early part of the war they were authorised to talk and the thing about Americans is that they love to talk and they are pretty open and pretty honest, these young soldiers and the military cottoned on to that after a while and the next trip that I took in you couldn’t do that.

GD: So what was it that triggered your news sense when you were in Baghdad, what was it that you found newsworthy?

MW: Well, you know, my fixer came in one day and said, “look people are pouring out to Abu Ghraib” and you think, that was the most notorious prison in the Middle East, 50000 people were held there, we’ll go out there. You know it was one of those situations where you could look out your window and see what was happening, there were gun battles along the Tigris for weeks after the war. So yeah, so if I read something about the Americans not dropping cluster bombs I’d ask my fixer and say what do you know. You know, your fixer is your eyes and your ears, he, well mainly as they were he’s, there were a few she’s, but he’s your eyes and your ears, if you got a good fixer, he’d tell you what was happening out on the street. A good story to me was the, well it’s hard to define, it one that made me interested it could be anything from the cluster bomb story, to the Abu Ghraib story to anything.

THE END
APPENDIX VII - INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

ERIC CAMPBELL (ABC)
19 MAY 2006

Giles Dodson: What I might just begin by asking you was, what was it that you were most perhaps proud of or the thing that you best achieved during you time in Iraq. And in asking you that, I am asking you for a bit of a description of your time there.

EC: Its one story where I don't really look back on achievements, because we got there and my cameraman got killed. So it's all a bit of a black murky area. I mean you take a certain pride in covering the big stories and getting to the centre of the big stories, but in this case events interceded that stopped the coverage in a very tragic way so I did a couple of stories before my cameraman was killed. But the story really hadn't started, we were planning on being there about a month and that all went arse about.

GD: I just want to ask you a bit more generally about journalism, but also relating to journalism during war, but what in your opinion is a professional journalist?

EC: That's a broad question. At the simplest level its someone who is a journalist for a living. If you want to look at what professionalism means, I have a great antipathy for the idea of what's commonly called the 'independent journalist' which usually means the leftwing journalist who takes a very polemical stance irrespective of the facts. What journalism is, is having a loyalty to no-one but the story, so you go into a story have a look at the facts and the situation on the ground and you report down the line what you see, rather than what you would like to see or what you would like to be the reality.

GD: How central are the values that are sort of traditionally symbolised by the idea of objectivity to the practice of a professional journalist?
EC: Well I think objectivity is absolutely crucial there is this sort of [sic] [in] the 1970s developed this school of journalism called “New Journalism” which held that objectivity doesn’t exist, that we are all biased, and that we should present our biases, which I feel is utter crap and an utter betrayal of the craft. Objectivity is what it is all about – which doesn’t mean you are a stenographer who simply reports what people say, you do analyse things, you approach things with certain values.

GD: How is that negotiated? The fine line between stenography and, how would you say, and objectivity?

EC: I don’t think it is a fine line. I think there is a process in journalism called analysis where you look at a situation, you make decisions about it, you make judgements about it as to what is the story, what is the reality of the situation. You approach it from a perspective based on various principles, such as a desire to tell what’s really going on a sympathy towards the underdog is quite legitimate, you know you look at the human side of what’s going on, all these things that do involve some empathy with the people you are reporting on. But as far as the bigger picture of the politics goes you take a very hard clinical look at what’s going on rather than trying to presuppose what the situation is so if you’re doing a story about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict you don’t go in with a perception that Israel is bad, the Palestinians are oppressed, you actually look to the complexities of the situation, whatever you think about the establishment of Israel you also have to look at the reality on the ground, which people are behaving in a way that is moral, that is consistent with international law, which people are doing things that are counterproductive, which people are respecting the tenets of international law, all these things apply to different situations, with the knowledge that the story you may finally come up with is not the story that you may want yourself personally to be telling, it’s the real story on the ground.

GD: How did your experience doing journalism during war confront these values?
EC: Well, when you’re reporting a war you are only, you are normally looking at it from a particular theatre of the war, you usually can’t be giving an overall comprehensive picture of the war, because what you are seeing is always a particular theatre of the battle. Now when I was in Iraq we were reporting from Northern Iraq, from the Kurdish area that was opposed to Saddam Hussein. The people we were talking to were very much in favour of US intervention, they had suffered enormously under Saddam Hussein, the kind of, feelings that you find in other parts of the war, people opposed to the war weren’t evident there, people were very much supportive of it. So when you’re reporting you’re not sort of saying whether the war was right of wrong, you’re basically saying [sic] what does it mean to these people? Why do they feel this way? What are the consequences likely to be for them? What are they prepared to suffer for the military intervention?

GD: When you were in Northern Iraq, what determined, for example, who became sources, because there was the Kurdish side, there were the Americans floating around up there and the local Iraqis.

EC: Well, at that stage we didn’t have any access to the Americans, because that theatre didn’t have embedding and the only Americans up there were Special Forces. They did not have an embedding program, so there was no options of going out with an Army unit, cause they avoided the media at all costs. So what we were reporting on was what it is like for the ordinary people there in Sulaymaniyah. The fears they had of chemical weapons being used, the fears they had for being victimised by Saddam Hussein in retaliation for the American intervention, we’d speak to the Kurdish leadership, for the political aspect but in the three days I was there before this happened, there wasn’t a great deal of reporting to be done.

GD: Obviously reporting in war is extremely dangerous, up until the point where Paul was killed, what were you doing to sort of mitigate your exposure to the dangers?
EC: Well, at that stage, in the lead up to the war, we all know now there were no weapons of mass destruction, the perception among journalists, as much as amongst anyone else, was that there was a very strong likelihood of chemical weapons strikes. I had done a course with the DoD in Britain, an ABC course – atomic, biological and chemical for looking at ways to protect yourself from attacks by weapons of mass destruction. We’d suck on the gas chamber [sic], we’d stick on gas masks, all that sort of thing – all of which proved to be pointless. But at the time people were carrying around, a biological suit in a backpack on our backs at all times, we’d take them to the toilet with us, we’d never take them off, only in the shower.

GD: Were there instances where the dangers, or elements of danger, were considered too great to permit reporting to go on?

EC: One of the reasons we had decided to go to northern Iraq was that the ABC had decided that Baghdad was too dangerous, so it was felt that Northern Iraq would be a relatively safe theatre of the war where we could still be in Iraq, giving the Iraq dateline, giving a sense of what was going on but not actually in an area that was being targeted by the Coalition. At the time, I mean suicide bombing has become a big issue, at that stage it wasn’t really seen a major risk to journalists. The course I did in London, it was in Stonehedge – Southampton I think, the military didn’t even mention suicide bombing because at that stage it wasn’t really a prevalent threat. Paul’s death was the first death by suicide bombing in the Iraq war, and we happened to be the ones that became the example of things to watch out for in the future.

GD: Having Paul killed, did make you reflect or reconsider your role as a journalist?

EC: Well, obviously it does, in an extreme a way as you can imagine. Yeah, in hindsight I wouldn’t have gone to Iraq at that particular time in my life, because I had a new-born baby. But because I had covered a number of wars in the past quite safely and because suicide bombing wasn’t the prevalent threat then as it has become, I made
the decision that I should go, but in hindsight I wouldn’t have made that decision, obviously.

GD: Of course, of course. To talk about a different aspect of the war – what is your attitude towards the notion of or the idea of embedding journalist with the military?

EC: Well, there’s a lot of nonsense spoken about embedding as though it’s some new thing, um embedding, in the sense of putting yourself with a particular party in a story is something that has been going on for as long as there has been journalists. If you go back to an environmentalist group like the Franklin Dam in 1982-3, journalists would base themselves with an environmentalist group who were guerrilla protest groups who were doing raids out in the wilds of the west coast of Tasmania. It was a more formalised situation in the Iraq war, but it was seen as a means of improved media access, after Vietnam where journalists had complete freedom and actually had a military ranking, freedom to move around, there had been a sort of lowering of the shutters on journalistic access. So this was actually seen as a bit of a break through, that journalists could actually be with a US military unit. But all you’re seeing is a snapshot of the war, all you’re seeing is what the 18yr old grunts you’re with are seeing. The problem with embedding is where it’s being used, where that snapshot picture is being presented as the overall picture, so it really comes down to the basic practice, the basic craft of journalism, where you don’t make what you’re seeing appear to be greater than what it is, pretending greater knowledge than you actually have, but there is nothing wrong with actually being in a military unit as long as you present it as a snapshot of the war. This is what these troops are seeing, this is a bit of a sniff of the reality of what’s happening for US troops on the ground.

GD: Leading into my next question, to do also with the, some would argue the efforts of coalition officials, and also Iraqi officials, to manage the news, the various strategies that were used, especially down at Centcom, with the military briefings that were, how do you say, not really revealing much at all.
EC: No, well, Doha was a complete farce. The journalists we had at Doha just thought it was a complete waste of time because they weren't being given any usable information, it was just the worst sort of PR exercise.

GD: What can objective journalism do to combat the obfuscation of the officials?

EC: Well, you report that. That we are being treated like mushrooms – being kept in the dark and fed bullshit. You don't actually pretend that you know what is going on. From the point of view of Jonathan Harley who was the ABC correspondent in Doha, that was the gist of his report, that this is the US trying to manage, trying to stage-manage what's seen, what's being heard, it bears no relation to reality. So that's quite different from being embedded which has a purpose in itself, if you approach it for what it is, rather than use it as a kind a fudge to pretend that you are seeing the whole picture.

GD: When you've got a situation where you've got embedded reporters or officials who are being less than 100% with the truth and then you've got extreme danger, how challenging to one's idea of professionalism, or to objectivity or to their idea about how they should be doing their job is that, you know? Especially in the context of civilian deaths.

EC: Well, I question the premise of the question. Because actually the safest place to be covering the war was with a US military unit. It was much safer than being a unilateral. Most of the deaths that occurred in the actual invasion were, among journalists were unilateral, rather than embedded journalists.

GD: I meant in terms of challenging one's idea of how one should be doing one's job, the embedded journalist is restricted in what they can do.

EC: No, I think that's wrong too. They weren't actually restricted. I think you have to give some credit to the Americans that the embedment process was actually quite open.
A colleague of mine Geoff Thompson, who was the only ABC journalist to be embedded, was able to film an incident where badly trained US soldiers opened fire on civilians and killed them, he was able to interview the commander who admitted that they had behaved badly, he was able to cut and broadcast the story for the unit he was embedded with, so it was actually relatively, surprisingly open access in a military situation. This idea that the US military was censoring what was coming out is not true; it is not borne out by the facts. They were actually, commendably open, um the shame is that so many journalists that were embedded were (not to mention Fox News) were behaving in such an irresponsible manner that they were not reporting what they should have been reporting and reporting it in ways that were quite wrong.

GD: Now the ABC, I believe, after the war, came in for quite a lot of criticism, or even during the war from the minister of broadcasting – was there any concern by people like yourself in the field, over how your news that you were generating was being received or did you think about it beforehand – how are we going to approach the war?

EC: Well, you do but I think it’s like any other story, you don’t care about how the military’s going to react to what it is that you are reporting, um if they don’t like it they can lump it. But that’s the same with anything you’re reporting on if you are close to the source and the source doesn’t like it, well, you move on. If you’re doing your job properly. I don’t think anyone who reported the war was concerned about how the military would react to it as long as your story stands up to scrutiny, then its fine if people don’t like it that’s their problem.

THE END
Giles Dodson: What was it that you found most rewarding about being an embedded reporter in Iraq?

Geoff Thompson: I think the most rewarding thing was access to one element of the story. As a journalist you’re never going to have access to all side of the story, but access is always good. And the thing is you’re only seeing the American invasion from that one perspective but that is still a valid thing to witness. You’re certainly seeing it from a privileged position as a journalist but it is only one position and the danger is that, or the thing you must ensure, is that it’s never anything more than that.

GD: How did you go about preparing yourself for that, not in a material way but in a psychological way, coming from a tradition of professional objective journalism, in which you’re not constrained or restricted by your circumstances – how did you go about adjusting to that?

GT: The short answer is that didn’t adjust anything – I just went in there as an objective professional journalist. And we weren’t constrained. We’d jump between units, as we want to [sic]. We didn’t have our own transport, but we’d hitch rides with people, which is not that dissimilar to what you would do anyway. I went into Afghanistan with the Northern Alliance and I was more or less hitching a ride with the BBC or with whomever else I could cadge a lift from. In terms of the invasion, which we were covering, there were people in Baghdad for most of the war, there were people in the North covering the war and there were people elsewhere covering other aspects of the war, but our job was to cover the invasion and only one aspect of the invasion, and I applied the same rules I always would apply. The thing is we could never see the whole battlefield, but we could see what was in front of us and the same rules of objectivity would apply to that. There was only one incident, in which an artillery cannon bolt backfired on a guy’s
leg and we ran over to film it and they went, “no no no, you can’t film it”. Now we kind of protested about that and very quickly they were falling over themselves to apologise and that it was a misunderstanding on the ground, the guys got a bit emotional or whatever. There was never any, this is what you have to remember about Americans and American forces, they are - and I have said this about this war - a lot of the guys on the ground, it not that they were ever trying to hide anything from you, they just didn’t know anything. All they knew was get to Baghdad, this is your mission today, fulfil your mission. Now in terms of the awareness that we had of that mission there wasn’t any attempt to restrict our knowledge of it. At that point, they didn’t really think they had much to worry about, and really they didn’t have much to worry about although they didn’t know that at the time. The guys on the ground didn’t and we didn’t know it at the time particularly. But there wasn’t any intentional obfuscation of what we were allowed to do. There was nervousness at certain points when we witnessed a shooting of civilians, but from the command point of view they were actually quite open about what happened and they allowed it to be investigated. My point would be that in essence I never ever shifted my basic principles which I base my journalism on, which is objectivity and only reporting that which you know to be true, and if its anything more than what you know to be true allowing that to be clear.

GD: I was interested to ask you about your technique of interviewing people, is it part of your technique to allow people to reveal themselves rather than to come out and make judgements yourself?

GT: I think so, at that point, going back to that time of war, it was probably not since Vietnam that an Australian audience had been up close and personal with American grunts fighting a war. It changed very much since then, we’ve had saturation of it, but at that point I knew that is was interesting and newsworthy in itself. Even the angle of the American war machine and the way these guys are geared and wound up and have, certainly at the lower ranks level, have a pretty simple idea of what they doing, “we’re gonna go and kill shit, this is fun” basically. But I knew that was interesting and newsworthy. But you don’t need to [inaudible] a combination of interviewing techniques to
some degree, also the simple fact that knowing you didn’t need to grill Americans for
them to say things and couch things in a way that was interesting, certainly interesting
for Australians at that point. I wasn’t goading them or anything. You didn’t need to do
that.

GD: There has been a lot of controversy about embedding. From talking to journalists I
get the response that people could protect their own independence and their own
objectivity by approaching their task a certain way, do you have an opinion about that
sort of saturation coverage, not so much the ABC but perhaps some of the British and
American television networks and their round the clock, up close and personal coverage
that actually trivialises war.

GT: Yeah, well we’re in the age of reality TV. These days increasingly having a sort of
worthy generic shots and worthy interviews and subjects, doesn’t really cut it anymore –
these days because of the YouTube phenomenon and everyone’s a video journalist,
you either live or die by your access. If you don’t have good access then people lose
interest, they actually want to see from the ground up, people living their lives. So you
can see that that Iraq war and the embedded experience was like “Big Brother at War”,
in many ways and that’s all part of the phenomenon. Them allowing the embedded
process, I don’t know if it was influenced by that, I think it was probably more influenced
by ideology – “we’re right and have got nothing to hide, so come on board and we’ll
show you”. In a sense, people getting caught up in the personalities does perhaps
trivialise it, but on the other hand it can also be immensely powerful.

GD: To what extent is the objective, aloof, independent journalist model is somehow,
comes into question? Especially with reference to the “YouTube generation” – is the
professional model undermined by the news demands of journalism.

GT: I don’t think so. I think it’s really easy to under-estimate the filtering process that is
really difficult. Taking white noise and turning it into something actually intelligible and
interesting and illuminating. The caveat I always put on this is that embedded reporting
is only one perspective on the war. If the only reporting the ABC was doing was during the invasion...in essence the ABCs coverage, our coverage was only one aspect of it – there were people doing the big picture, there were people in Baghdad for a period at least and there were people in the north. The ideal is to have someone everywhere, but you don’t cut yourself out of some access because, my beef with the people who are against embedding is that they have a narrow view – access is always good, its only when you pretend that that access tells the whole picture.

GD: And you were obviously quite conscious and quite careful in your representations of what you experienced, yeah?

GT: I have actually spoken to someone like yourself before and they used it as a point of saying, “oh look, he’s made this admission”, I thought it was a little bit silly but the admission they focused on was I had made sure I only reported on that which I saw in front of me and that which I knew to be true. Right, now you can flip that each way and say “a-ha, he can only see what’s in front of him!” And therefore embeddings invalid. Well, that’s just stupid. I saw what was in front of me and that was true other people were looking at other things and the bigger picture and that was also true and then it’s up to the intelligent viewer to interpret all that stuff and walk away with an opinion.

GD: There’s also a filtering process that news goes through – once it’s left your hands the report can be manipulated in many ways.

GT: Well, everything we shot we actually cut ourselves in the field, it was all [sic] and it was actually we were the first Australian film crew to do feeds from the middle of the desert, shooting, editing and sending complete cut packages and using satellite phones. The ABC was giving us three or four minutes sometimes to run a package, only because it was unique in comparison to what else was on in Australia. That’s why and that’s because of the access. Because that was interesting because that hadn’t been seen before. These days watching Americans talking to you down a camera, I mean turn it over, because we’ve see so much of it.
GD: The reason I tried to make that point was that two journalists can see the same events and report them in quite different ways – an example being the reporting of events on say Fox as opposed to the ABC – in this case the professional responsibility comes down almost to a kind of morality – how should something be presented.

GT: Well Fox is patriotic TV.

GD: But there are shades of that throughout the array of media outlets.

GT: Yeah, well look, obviously the idea of pure objectivity is a myth but that doesn’t mean that it shouldn’t be strived for.

GD: What is your response to accusations that constantly having war on TV screens and in newspapers is not only privileging of military perspectives but it dangerous in and of itself?

GT: I think it definitely privileges the military perspective and is it dangerous – yes and no. It’s embedded reporting that got a soldier shooting a guy half dead on the floor in Karbala or somewhere. That stuff we filmed young grunts shooting up a car full of civilians. Yes it does privilege their perspective and it doesn’t make them immune from criticism or surveillance. But does that mean it would be great to be embedded with the insurgents, oh yeah. But apart from Michael Ware and a few other brave souls, who are also working for organizations that have got the time and security and commitment and resources to be there and develop that access. If you want to cover Iraq its easier and safer to do it embedded, although that’s questionable these days because you’re a target. That’s doesn’t mean that roaming around on your own – very few people are doing that these days because it’s just so goddamn dangerous. So, look the idea opposed to embedding is based on this idea that journalists are by choice not hanging out with insurgents, not sort of driving around Baghdad, living with people who have just
had their entire clan wiped out – that’s what every journalist wants to do, but can they do it without being strung up from a lamp post.

GD: What sort of sensitivities do you take into account when doing such interviews (case in point soldiers who had shot up the civilian’s vehicle)? Also do you let subjects reveal themselves rather than digging or pushing for comment?

GT: I think both. That particular incident took place over a 6 hour period – from when it happened to actually realising that it probably wasn’t a threat to establishing that there wasn’t actually a threat.

GD: Your situation is quite tricky there as the embedded journalist trying to cover this major blunder.

GT: I felt sorry for the young grunts. And it was a weird experience. It wouldn’t be valid now because those guys are so battle weary and battle aware – and if you think about it from the viewfinder of the present, looking back they have every reason to be nervous. What if the reality of Baghdad streets then was what it is now? Those guys always go up the streets if they’re in a vehicle they’ve always got their finger on the trigger. People are trying to kill them. The fact that they weren’t then is why it was true and why our story was valid. I felt sorry for them – I’ve been in those situation before, where it all get blurred and everyone gets very excited and the bloods flowing and rumour and misjudgement bubble to the surface very quickly. Coming off that battle high they couldn’t with any sort of sober perspective actually look at what had happened, so yeah I felt sorry for them and the main trigger man who egged them on but in the context of three thousand civilians getting killed in October – it begins to fade into irrelevancy I suppose. The truly interesting thing and the devastating impact it’s going to have on Iraq for I don’t know how many decades it’s going to affect them – also the generation of young Americans – 2800 killed, but 22000 wounded, the Iraq war veterans generation and the problems that’s actually going to present to America, will be very interesting down the track and I am fascinated by all that stuff.
GD: Do you think the interrogation of the logic of the war and the interrogation of the war should have been much harder, and what lessons could be learnt from that, given that things have unfolded the way they have?

GT: Yeah I think that absolutely, I have to admit though having been in countries where entire societies do lie, particularly being in East Timor in 1999 and being very much aware of Indonesia lying as a state about what it was doing. Kind of expecting in a way. I guess what I am saying is when I saw Colin Powell give that speech, and people said, “Look where’s the real evidence” but I sort of thought, “yeah well entire countries do lie, so maybe they’re right”. But having said that there was a huge rah rah [sic] element going into that war, coming off the back of September 11 and all the rest of it. There was this whole sort of, America was very hurt and like a bumbling kind of wounded bull.

GD: Do you think if a similar campaign commenced today or in the near future, involving the States and presumably Australia, do you think the World’s press would be as eager again to go along for the ride…

GT: Well, I was just reading Seymour Hersh in The New Yorker and this battle is being waged at the moment – even though the Republicans have lost a lot of power there is still a certain block within the White House that wants to bomb Iran. The press and the military would be much more questioning, basically they’ve cried wolf once to many times. And I think that will have a huge bearing on it, the American press now is deeply questioning. Its fascinating to back and look at “Fog of War” or Robert McClellan and the Kennedy Administration and the degree of handwringing that went on say over the Cuban Missile Crisis and you sort of think [pause] Willy Smitts was the Chief of Staff and he wanted to bomb Cuba, right. That could have trigger a nuclear war, that’s how close it was. That was one person’s position was resisted, now at the moment potentially you’ve got Cheney wanting to bomb Iran and the military preventing it, but it can be that close and suddenly world history can take a very bad, dramatic turn. So I think that yeah, that the press is certainly gonna be more vigilant next time round, but
what is a little depressing is that given the lessons of history in Vietnam, in the Cuban Missile Crisis and other times, that the Administration wasn’t more wary of unilateralism and “faith-based thinking” and I mean that in the broader sense of faith in your own opinions, even if you don’t have the evidence.

GD: There were a couple of events one being the whole Iraq saga and the other the Hurricane Katrina catastrophe last year and people have been saying that those events, the exposure of the American administration as a pack of liars and as completely incompetent with dealing with disasters has allowed journalists a fresh space with which to question and openly be more critical of policy, do you think that has any sort of credibility, that argument?

GT: Yeah, I think there is, but I don’t think there was anything stopping them being critical the first time round.

GD: What processes have been going on that have dulled journalists senses in a sense?

GT: I think, basically it was because journalists wrongly bought into a way of thinking and policy, sort of archetype that was an oxymoron, which is that there can ever be a war on terror. When it’s confusing, all the war on terror means is a strategy against a strategy, its making the mistake of confusing terrorism with state actors, using a terminology used to describe relations between nation states, which is war and combine it with non-state actors, because terrorism has existed since the American revolution – what was the Patriot about if it wasn’t about guerrilla fighting. Everything that has been written about military strategy since Sun Tzu and the Art of War, Mao Tse-tung and Che Guevara who wrote so much about guerrilla warfare, you don’t try to attack guerrilla insurgencies with conventional means, and it’s very rarely proved to be a happy result. I thing that the war on terror was always oxymoronic and I think if people were honest with themselves they would acknowledge that war is the privilege of the powerful and
terrorism is the necessity of the weak. And its strategy is not a philosophy – terrorism is a way of killing people, not an ideology.

GD: What was your relationship with the editors and the people back at the ABC who were producing what you were sending back there? Were you in touch with those people on a regular basis, did they provide you with direction?

GT: Not really, look they do sometimes, but in that situation it wasn’t really possible. A part of that was because we resisted, and this became a key point, we resisted any pressure to be doing constant live updates. Because that I felt was going to be facile television. With things going on you’re talking in the middle of nowhere.

GD: That is what I meant earlier about the trivialisation of warfare.

GT: Well, we didn’t do that. And it’s certainly what happened on CNN and FOX. We kind of tried to make each report or piece a little slice.

GD: To add some newsworthy element as some sort of justification.

GT: Yeah and that was just a decision we made on the road, partly as we were not able to go live all the time and also, you’d stop for a few hours and then you might take off again, we decided we’d give them what was possible and to be honest half the reason was that when we left the base to head off into Iraq, we thought we were coming back the next night so we left half our gear behind, so we didn’t have a live capacity anyway.

GD: Were you under pressure at all from Sydney to provide that live coverage?

GT: A little bit, a little bit. But I kind of resisted it because I thought it was more valuable for us to actually send something back which was a bit illuminating.

THE END
APPENDIX IX - INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

RORY CALLINAN (NEWS LIMITED)
18 DECEMBER 2006

Giles Dodson: What did you find most rewarding or most satisfying about your posting to Iraq, both stories and your experiences as a journalist?

Rory Callinan: Look, I think one was it was rewarding to be chosen to do that job. News Ltd only chose three journalists to do it, so that was rewarding. Then getting to Doha and getting a couple of breaks on stories, there was a break I got on a story in Doha that I was particularly happy with. I don't look back at that experience and go "jeez, wow [sic] that was a really fulfilling experience as a journalist. It was a very frustrating experience". But there were things you felt “oh, well I'm reasonably...I wouldn't say happy, but I suppose came reasonably close to what I was trying to achieve. My problem is that I never feel happy with anything. There were a couple of things. There was a story I did in Doha, there was a story at Um Qasr that I did and then there were one or two stories that I did in Baghdad that I was happy with or satisfied with and then there was a story I did up in the North of the country, but I can explain to you more about that later. But that was the way I felt. But there were little things, you might get an incremental break on a story or something and you might think that's something nobody knows about, and you might think that's relevant to what's happening and it's relevant to the people back in Australia.

GD: You were based initially at Central Command in Doha, how did you find that?

RC: That was horrific.

GD: How did it challenge you as a professional journalist?

RC: It was just a theatre, I wrote a piece at the time for the Australian’s media guide. We sort of got there, we went into the place, you know – you’d stay in a nice hotel out in...
the capital somewhere and then you sort of half an hour’s drive to get to the place and then you sort of hit this huge, like a fortress basically of security and you went through several gates. And once you started going through that security apparatus, you suddenly realise that this is an intensely controlled environment. The guys will either do a strip search of you or you had to walk through the X-ray machine that was like getting zapped, whatever it was. And the control just increased from that moment.

GD: And that was an affront to your journalistic sensibilities was it?

RC: Sort of. Whenever you’re put in those circumstances you always think, “it’s my job to get around this stuff, it’s all part of the business”. But you know you start to get quite surprised with the level of control from that point, you know. From the moment you’re herded into the bus and you’ve got all these name tags and the bus goes to one particular compound about the size of a football field and you can’t leave that compound.

GD: Do people start thinking “oh, god what have I got myself into”?

RC: Oh, completely. It wasn’t the way I envisaged we’d be reporting on it, but then I was the third choice to be reporting on it and I was lucky to get that third choice. So I was grateful initially. And when you got into that compound, it was very well set up, there was a great coffee shop, a nice Starbucks or whatever it was, you could plug into the net and use the net at 10 billion bytes or whatever the top speed is. It was very comfortable and air-conditioned and they had these auditoriums set up where people would theoretically be briefing you. And then we obviously as Australians, the Australians had their own little PR team in this area as well. And I think I wrote in that piece in the Australian something about “you need to be prepared or if your enemy’s unprepared then you’ve won the battle”. And the Australian media guys had put this up on their door. The guy who ran the show, Pup Elliot, he’s a very professional operator and that’s the way they proceeded to deal with the media, they were very very good.
GD: Even you as a military correspondent?

RC: Not really, no initially I was just sent to cover it. But when you got there it was, your sole point of contact was the military – you know, Australia’s got 5 F-18s and today they bombed three places and didn’t bomb somewhere because they might have killed civilians, so I was dealing with a flow of military information. What they did initially was, they said to me you’ll do the write-off from Doha, the battle as it unfolds. But what we found was that people in New York and journalists back in Australia, started to get briefings from politicians, like Downer – I can’t remember who the Defence Minister at the time was – they started to get briefings from Canberra that we weren’t getting, while we were in Doha, where theoretically there was a command HQ. So it just made it completely ridiculous. And we just sat there. That was the theory, we got it once I think when the SAS went in we got that break once and then when the Australian troops went in. It was really interesting at this point. This is right at the start, just before the whole thing kicks off. And the auditoriums where there with Hollywood designed sets basically. And there were even camo-nets up against one wall so it would look as though you were doing your live cross. They weren’t going to be used until Tommy Franks came and christened them, until the big boss arrived. So everyone was just waiting and waiting and waiting and the Australians suddenly said “Oh, look we’re at war and we want to do a briefing”. I think the first American troops had gone in at that stage, but Franks hadn’t shown up at that stage, so you had hundreds of media just sitting there waiting for Tommy Franks to come along and he hadn’t showed. We then went to the Australians and said we really need to know something, they were much more, as I said they were very professional, but they were a bit more reasonable about what they were prepared to tell us. So the Australians went, “right we’ll give you a briefing, we’ll do it in this auditorium” – the number two auditorium or something. And they got blocked from doing that. We heard later the Gen Franks’ people and the American media machine had gone, “no way is some Australian low-level partner going to christen this stage. We want the big fanfare”. So we had to go out into a compound next door, and stood there with McNairn and basically did a press conference. They blocked all other international media, so all these international media were leaning over
the fence and climbing over the fence to film down to get some sort of action. So they gave us a reasonable briefing and said, “we’ve gone into combat”. So we raced out and filed that. And that was what we were supposed to do there – receive those briefings and then file straight away. But with that was one occasion in which we got a breaking news lead that hadn’t been leaked or officially given in some sort of press conference in Canberra, so tightly was the message being controlled by the politicians.

GD: With that management of the news, how possible is it for and independent journalist to deal with that and to retain some sort of professionalism in that situation?

RC: Well you can ask questions in the press conferences, probing and probing and probing – there were guys from the ABC – Peter Lloyd – would stand up in the press conference later on with Franks and say things like “you’ve shown us the camera footage of the smart bombs where they’ve hit – will you show us footage of the bombs that miss”. You can imagine those questions! They were very good at that, but the trouble for us as print journalists it’s no good to ask a question in that forum, because then everybody else then knows your answer, the wire services are there and if the question is relevant to Australia then they can just pump out a story on the web, so that makes it hard. But to work around that you’re also supposed to get sources on the side and build relationships with people who will tell you stuff that nobody else will tell you. And I was able to that a little bit and I got a story about all these other Australians who were serving as embeds with the Americans, and I was reasonably happy with that, they ran it ok in Australia, but not very well. But that was something that no one else had at the time and it became relevant later for us.

GD: You talked about the piece you wrote for the media section of the Australian – quite a few of the journalists I spoke to have been, especially in the embedding situation, have been very cautious about “making the media the story”. But it seems to me that the management of the media and the information management strategies of the military authorities is crucially central to the story.
RC: You mean this Horaldo presence on the battlefield?

GD: And the day-to-day frustrations the journalists experience trying to get some information out of the Australian military people or the Yanks or who ever. I am just wondering, because when you read this stuff in the paper, especially in the paper, there’s not so much sense of the day to day management of the information. Just in your opinion is it legitimate to make that a more central part of the story – that propaganda aspect of it?

RC: Well I think so. I think you should be doing that if you can. It would be interesting to talk to Tom Allard from the Sydney Morning Herald if you can. In press conferences he asked some good questions – we had a press conference at one stage and this was about the F-18s and what they were going to do and what they had done and how many bombs they’d dropped. And they wheeled in an F-18 pilot to brief us, and we started asking questions and Tom’s asked a question about, I can’t quite remember, but it was quite controversial and the military media guy, Pup Elliot said “well, that’s just not on and this press conference is finished” and took the guy out. And everybody blew up. Everybody backed Tom’s question and said you’ve got to answer it, you should answer it, c’mon c’mon c’mon [sic] and it got quite ugly at that point. And I think Tom went away and wrote a story where he said they basically squibbed us, they wouldn’t answer us in the press conference. I am not sure if I wrote something I can’t remember now, there were a lot of journalists who weren’t bothering to focus on that, maybe not Australian journalists.

GD: It seems to me and inherently interesting aspect of the whole goings on, you know.

RC: And it should be, the fact the Australian newspaper has the Media Guide makes it the perfect vehicle to write stories like that. A lot of other newspapers, like the wire services, didn’t have it. Having said that I agree, but I still think it’s newsworthy.
GD: Perhaps you can speculate a little about embedding as well, and the danger of journalists being so close to the military, but also in that “fortress” media arena, the danger of that sort of privileging of the military perspective.

RC: Oh, for sure. I’ve been embedded since in other circumstances and I never really did a proper embed at that stage. What they did for us is flew us to Um Qasr and said we could spend a day or a night with the mine clearance divers. So frustrated were people becoming with being locked up in the Doha centre, that this was a real adventure, things were coming great. And every day I or others would say, “Look, when can you actually take us into Iraq and show us what you do, we don’t what to just get press conferences”. I suppose you sort of reach a point where you don’t want to…I can see a point where you could get so desperate, and might start thinking, “should I go a bit soft on these guys and they might start looking after us, or maybe take us to the next level”. It didn’t happen for me and I didn’t feel that it coloured in any way my reporting, but I could that you had to think about stuff and you had to think, “well, if I include that I’ve got bugger all chance of getting out of here”.

GD: That seems like a very vulnerable position for a journalist to be in.

RC: Oh, you could be. Having said that there were journalists who were very happy being in Doha, they didn’t want to move – go to the hotel, there’s no problems filing. They didn’t really care. You could see situations where a thought like that might cross your mind, but it never influenced the way I reported because I wouldn’t see the point you know.

GD: So how do you reconcile that dependence on the military and the dependence on the military managers for the info and the access with the traditional journalistic ideals of independence and objectivity and impartiality and that kind of stuff?

RC: I think it’s really difficult, it’s really difficult. And the thing too, with the way in which Australia sent people in there is that Australia is not well resourced. So they were
behind it from the start. I think Ian McPhedran, I think it might be difficult for Ian
because he still works for News Ltd, but I do know that Ian and others, he felt he should
take a photographer with him, because one it would be relevant for the stuff he was
filing, but also to watch his back. And, they said “No, we can’t really do that”. And Ian
gets there and he’s competing against people who have photographers and the latest
sat phones and they have drivers and teams and all the rest of it. It becomes quite hard
and quite dangerous. So if you’re not well resourced you tend to rely on the army to
take you places and that’s what happened in Doha. I was constantly on the phone to
News Ltd, saying I need to get out of here, this is ridiculous – the briefings are
happening overseas, they’re not happening here. The people who are here, you get
very little access to them, it would be much better if we were on the ground, seeing what
Australians are doing and they would just be going, “No, this is the situation” and later I
would find out that…its very expensive for them to have 3, 4 or 5 journalists on the
ground in Iraq, simply because of insurance purposes. So yeah, I do believe you are
vulnerable.

GD: What was your relationship with your editors or whoever it was you were dealing
with back in Australia – would they provide you with updates from their end and point
you in the right direction or ask you to cover certain things in certain ways?

RC: First of all, in terms of editorial pressure, about whether they wanted you to push a
certain line, I never really felt that. People talk about all these conspiracies with Fox
and Murdoch and the rest of it – just in terms of the logistical nightmare of receiving
copy from us over there, to try and spin it or direct you to cover a certain angle was just
not feasible – we were flat out just setting things up just so we could file and file at the
right time and file enough copy and chase…in terms of direction as to what they wanted
us to do. I don’t know about the other guys, but my initial direction was that I would do a
big write through as the battle unfolded and as we got all the briefings and say, “today
they got through Nasiryah and five dead here and fifty dead here” but we worked out
that people sitting in New York in immense comfort could get that information off the
web faster than we could get it off the briefings.
GD: Did that mean then that your reporting became focused on the sort of micro goings on of “Australian diggers”?

RC: More so yeah, it did. That was the other thing, the one occasion when I sort of felt there was a problem was, I’d gone to Um Qasr and I’d hitched a lift with some TV journos up to Basra. Now Basra was still, it had still not fallen. The Brits [sic] had gone in there, come under really heavy attack, and turned around and come back again. I had filed this story saying that you couldn’t even go up the road because snipers were shooting at people. And that story, I think that story, I can’t remember, but they either re-topped it, or didn’t use it properly or something to basically to go along with a line out of one of these places – either Doha or New York – you know, “Today Basra has fallen”. And that was the one thing that I think they did get wrong. But I think it was the case that they weren’t set up logistically to handle rapid copy coming in like that. It might have been they couldn’t change the story in time. I don’t think there was any great conspiracy, but I think they might have seen it on wire services that, “hey Basra’s fallen”, but that was completely false and I was quite annoyed about that and I felt also that it was more so of [sic], I was more likely to get stories in the paper that were more “micro – level” about Australians and all the rest of it. And felt that I’d just file that story, now I’ll move to this. Saying that I did file stories on other stuff, like when Basra did fall that got a run in the Oz [The Australian] and a few other places as well. But that was probably the one occasion, but I don’t think there was any great conspiracy with that. I think it was the case that they might not have understood that I had moved so quickly, from one place to the next, to get this information. You’ve got people who were the foreign editors, who were just being bombarded with so much information and they were having to make decisions really quickly that was putting them under immense pressure.

GD: Who would you deal with in the first instance back in Australia?

RC: I can’t remember. I think I was dealing with in terms of being able to move out of and in terms of where we were positioned [sic], I dealt with Bruce Laudon at News Ltd.
I found him very professional and he knows the job, he’s been a foreign correspondent and done it tough, before sat phones [sic] and all that kind of stuff. He was good on that stuff. In terms of that stuff on Basra, I was dealing with chief-of-staffs who were in Brisbane, Sydney, in Melbourne. That was another thing; each newspaper had its own interests about what it wanted to cover.

GD: I am actually focusing primarily on the Australian, combined with Fairfax and the ABC. Of course a lot of your stuff was run in the Courier-Mail, which I would say has a completely different sort of focus than the Australian. Were they asking for something different than say was the Australian?

RC: Not really no. I think the case was they were just really happy to be getting anything. I never received any…towards the end I was getting a few clear things that the Oz [sic] wanted me to chase. But, no it wasn’t like they would say go after this or go after that. The thing I would say is that the Courier-Mail, their a small operation, they had a small team of people putting out what was basically a war paper every day, so it was pretty stressful for them. I can’t remember where that Basra story ran, but it just...I don’t think it was in Oz [sic]. I think it was the Courier-Mail. It’s quite frustrating because you don’t find out for a day or so, what runs and what doesn’t.

GD: Talking more generally about reporting on war, do you think there is a danger from a journalist’s perspective when you’re covering war to end up romanticising military operations.

RC: Yeah, definitely. I think that’s definitely a problem. That’s something I look back on over the stuff I did and think, “Oh, you know, probably might have used a few less adjectives in some of the stuff. But it is a problem, especially when you haven’t done it before and I don’t think any of the journalists that turned up from Australia had done it before. Yeah, you do trend to champion that sort of “Australian troops during war”. That sort of parochial Australian interest. And the papers do – that sort of stuff does get a run, so you do. I wrote a story about a marine, using a jaffle iron to cook food for the
troops. So you do get a bit caught up in that. I think that’s probably a sign of the first time Australian troops had been in that scenario and Australian journalists had been that close to write about them, that sort of stuff. The other issue is that the newspapers did pick that sort of stuff up and you might have been filing something that was much less like that one day and it’s not getting a run, and the next day you file it and it gets a run.

GD: You might call someone a few days later and they might tell you what made the paper or not, but you wouldn’t know on a day to day basis which stories were getting picked up and which were not?

RC: If you got something on Page 1 you certainly knew, but it was in the back, in the wrap up – you go a little bit of feedback from the chief of staff.

GD: But you are in a sense working a little bit blind and you don’t get a chance to calibrate your reporting to what is likely to get a run.

RC: That’s all to do with the fact that Australia’s a long way away, and they’ve got such limited equipment. I think I had to share a bulletproof vest at one stage.

GD: There’s also a difficulty I would imagine with a paper having access not only to the wires, but also the large news organisations from overseas, the big American outlets, better resourced and I would imagine that it is much more difficult to compete.

RC: Oh yeah, that’s completely right. That said have you spoken to Peter Wilson at all?

GD: Yes.

RC: He did really good job in Baghdad, he certainly competed with those guys and so he should. But again he was not as well resourced as those others guys.
GD: He sounded as though he had the most backing from the guys I have spoken with – he had an interpreter with him, a jeep he was allowed to drive around in and a photographer.

RC: The other thing, what you say is very right about those American papers. The Times of London has one of the best networks of correspondents in the world and when those guys ring up the chief of staff, he’s used to dealing with people telling him, “I can’t leave my hotel room because there’s shooting outside”. He’s used to people telling him that. Whereas The Australian, a classic example was I got car jacked at one stage and felt I couldn’t really go into the details of it with the bosses, because they’ll just say, “oh, look what are you doing? Get out and go home”. So I thought I can’t really make a big deal about it.

GD: You don’t want to be pulled out.

RC: So, if that happened to you and you were working for the Times, they’d just say “Bad luck old chap, we’ll wire you another three thousand pounds for another vehicle”.

GD: Within the context of Centcom and more generally reporting on military goings on – especially for the embedded journalists – how relevant or how challenged are those ideals of objectivity and impartiality in journalism, when the range of sources you can use is limited, and the information you are getting is coming from a very interested source.

RC: Certainly, it challenges you, but if you’re in this job for the right reasons, then it’s your job to get around that.

GD: And not just become…
RC: A mouthpiece for the military, yeah. If I had seen scenarios where Australian soldiers had killed someone or done something bad or what have you, you know, I would have loved to write that story. That's a great story that needs to be told. But definitely the newspapers that I was dealing with would have loved to report on that story. I have since written about similar things, and have never had a problem with any Australian news organization putting a spin on it.

GD: There’s never a tendency to give the establishment an easy go?

RC: No, it’s more the case, I mean people complain about Fox and Murdoch and all the rest of it, but newspapers love to, the newspapers [sic] I know and the people that work there, really love to nail it, to uncover something. That is, if you’re a good journalist and a keen journalist, then that’s what you live for. If I had come across anything like that in Doha, it wouldn’t have bothered me in the least. The biggest issue was, or the essential tools you need to get the information you use to those stories, well the army had set up a very efficient mechanism of defence, stopping you from getting those things.

GD: Cultivating sources basically?

RC: Normally on the battlefield, when you talk to soldiers, they’ll just tell you anything. But in Doha, at Centcom, we never even saw an Australian soldier, we might see one for five or ten minutes, but they were all locked up in a really controlled environment, where everything was monitored; their emails their phones, they couldn’t do anything, but as soon as I got to Um Qasr you got some great stories there, with a much more interesting perception. We found out these Australians were selling water, exchanging water for mines and ammunition and stuff being brought in by local kids, which was quite handy for the Australians, but quite dangerous and I know that was a story they probably wouldn’t have allowed, or told us in Doha, as piss weak as it sounds, because the families back home might have thought, “Oh, no”. The Australians had this mad idea, that was the other problem with the Australian coverage, they wouldn’t let you name people, identify people for some extraordinary reason, meanwhile the marines are
going, Bill Smith from (such and such a place) giving a street address almost in California, has flown fifteen missions. The Australians are going, “No, it’ll have to be Trooper X or Pilot Y”. The Australians put up this immense blocking mechanism or defence to try and stop you doing it. But if anything it made people angrier and keener to get around it. But having said that it was a very effective defence…Doha was a very frustrating place, and I can see what you’re saying with the question, when you’re confronted with that sort of thing you tend just to sit back and go “alright, I’ll just toe the line and write what they like”. But I don’t feel I did that, even though I probably wrote stories later on that I felt were maybe a little, parochial. In hindsight I might not have written them quite as parochially, but still I felt they were of relevant. But I was really happy that I was able to get out of Qatar and actually go out and speak to people and find out what was actually happening on the ground. And I think if you are…I felt comfortable professionally to be able to look back and say “yeah, I was there, but I didn’t spend the whole time there, you know!”…

THE END
Giles Dodson: Could you describe the style that you used in your reporting from Iraq?

Ian McPhedran: I wanted to keep it personal really, to make it the story of the people, the people in the war. That’s entirely what I tried to do and get into the human interest side of it, rather than the strategic side of it because obviously being there and seeing things through just one set of eyes it’s difficult to have a big picture view, so I was keen just to make it a personal account.

GD: Is that sort of style easily reconciled with the overall objective, impartial model, being there on the ground telling the human story, lends itself to a more “experiential” style, doesn’t it?

IMc: Yeah, that’s right, but there not too many options. You’re really limited by the options you’ve got there. While it would be great to do a broad brush coverage, when you sitting in a hotel in a city, you’re limited, particularly in those circumstances when you’re under the control of the local Information Ministry and so on. Given those limitations I think the human angle was the best way for me to go.

GD: Were you quite conscious of the terminology and so on that you used, given that it was such a tense and controversial time? The portrayal of the city and the people and the government there, were you particularly conscious of the language that you used? Talking about Saddam as a “brutal dictator” or his palaces as “evil lairs”, its quite sort of lurid terminology.

IMc: It is it is, yeah, but that’s the sort of reality though. This is not a Sunday school picnic. This is a dictator, and he’s brutal and that’s the way it is. And I don’t think that’s propaganda, I think that’s accurate.
GD: Again, I think you’ll probably say you were being realistic, but there’s an almost sarcastic portrayal of the Iraqi defence forces and that sort of thing, obviously they didn’t provide much in the way of defence, but again it’s that sort of objective idea where one must be very even handed I suppose.

IMc: Yeah, that’s right I guess. You do sort of fall into that, given the sort of people that you’re dealing with and the propaganda that they are trying to peddle. If someone is telling you that their divisions of soldiers are repelling the enemy at the border, and when you know the soldier are actually on the other side of town, that’s a complete lie. You can’t really respect that.

GD: And they would take you out around Baghdad to see civilian damage and to see suburbs bombed. What was your approach to that? It must have been quite difficult to at once judge the news or truth value of it, but at the same time you didn’t want to ignore it.

IMc: Well, I think you’ve got to be very careful when you’re dealing with these people. When going to the site of a missile strike or whatever, you’d find a particular group of people there willing to talk to you, when you’d go further and get into the bomb site and try to talk to the neighbours, it was often difficult to get to the truth of the matter and find out who lived there and that sort of stuff, so you had to be very careful.

GD: Did you find that later on, when you went back to Baghdad – I presume people were more open and talkative, that the deeper truth of what had happened came out.

IMc: Yeah, that’s right, I mean the more you got in behind it the better it was, but you know time constraints, risks, dangers, “get back on the bus, let’s go” and given the fact that some crews were actually caught with missiles coming in as they were at these sites, it was quite hectic.
GD: I suppose also one you’ve got the news cycle, but also you restrictions in terms of being able to get an internet or email link that must have placed quite heavy restrictions on the degree to which you can pursue issues?

IMc: That’s right. I was filing by satellite phone directly into our mainframe, I wasn’t using the internet, but you had to get back to the hotel and file at certain times and there was a six or seven hour time difference. All these things add to the pressure on the ground. These things are always there, but when there’s a war it just adds and extra dimension and magnifies the problems.

GD: Talking once more about your style, as we were before, is that sort personalised, episodic or travelogue style, is that narrative style, as opposed to a hard news style, was that something that the Australian or you editors were encouraging you to do?

IMc: Well, not really there wasn’t really much discussion about that at all; it was simply the way it happened. They got what they got. They must have been happy with it as they ran it pretty well. I was the only bloke there so it was as good as it was going to be. If you had had a couple of other people there you could have done hard news, colour and movement on the side, but doing it the way I did it I thought was the best way. So I’ll certainly stand corrected if anyone wants to debate it.

THE END
Giles Dodson: What for did the day to day routine and activities take at Centcom?

Jonathan Harley: Well, for me, and this is in the context that it’s a while ago now, a typical day in that gig, and I was predominantly doing ABC Radio news and current affairs, was not that dissimilar to any moving story. Get up at about 5am, what the time difference in that part of the world? About five or six hours. So you want to up in time to meet the lunch time bulletin. Get up at five, quickly get on the web and get on the phone to the foreign desk, get a quick sense of what they’re seeing.

GD: And what direction would they give you in terms of things to cover?

JH: Look, at that time of the day, if you’ve just got up, then yeah. You know, they would have been following it through their morning, so they’ll have a pretty clear sense of what they want and you know it can be as directive as, “there’s been a “black hawk down” in Baghdad, or wherever, we’ve got some wire copy, we’re sending it through to you now”. To work up into a script, so it can be prescriptive as that.

GD: And presumably, anything to do with Australians or Australian soldiers?

JH: Yeah absolutely. Although, you know, that was such a small part of the story. It was such a small part and I thought we were making it disproportionately large, but that’s just the nature of it really.

GD: Did that opinion bring you into conflict with people?

JH: No not really. I just think that was one of the inherent tensions about covering the story from an Australian angle, where you’ve got this major military campaign, of which
the Australian element was just fractional. But journalism being what it is the Australian angle is of greater interest and that’s why you have Australian journalists to portray that.

GD: If you were consuming news from Australian papers and possibly from the TV as well, during that period, you would have got an absolute deluge of stories covering what Australian soldier were up to and it would have come across extremely disproportionate to the actual involvement.

JH: But just to be clear, my frustration is more on the fact, not that they were doing a fractional amount of the heavy lifting, because you don’t want to belittle what they were doing. But, that the media bureaucracy and the military command were so obstructive and so obtuse in giving solid information or real access in any way, shape or form. But that was the nub of the frustration.

GD: Presumably that sort of uncooperative posture encourages journalists even more to try and get something from these people and sort of inflates the idea as well.

JH: Well, I think it just means that when you get anything its importance seems magnified. So any little thing becomes relatively large, and in that sense it is disproportionate.

GD: Conflict anywhere is controversial, but there was especial controversy surrounding the embedment of soldiers with military units and of course the Centcom theatrics, how easy or how difficult is it for a journalist to convey that sense of what’s really going on at Centcom, other than conveying simply what the military press officers are giving out at press conferences?

JH: Well, I just think you weave that into your story. I mean what’s really going on at Centcom is that there are two worlds – there is the media world and then there’s the operational world. And you’re never really going to know what the operational world is –
so part of your writing is always going to be about trying to dis-assemble the spin or the PR or the propaganda, call it what you will.

GD: Because quite few of the journalists who were at Centcom and also those who were embedded made point of commenting on that in their reporting alongside their day to day reporting of events, but that seems to me the discussion of controversial aspects of the coverage, the uncooperative nature of the military bureaucracy, the control of media and the management of information, seems relegated to the second rung of reporting.

JH: Well, I think it is second rung – the reality is you’ve got the largest military machine rumbling through the desert and folks dying both civilian and in uniform, I just don’t think you can make the media story the story all the time, it’s just a part of it. And I think you’ve got to keep a perspective on it. To me, the media story is always part of the story, the military presentation is always part of it, but it’s never, well, it’s rarely the story. When you’re in Centcom and you’re reporting from military spin central, I’m not a huge fan of the word spin, but you always have to work that into your copy, but you can’t just make it your copy, because it just become repetitive, and there is media awareness.

But to get back to the original question – up at 5, breakfast, file some early stuff for the lunch time bulletins, maybe do a Q&A on the phones with The World Today or the noon TV programs, then you might get in the car and drive to Centcom and door to door, by the time you got through security and were frisked, x-rayed and your bags got sniffed and pulled apart and you get in the minivan to go from the perimeter to the media centre it was basically an hour. So you probably getting out there at about seven or so, and the you’re checking in – both in terms of what’s on the banks of monitors from the American networks, the Am-nets, the internet and you’ll scour the NYT and the Washington Post and Al-Jazeera and all that sort of stuff. You’ll talk to anyone you can if you can get them, you’ll try to get a sense of what’s going to happen through the day in terms of briefings and then you start writing again – for the afternoon bulletin, for news, for the five o’clock, six o’clock, for PM you do some Q&A’s for five and six [sic]. If
you’re doing TV you’ll being writing your script, doing your stand-up, etcetera. You’re talking to the desk in Sydney. There might be a briefing. And then you’ll start working your way towards the morning bulletins. And you’ll start crafting your AM story, you’ll be hassling to get an interview, you’ll be kind of working all of that stuff. You’ll be preparing your Lateline stuff. And then there’s probably a briefing late in the day, back to the hotel, you probably get back at about 7 or 8, you’ll often sit down and write your AM story and your news stories and if you’re lucky you’ll be finished by about ten or eleven, maybe. Maybe. Eleven or twelve you’ll check in with the foreign desks for the seven forty-five bulletin and for AM. You’ll update accordingly, maybe a live cross to AM. And by which time it’s about midnight and once they’re all tickety-boo [sic], you try to get a few hours sleep before getting up and doing it all again.

GD: Given the power of the military bureaucracy to control journalists, their schedules and the release of information that they can use, it must be a position in which journalists squirm, naturally people who are independently minded and used to doing their own thing – it’s a particularly difficult place to work professionally?

JH: It’s frustrating, but it’s not uncomfortable. It’s difficult in a different sort of way. Are you embedded, on the frontlines, no way – are you in a comfortable, ridiculous five star hotel, you bet. Basically, it’s frustrating because there’s so little to work with and basically often there’s just not a story to tell and you’re not bearing witness – I am the sort of journalist that needs to see and feel things to kind of really tell it, and there’s just no narrative at Centcom. I certainly wouldn’t put my hand up in a hurry to do that sort of thing again. But I also think it’s a fantastic thing to do, I think it’s such a peculiar environment, it’s such a hothouse for information and disinformation, and it’s that fabulous, perverse media circus at its most extreme and it’s most insane. I think it’s a great thing to do at some stage.

GD: Did you, or amongst the press corps there was there a sense at all that the whole operation was helping to justify a military campaign? The same way that embedding has been accused of doing.
JH: Well, of course it is! I am not of the view that embedding is a bad thing.

GD: No no no, but that criticism has been made.

JH: Yeah, I know and I think it’s an unfair one. I think embedding is a part of the journalistic coverage. The problem is if embedding is your only coverage. Look, the first casualty of war is truth. We know that. We know what the exercise is; we know it’s about PR and propaganda. So do you feel sullied by that? Yeah, a little bit. But you’re part of it as well, and I think if you present it for what it is. You know I can’t imagine any journalist in 2003 going to that experience and not being aware of what exercise. I think you can be really blown away by the scale and the audacity of it. I think what really was extraordinary in that instance was how little General Tommy Franks fronted the media. I think he presented himself I think it was three times, in the month of the roll to Baghdad and the rest of the time it was much more junior generals saying really very little.

GD: That was very much part of their strategy though really wasn’t it, to reduce that star quality of their generals.

JH: Yeah, obviously they weren’t trying to repeat the performance of Schwarzkopf in Gulf War One. And in many ways I think that was an effective strategy.

GD: To diffuse the…

JH: But I did find that breathtaking, that audacity. Absolutely. If you say to the world’s media this is going to be the place, this is going to be information Central Command, media central command. Here’s the big stage and the big lights and the big production, which they did. And then not actually put anyone of substance on that stage – I find that incredible!
GD: To talk of the coverage of *that* but also of other stories that came through, for example civilian killings at checkpoints. Reading some of your own reports, there seems to be a very fine line between almost a sarcastic or a critically ironic telling of a story and that tension with having to stay ‘objective’. I can tell by reading some of those dispatches I can read between the lines and get the meaning but it must be very difficult to negotiate that tension is it not?

JH: Yeah, but that’s why they pay us the big money...I just think that’s the eternal tension and eternal challenge of journalism...

GD: Is it possible then to come out and say – “these guys are a pack of liars or what they're doing is...”

JH: Not from Centcom, because you're not seeing it. You know, Geoff Thompson had that great story outside of Baghdad, with the shootout, which was just extraordinary, that Michael Cox shot. And he was able to say, what they are saying is wrong because I saw different. You can't do that at Centcom, and that’s the frustration, but you have to write it hard. That’s what it’s about – it’s not just about he said she said exercise, it's about analysis and interpretation and having the courage of your…it’s the courage of your observations. Because language, it’s a study in language. I can remember, early on Tommy Franks talking about “terrorists”.

GD: Terrorist death squads, or something like that.

JH: Yeah. And it was the national front or whatever they were called. They were regular soldiers. And they (US military) were clearly trying that on to see if it would fly. And I just thought it was fascinating, but you also had to call them on it. So, you know in that case, the language really is the story because they are really, consciously trying to weave that into the subconscious, but it’s probably not even as subtle as that. They did drop it, they dropped it pretty quickly actually. I don’t know what level of monitoring they did and whether they monitored the Australian media, but obviously having the
Australians there, they would have monitored pretty closely what we did so who knows why they decided to. Clearly it wasn’t kind of registering. That’s really fascinating to me.

GD: Did you feel enough was made of it in your reports and general ABC coverage of Centcom and the war, this sort of linguistic aspect, or this propagandistic aspect of things. My interpretation of it is that journalists were restrained in their reporting of it.

JH: Well I think you’re always, is it restrained. Maybe it is restrained, but I’m not sure that’s a bad thing.

GD: Rather than coming across as a loose cannon?

JH: You certainly don’t want to be. You don’t want stridency. Clearly the tone is really important. And I’d remind you that Richard Alston’s office waged a major assault on the ABC’s coverage of the war. I was mentioned indirectly, never particularly singled out so given that that report symbolised the height of sensitivities about our coverage of it, you’d like to think I wasn’t overly strident about it. Do you feel a bit restrained? Yeah. You do feel a bit restrained, but that’s what ABC news and current affairs reporting is and if you want to write and opinion piece then go and be an opinion editor. I there’s always that tension between writing it as hard as you can and not overcooking it.

GD: We’re your editors and people producing for you and providing you with advice, were they more conscious and sensitive of the way your coverage was being perceived in Australia than for example you were in Doha to the potential criticisms of the ABC.

JH: I think it’s fair to say that.

GD: It’s a perennial issue?
JH: No, it’s more than that. Australian journalists and editors and producers are increasingly sensitive to how the ABC’s coverage is perceived. There is increasing pressure on the ABC to, pull its punches, to put it frankly.

GD: And how does that manifest itself in a journalist’s day-to-day experiences. Be it during war or whatever.

JH: How does that impact a journalist’s coverage of war? I just think is an assault. It has had the effect of undermining the courage and confidence of ABC news and current affairs. I really really think that that has been both the intention and the effect. I still think that ABC journalism does something that nobody else does, by sheer weight of coverage, for sure. And it’s held in a particular way by the community at large, no doubt about it. It’s a unique beast which should not only be celebrated but nurtured. I think it’s being tested at the moment, like never before.

GD: Given the situation you’re in a Centcom with a relatively restricted information environment and given that you’re not witnessing things for yourself – plus that linguistic manipulation that goes on by the military authorities, is the idea that a journalist can remain objective, is that something that needs to be reconsidered?

JH: I think you’re always striving for objectivity. But we also know that ever since Einstein scribbled E=mc2 we’ve understood that objectivity is not absolute and we all bring our prejudices to the job, but that’s not to say that the objectivity of the job, of news reporting, cannot be learnt and that’s not to say it’s not and effective discipline, that you exercise in the doing of your job. Now I think the different between news and current affairs is subtle but significant and I think that this cuts to the nub of the tension surrounding Richard Alston’s campaign around the ABC. Because current affairs are not news reporting, it is not simply about the presentation of facts in some clinical form. It’s about analysis and interpretation, and inevitably there is a degree of editorialising that goes on in that exercise and should go on in that exercise. And if you have journalists there, then you have journalists there to think, and you don’t have some cub,
you have senior experienced journalists to do a job and think and present it as they see it. And that is still under the umbrella of “as fairly and objectively” as they can be – I don’t think the two are mutually exclusive. I think it’s about a duty of bearing witness and conveying that to the Australian audience.

GD: Aside from official briefings, who were the most newsworthy sources?

JH: Your always trading, trading information and ideas, it’s always imprecise. There are always those journalists with their finger more on the pulse than others. In a perfect world you’re trading info with journalists who are not competitors. So, old mates from British papers who were there – perfect. Guys that I knew from South Asia. Writing for the Guardian, he doesn’t care what’s on the ABC and I don’t care what’s in the Guardian. And the British guys were the ones you wanted because the British guys were the most media friendly. The British Military were by far the most giving and the most nuanced in terms of their media relationship.

GD: Were the British journalists there also of a different calibre?

JH: Yeah. They’re just so good. It’s such a huge media market in the UK, it so massive. You just need to arrive in London to get that incredible quantity and quality. There a great pool, it’s competitive and there’s a great heritage there. And as a result there’s more mobility, you can move around a lot. You don’t have that in Australia.

THE END
Giles Dodson: I was going to begin by asking you to explain the style that you used in your approach to writing, which I thought in reading what you wrote, was more of a narrative style than a "hard news style".

Peter Wilson: My strategy was that all of the basic news that was coming out was going to be covered by the wires and the other sources, so the aim was to add value and do something that your readers wouldn't otherwise be getting, so to give them a sense of what it was actually like there on the ground. That's why I was really concentrating on the people, that's why I took a translator with me when most of the people who did get into the south didn't take translators, which absolutely amazed me. I wanted to cover the people's war and write about how it is affecting the people on the ground, what do they think about it, because like with any story, no matter how complicated or esoteric the issue if you can humanise it, then it's going to reach your readers much more easily. So the aim or basic tool is trying to tell a story through a person or through some people so that your readers can relate to it more and understand it and the way to do that is to portray people there as ordinary human beings with wives and children and jobs and fears and try and find out what the public attitude and reaction is going to be. We kept hearing the Americans saying that people will be throwing flowers in our paths and Saddam's saying they'll fight to the death and it will be Stalingrad. So what I wanted to do was talk to ordinary people to get a sense of what their attitude was.

GD: Do you think that in some ways the traditional liberal method of journalism is somewhat not well suited to that style of reporting, you're talking of an experiential sort understanding.

PW: Well, by definition you're going to give a bit of the picture, you're going to give what you see. That'll be limited to where you are and the people you come across. So
yeah, you’ve got to acknowledge that it is not going to be an overall, universal objective picture, but you can do that objectively, if you are determined just to write what you see. And what people give you and not the preconceptions that you carry in there. You know like [sic] a lot of people go into situations like that with an agenda, they are either against the war or for the war or whatever and if you want to you can twist anything. Any news story you can fit to your agenda if you want to. In London all you have to do is read the Guardian and the Daily Telegraph every day, the way they cover exactly the same set of facts in totally different ways almost. You just put it through your own ideological prism. That is what I was trying very very hard not to do.

GD: How did you go about doing that on a day to day basis? How do you maintain that centrist line?

PW: Well, I’ve never seen myself as a commentator or a genius who knows the truth behind every current affair issue. And I just don’t think that my job. When I used to be an industrial relations reporter years ago in Australia, I used to resist being asked to do comment pieces all the time, because I don’t see why people should give a shit what I think or what my comment is. An analysis piece [sic]. I’d break some story or whatever and they’d go “what about a comment piece”. And I’d go “what about an analysis piece”. You should really do an analysis piece discussing what this means, why should I write what my opinion is. Who gives a shit what I think. And so with the war that had always been my approach. I was never into preaching but I also went there with ambivalent views. I didn’t see it as a black and white issue, I could see both sides and because I didn’t have a single definitive view the war is right or the war is wrong that made it easier for me to focus on what I saw, what people said, stuff I found, rather than going “See, I told you the war was wrong”.

GD: What determined for you who became talent in your stories, was it just people being available?
PW: Well, yeah, a combination, people who looked like they had interesting stories. So if you had someone who looked as though they had a family, or some tragedy, or they were in an unusually good position, like their house was near a battle front or something, and then just their attitude, if they were welcoming and cooperative, you’re naturally going to go with them.

GD: Do you think it’s possible maybe not just in your own experience, but as a Western journalist, do you think it’s possible to cover the “people’s perspective” without constructing the regime, Saddam’s loyalists as that enemy, which was so much done by the more propagandistic American style. Do you think it’s possible to cover that without crossing that line?

PW: What do you mean?

GD: In one’s writing about civilians experiences do you think it is possible to write about, to do that without characterising regime figures or Iraqi army figures as some sort of enemy.

PW: Yeah, absolutely. In the recent Lebanese war, I was there for a while, you know Hezbollah – I certainly wasn’t cheering them but I wasn’t presenting them as Nazis. And that was just based on the attitudes I was getting from ordinary people. People were telling me, “Hezbollah represent me”. They are not some terrorist organisation to be demonised by Washington. It is the most popular political party among Shia, the largest minority in Lebanon. And they provide the schools, the TV station, they pick up the garbage, they insure people’s homes. Once you got a sense of that from people then that affected the way I reported on Hezbollah. People here don’t see them as a military fringe; they see them as a mainstream. So I don’t know if that answers your question, but I was trying to find out what ordinary people thought of the Saddam regime. And so with everything you’re using your gut instincts in those situations and trying to figure out now are these people just telling me this because they think it’s what I want to hear, or are they scared that I’ll get the Americans on to them if they don’t bag
Saddam. And you know, they didn’t have to come out and say they liked Saddam, it’s just the way they spoke about the Americans.

GD: Did you have a mind to include those people in your coverage just as much as those whose families were on the run or…

PW: Yeah, if got there and everyone was saying that then I definitely wanted to cover that, because that was what I was trying to find out. I was trying to find out what the Iraqi reaction was going to be, because I believed that that would in the long run determine the success or otherwise of the occupation. And I think that was right. You could see in the first two weeks of the occupation that ordinary people did have an open mind about the invasion. We’d dropped all these pamphlets and stuff, radios broadcasts saying we’re not coming to get the oil, we’re not invaders we are liberators. Saddam is the enemy not you. Stay home stay out of the way, we’ll restore electricity and public order and everything will be ok. And they went, “ok, we’ll see what happens”. And as the days went by all those promises were broken and you could see that open mind closing and people’s attitudes changing and they were just making their judgements based on the evidence. After a week or ten days they started to say, “Fuck you, the Americans are not here to help, they are here for the oil. There’s been no food for my children there’s been no electricity, you people clearly don’t care about us”. And that has panned out over the last three years. The coalition blew the opportunity of Iraq popular goodwill. But that’s what I was trying to find out – what was the Iraqi public attitude. My time in Japan really influenced my thinking on that, because the history of the occupation of Japan was that Macarthur was incredibly sensitive to the Japanese popular opinion. And that’s why they lied about the history and pretended that Hirohito was not a war criminal and just fabricated his role during the war and didn’t hang him. They did a straight out calculation. They got the OSS (precursor to the CIA) to present two figures – how many Americans will die if we kill Hirohito and how many if we don’t. And it came back sort of 250,000 and 10 if we don’t. So they went that path. One of the most cynical deceptions of history. I don’t think any Americans died during the occupation. And that really informed my thinking about Iraqi public opinion and what I
have never been able to figure out is that the American military, which is the same institution that produced MacArthur has somehow lost that institutional wisdom. Normally institutional wisdom is a real thing, especially with the Brits. That’s why the British military are so much better in Iraq than the Americans. People were saying “oh, because they’re experience in Northern Ireland”. I thought it was more than that, I thought it was to do with centuries of imperialism and they have for generations have been in situations where British soldiers have been outnumbered but the locals and they’ve realised, “well, you can’t kill them all” which is the American approach, sheer military power. So you’ve got to understand them, work out their power structures, get the local chiefs onside all that sort of stuff. So from day one the Brits were walking around with soft berets instead of hard hats, they were forbidden to wear sunglasses, they weren’t pointing guns at people and it was much more successful.

GD: In amongst your articles, especially before you were arrested in that South Iraq area, there were a few things thrown into the mix, including Australian soldiers, and John Feder’s amazing technology that he took along with him. I wonder was stuff sort of chucked in there off your own bat so to speak, or was it ordered by the editors.

PW: No that was all from me and a reflection of my sort of background as a generalist foreign correspondent. There are two sort of styles a specialist, where you just cover the oil industry or Wall street or Washington, and the other side of it is what I am doing here which is all of Europe, so you’re not a specialist and it’s about trying to be as broad and reflective and versatile in your coverage as possible, so one day your covering soccer, the next day it’s an economic report, German politics, fashion. It’s not one instrument it’s playing the whole orchestra. So therefore it was sort of instinctive for me, you know I would have written a business report if I could have. Trying to get all different sections of the paper. That one you were talking about, John Feder’s technology, that was for the Media section, tailored to various holes in The Australian that can be filled. I always want to get as much in the paper as possible. The way to do that is to understand your paper and its range of interests and hit as many sections as you can. And obviously there’s also the Australian stories or stories with as many
Australian angles as possible. As I said at the start, Reuters and AP are providing the basic coverage of, “the Americans today advanced on Basra”. You don't go there to duplicate stuff, or so that the same information runs with your name on it, that's not the point, particularly in a dangerous situation. Why risk your life if you're not adding something to the equation?

GD: Is there a danger do you think, especially in Iraq of the media becoming “the story”?

PW: Yeah I think always.

GD: It's actually quite an interesting story too.

PW: If it tells people a broader truth if it shows them what it's like and what's going on there then it's worthwhile. If it is just about “Hey, I went and did this”, then it's not worth it. In that experience, in the things I saw and the impressions I got, I got to talk to Iraqi soldiers, I got interrogated by them, and they told me things. I remember one exchange that got people excited on the Oz (The Australian) this Iraqi soldier on his way out before we were taken to Baghdad, turned to us and said, “Tell me, will we face chemical weapons from the Americans”. And this is really revealing that they didn't have the gas masks, and thought it was the Americans who were going to use it on them. In Lebanon recently I was very sensitive about situations. I was driving around the Hezbollah headquarters area with Stuart Innes the same translator, half Lebanese half Scottish, and we got nabbed by Hezbollah supporters who stuck a gun in our face and rang up Hezbollah and they came and took us away and held us, going through the paper work in the car and passports. An hour or two and they let us go. I wasn't even going to mention it in my story except I was writing a story about who are these Hezbollah fighters. Are they educated? What class are they? What sort of people are they? Where are they from? So that was the story I was writing and that was what we were doing when we got grabbed and I put at the bottom...“and these ones I met yesterday, when they stopped me for two hours”. They were obviously educated,
extremely well spoken, they could have been dentists, if not gunmen. I filed the story and when they saw it in Sydney they went ape, and said “what happened?” I said that’s what happened, they said, “no you got to lift that higher and put it at the top of the story” and we got into this big argument and I was saying it was no big deal, they detain journalists all the time. Its hairy, because it could go wrong, but it happens all the time, in different areas to establish that you’re not an Israeli spy, and so the usual trade off where they wanted to lift it and I didn’t want to at all and we sort of compromised a little bit. It was a bit of an arm-wrestle that I sort of lost.

GD: So what is their interest in doing that do you think?

PW: They think it’s a sexy story, they think it’s going to get readers in to actually read the story. Our man on the spot, it emphasises the fact that your there for the reader, not just sitting in Canberra or wherever.

GD: It’s also an interest in the drama of it over the substance.

PW: Yeah, exactly, which is not necessarily an inherently bad thing, you need the drama to get people to read the story, you need some aspect [sic]. It’s the basic challenge of journalism to make often uninteresting things interesting. And present it in a way that people will actually read it. It’s no use being worthy, but no one reads your stories.

GD: My next question was about the Palestine Hotel after the tank fired the round into the hotel room, again very vivid dramatic story reporting the events of that day. I just wonder if the horror and the action and the emotion of describing something like that detracts from the larger issues of American incompetence or systematic targeting.

PW: No, it’s the opposite, I think it underlines it, it shows people what this means. It nots just two people died or 75 people died today in Somalia or whatever; they’re all just numbers who don’t mean anything. Its saying to people that “ Fuck! This is what
happens when they just fire off rounds at a hotel”. You get guts splattered all over the wall, you get a human being, who I was able to describe, and the father of an eight year old, is now dead. The night before he was sitting here having a beer. Now he’s dead. That I think is the sort of coverage that the Americans hated, because it humanised what was going on. There is a very good reason why during the first Gulf war and the second [sic] the Coalition refused to even issue numbers for Iraqi dead let alone names and details, because as soon as you start putting number that can make the reader, or the voter think, “Fuck!, 2450 people died today!”. That’s why Bob Hawke, they all just refused to put a number on “collateral damage” because they don’t want it to have that impact on the readers. Once again when you focus on something like that you are giving a skewed view of things and you have to be aware, it’s just because you happen to be there. You’re trying to make a point but you are not trying to make out that the death of a journalist is a bigger deal than the death of anyone else. On a basic professional level the other problem with reporting in that sort of emotional shock is you make mistakes. I made basic mistakes in what I described – when I wrote a book about it and went back over my notes and material, I realised first that I got two guys mixed up, these two guys who had been sharing the room, and I had been drinking with the two of them and I wasn’t sure of which one of them it was. I still can’t understand, because I was trying to put his guts back in and looking in his eyes and talking to him. But he was lying down covered in blood, I was in shock, everyone was screaming “get out of the room; they’re going to fire again.” I was wrong again in describing the time. I went downstairs straight away, I couldn’t go to hospital because I was still under house arrest, so I went downstairs and filed. So I wrote that we had him in the room for fifteen minutes working on him. In hind sight it was probably about two minutes. For me time stopped. I thought it was very long, laborious [sic] sensory overload slows time down. That is one of the hazards of reporting under those circumstances that you’ve got to be aware of.

GD:  Was there any direction given by Australian editors over what you should be doing?
PW: It was more me ringing them and telling them what I am doing. Working for the Murdoch press there’s often the suspicion that there’s an ideological line being put through everything, especially on an issue like the Iraq war, where all of our papers editorials ran very strongly in one direction, except for the Port Moresby Post or whatever it was. There was none of that, I was never told, “this is our party line, try and put spin on it”. People know that I wouldn’t do that anyway. I am not really interested in that. And it was also because I would ring in on sat phone and say, right, this is what I am planning to write, how does that sound. And they would say yes, or no, we haven’t got enough space or we need more, instead of 500 words can you make it 1000. Or they tell me something that has just happen that I didn’t know about which would mean what I was going to write was redundant, or that a much bigger story had happened. Don’t bother writing four stories, we won’t have room for them just write one. You’ve always got to have that sort of coordination but there wasn’t direction given, no one had a clue to tell you what was going on.

THE END
Giles Dodson: The ABC in general and you in particular were quick to mention the possibility of American war plans going awry, how careful or sensitive did you have to be in reporting that, especially given the potential for controversy over war plans going badly, were you sensitive to that at all?

Mark Willacy: Not really, because where I was I didn't really get a sense of what was going on back in Australia or what sort of parameters were put on the ABC, what warnings were given to the ABC, and the ABC gave me very little instruction. It was very hands-off, they deferred to my judgement on everything. Obviously after the war we were accused of anti-Americanism, which to me was a load of crap. It was just Alston on a mission [sic]. Having since read a lot about the campaign and how it was conducted, I don't think we went hard enough. The thing is my job wasn't to comment on the campaign as such but to comment on the impact on Iraq and its people, so that's how I focused. We had a guy embedded, Geoff Thompson with the military, we had Jonathan Harley and Peter Lloyd in Qatar. So you know they could handle that, I just dealt with what was happening in Iraq or around. But having worked in Israel the time before that I was very distrustful of what the media tells you, the Israelis would tell lies, I am not singling them out, all militaries tell lies, that's because they have to, and often they choose to.

GD: What was it that you sought to achieve from this specific instance of the Iraq war, given that there are wire services and ABC people and saturation coverage of this event, what did you seek specifically to achieve yourself?

MW: You're right there was saturation coverage, but I was in a very privileged position to be inside there, there was only me and Trevor Bormann and the cameraman Louis, it was the most important angle, because before the war we wanted to ascertain the
American allegations of WMD [sic] were right, really how could we do that in a totalitarian state? You’ve got to try. We also wanted to ascertain before the war whether the Iraqi people did want the American forces to overthrow Saddam Hussein. Again, very difficult because of the totalitarian regime. And after the war that was extremely important to find out if the Americans had conducted themselves in a manner that they should have, and they didn’t. They failed to secure Baghdad, they used an invasion force of only a third of what was recommended in their war plans in the late-nineties. The whole thing was a schmozzle [sic].

GD: I noticed in your reporting as opposed to some of the print journalists, and some of the other ABC guys, you’re less willing to poke fun at the Iraqi official view and less willing to report the information ministry pronouncements on whatever issue in a quite satiric tone. Was that something you were quite conscious of?

MW: Yeah, not really. The mood in there was not a very satiric mood.

GD: Perhaps more dismissive. Your reporting gave time to the Iraqi government, which is fair enough.

MW: Well it is, in the ABC you’re taught to give fair amounts of time and emphasis to both sides no matter how stupid the pronouncements coming from Saddam Hussein and Sahaf were. I don’t try to put ideas into the listener’s heads. They can tell if this guy is being ridiculous. I have often been accused of being too subtle in my reporting. I am writing this book, and the publisher’s saying, “well, you need to say this” and I am saying, “well it’s inherent within the text”. So maybe that’s just my style. If al-Sahaf is making statements saying American troops are committing suicide at the gates of Baghdad in their hundreds – that’s patently false. I think just running that is satire enough. Can I just add – Saddam Hussein, what he says can sound ludicrous, but he has committed ludicrous acts that have resulted in many deaths, so I took Saddam Hussein reasonably seriously.
GD: There were plenty of instances in which journalists were treating those sorts of pronouncements in an off-hand way or dismissively, and yet they have been able to discuss their own reporting as being objective or whatever – within that scheme and professional model, fairness, impartiality, independence – there does seem a lot of leeway to find your own style.

MW: I think so yeah. I wanted to tell the story of the ordinary people. Really, I was in Iraq and had to report the pronouncements of Saddam Hussein and his officials, but I wanted to get out and talk to real Iraqis – these are the people who are out there in the firing line, so that was my style. And to be honest I don’t have to be objective within a report by balancing it up with a comment from the Americans, that’d be done by another reporter. I wasn’t given a mission by the ABC. I think if you were dropped in Iraq at the beginning of the war and told this is your, this is where you’ll be, this is who you’ll talk to, you speak to ordinary Iraqis [sic]. We did that every day, before during and after the war.

GD: Quite a few of the journos who weren’t on specific postings, either embedded or at Qatar, have said, yeah, it was the people’s war which I wanted to cover. Do you think that a different style of journalism is required to understand the “truth” of the experiences of the Iraqi people, perhaps a more experiential way of understanding their lives.

MW: You’ve got to have a good background in the culture and you know I had a little bit of a background in Arabic culture, having been to Iraq a couple of times before the war had helped me. I got to know people, I was invited into homes and I got to know people. I would have hated to be embedded. Qatar would have been like hell to me. And embedding you can say well you’re in Iraq covering one side of the war, and embedding is covering the other – but embedding is covering it from a very very specific perspective, because you are lobbing shells with an army unit in the direction of somewhere and you don’t know who they are landing on or the damage they are doing. But anyway, I digress. I think you had to have a background you had to have a feel for
the place. One thing I had to remind myself is that these are ordinary bloody [sic] people, they could have been anywhere, they could be living in Brisbane, or anywhere. The difference was they were under the gun and they also had their president who could knock on the door in the middle of the night and drag them out. So I always try to treat people with compassion wherever they are, but I felt that these people had been through a lot and were about to go through a lot more.

GD: Were you witness to reporting of journos who did things in quite the opposite way – this idea of a “parachute journalist” who drops in from CNN or whoever, and doesn’t know anything.

MW: I met a lot like that, but I met a lot who were very committed to the story and very sympathetic to the culture and when I say culture I mean very sympathetic to the people, the traditions, but not the mode of government they were living under. But you did get the fly-in-fly-out, as you mentioned it was from CNN, even the BBC had a couple. But that could just be the demands of their network, often you can’t find a dozen reporters who necessarily know much about that region.

GD: Were journo’s also in your experience quite conscious of their intrusion into people’s lives as well?

MW: Yes I suppose they were. And there was also the intrusion on the part of the regime. Before the war if you wanted to meet a family of Shi’ites in Sadr City or Saddam City as it was known then, then you knew they were going to hand pick someone, every word they were saying was going to be monitored, and if they said one thing wrong or maybe told the truth, then that could have resulted in a bullet in the back of the head. So we tried to minimise that amount of setting up a story, but you did have to be very conscious of what you said, what you asked and you didn’t want to push people. That was the hardest thing, and I always reminded my listeners that we were accompanied by an Iraq Information Ministry minder and what people were saying was being listened to very carefully.
GD: Were there issues which didn’t receive as substantive coverage as you would have liked? There was one on cluster bombs. Is it possible to slow down the news cycle in these situations and to give these issues more substantive treatment?

MW: In the medium I was working in which was radio and AM which is the best radio current affairs in the country, there was because we had the correspondents placed everywhere else and if OK, there’s a bit of military activity or broad scale issues going on then someone else can cover it from somewhere else. I can be given the task to go and ferret out stories, do the feature stories, like the cluster bombs, like the digging up of graves at Abu-Ghraib. Other little stories about a family who lost two sons because an American tank commander fired a round into their house inexplicably – just these little issues, and that’s what basically I did and I am very proud of that reporting, more so than reporting Mohammed al-Sahaf and all these other idiots and their crazy pronouncements.

GD: Quite a few of the journos, the Australian guys, in amongst the body of their journalism that was produced in that sort of month period, there’s the obligatory stories of the Australian involvement, in terms of providing aid, or the Australian divers clearing mines, or Australian boats waiting in the Gulf to do something. Obviously, Australian audiences are going to interested in what Australians are doing, there must be a fine line between gratuitous reporting on the “diggers in the desert” and the more substantive issues. How do you balance those two?

MW: Well you’re right, and it was gratuitous. And that was one area that the ABC ordered me to cover – get down to Kuwait, or Bahrain, I think it was, jump on a Sea-King helicopter to the Kanimbla. To me that was the most boring bloody story I covered in the whole time. And I’ll tell you why, because they were sitting on a billiard flat sea, with their thumbs up their arse and their minds in neutral. And that’s not to detract from these people, because they were sent there and they did a very professional job and they were looking for mines and there were mines, but you know, big whoop [sic]. And I
know Australian audiences are interested, but I also think that sometimes Australian audiences need to be told what the story is, because they were not there and I could hardly wait to get back into Iraq to do some more reporting, which I did because that’s where the story was, people were dying and that was the most important time too, when I was on the bloody Kanimbla, the Americans were trying to secure Baghdad and that was when and that’s when the seeds of the insurgency were planted, during that period. I got back and I did reports on it and how there was looting and the Americans weren’t finding weapons of mass destruction, they were finding giant stashes of conventional weapons. They didn’t find a lot of those stashes because the insurgents, who were then ordinary Iraqi military personnel, didn’t want them to. And now they are using those weapons to fight the Americans, so those were very important stories and to be sitting on the Kanimbla in the ward room, with the chef asking what did you want for dinner that night, it was very frustrating.

GD: So how do you manage that relationship between ABC head office, or your producer who’s asking you to go do these things and your own news sense that is saying to you, “well, no the stories are elsewhere” – there’s tension in that relationship and how do you manage it?

MW: Sometimes you don’t manage it because you lose your temper, but I tried to argue this one out, I tried to argue it very hard and I lost because I sometimes feel that the person who made this call, is too busy chasing Channel Nine, who had been on the boat a week earlier. In my opinion that makes the story redundant anyway, because it had been done. And that put a bit of tension in the relationship, and sometimes you argue a story so vigorously with someone that it creates tension in the relationship that lasts and in this case it did. And from then on I questioned this person’s news judgement. I got back in there and I worked very hard to do the stories that I wanted to do in Iraq. The story that eventually won me a Walkley Award, I don’t think that’s the be all and end all, but it’s a degree of recognition for a story that is important. Not that the Walkley Awards are a judge of everything in journalism, but I don’t think I was going to
win a Walkley Award for sitting on the Kanimbla eating duck a l’orange in the ward room.

GD: Is that a tendency do you think more generally within the ABC to try to keep up with the commercial networks?

MW: Generally it’s not, but on those big stories I suppose it is important for the ABC. Overall I do think it’s important for the ABC to keep the news agenda focused on what we’re good at and that’s serious hardcore news and very incisive current affairs, but occasionally there is a lapse, and I think what should have happened in that case, if we go back is that I should have gone back into Iraq and they should have sent someone from Qatar where they had two journalists.

GD: As you mentioned before those sorts of lapses can be the result of one person’s decision.

MW: Very much and you’ve got to put faith in people’s judgement and once they are given a task you back them, or you sack them. But I didn’t agree on this occasion, overall this person does a reasonable job, but that was a big lapse. But also to be fair to this person maybe they were thinking, “well Iraq’s a bit dangerous at the moment and we probably can’t get them in anyway”. So to be fair, there might have been other considerations, but I would have still attempted to go back into Iraq.

GD: When you did get back in there, towards the beginning of the occupation, there was on story I remember reading of the celebrations of American troops, described by you as a football team. Obviously you are implying a certain sort of attitude amongst the occupation forces, but it is possible to take that even further and say explicitly the sort of attitude these guys have, the insensitivity.

MW: That was the first time I had seen the Americans during ground campaign in Iraq so I didn’t want to paint the whole campaign based on that one incident, but it didn’t
instil me with a great deal of confidence. You’ve read the transcript, there was one guy standing tall like John Wayne with a pistol unloading across the river. Now if the source of fire was that serious, I don’t think you’d be standing up there with a pistol. They way they responded was patchy and funny in a lot of ways. The Americans stopped after a while and they realised that maybe whoever they were firing on could have left in the first two minute of the engagement, they were too busy pouring thousands of rounds across the river. I did another story for PM where I met this American marine who showed me this weapons stash. He was decent young guy and I kind of felt for him, he didn’t really want to be there but he had a job to do. I met another young marine, I don’t think I reported this, on the banks of the Tigris, and he had a thick Southern accent and he says to me, “so what river is this?” I said, “that’s the Tigris, where the first city states and civilisations were born”. I didn’t feel like deriding the guy, but it highlighted to me the overall lack of cultural awareness and so I was starting [sic] they did pose like a football team, and they did so because they were very blasé in the way they approached this and it was just like a football game gone mad, and it was the only analogy I could think of.

GD: I have a quote “That sort of optimism is easily bred behind the insulation of an armoured vehicle mounted with heavy machine guns, but that insulated thinking will not sit well with the supposedly liberated Iraqi people”. That’s a very pointed comment to make and quite incisive at that stage of the occupation, you could see it going down the gurgler. Do you think that was reported well enough at the time?

MW: The seeds were being planted. The thing about that comment, I can tell you why I made it – I had spoken to Iraqis before the war and they had secretly said to me if the Americans come as liberators then we will welcome them, if they come as occupiers then there will be problems. So that is where that comment comes from, I could make that comment with some authority. Not a hell of a lot, at that point. I don’t want to sound as though I told you so – but I told you so. The biggest problem with the Americans was their lack of understanding about this culture and about what they’d done and what they were about to do. Unfortunately for these Marines and these
soldiers, they couldn't change it any way, what needed to change was Tommy Franks and Bremmer who came after him who was a total bloody disaster.

GD: Is it possible for journalists to get up and say “these guys don’t have a clue”?

MW: I think there are more subtle ways of saying that. Richard Alston would have been apoplectic and to be honest I probably would have been found guilty of breeching editorial standards. But saying that as I did, Alston – not that I am here to please Richard Alston, but there are ways of saying things and there are ways of saying things, but that comment was not picked up by his bunch of little helpers who were pouring over every transcript. And it's a better ways of saying it than saying, “these guys are clueless” because you're saying he here in he's sitting in his vehicle, surrounded by weaponry, he's a confident guy, but he can't see the wood for the trees. So anyway, that's the way I justify it. I think it's a legitimate way of questioning, I think the listener doesn’t need to have it blurted out, sometimes we can just feed it out. And the listener can make up their own mind. If I just say they're clueless, well shit he's got a point of view, I know where he’s coming from now and its going to colour the way I listen to his reports and what I think of them. Where as if I stand there in front of that the listener may think “well, he’s there, he’s looking at that and he knows what he’s talking about”.

THE END
MICHAEL CAREY – EXECUTIVE PRODUCER (ABC)
22/12/2007

MICHAEL CAREY: We’d talk to our reporters over there - say to Jon Harley or to Peter Lloyd. And then we would try to talk to one of two reporters who remained in Baghdad and that was Paul McGeough, the Fairfax journalist, so we tried to get him on most nights.

GILES DODSON: Trying to get the fullest picture, I suppose?

MC: Look, it’s a war so the full picture is simply not readily available. Basically, what you’ve got to do is focus on getting as many details right as you can as you go along, and you know, there’s always the temptation to try to do the big overview, of where the war is going and stuff like that. I think you can actually fall into traps doing that.

GD: How possible is it to direct, to be able to manage reporters production of news?

MC: In those circumstances we really weren’t, because basically the packages that we were doing from back here would sort of mine what the BBC or CNN had and mine the raw audio there. The reporters on the ground we really wanted to know, well what had they been told. We were not trying to push them much beyond that. Paul McGeough was very interesting because he had some freedom to get around Baghdad a little bit. So someone like that, he could use his eyes and talk about what he was seeing. Eric Campbell, before Paul Moran got blown up, the same thing he could actually use his eyes and talk around it. Jon Harley and Peter Lloyd were basically office bound, but in an office in the Middle East. They really just had to talk about what they were being told and what the daily briefings were. Geoff Thompson who was embedded, he provided a fair degree of colour. And he provided a fairly stunning piece about the US force shooting up what looked like a civilian car. A lot of it is just “suck it and see”, you get people who you rely on, and people you think are good.
GD: So those who are out there they are the crème de la crème?

MC: They are all very professional, they are all experienced foreign reporters, who hopefully don’t get snowed that easily and understand what their role is and what our role is.

GD: And were you able to achieve what you set out to achieve.

MC: Yeah, I was very proud of the reporting. As I said the time zone suited us very well.

GD: What is something that you found particularly satisfying or particularly proud of?

MC: I think the stuff that Paul McGeough was painting of Baghdad before the fall was extremely dramatic. Radio is also very nimble, so we able to get the rioting or celebrations in Sadr-City, whereas the TV news people here didn’t have the time or were not nimble enough to turn that around. So we were basically able to call key events much more quickly. We were able to, for example, in that first week when there was that talk of whether or not Saddam had been killed in the bombing, we were able to go live with the press conference as it happened and basically able to log it and he had a few details there that proved that this was not pre-recorded, that he was there. So there’s an immediacy that you can get out of radio and as I said I think we did it really well. But you can fall into traps, I remember when Afghanistan was on, I was in Washington, and there was an attention span or something, about journalism and reporting, that the fact that five weeks in, and the fact that the Taliban hadn’t fallen and people were saying, “oh is it a bad plan” and so on and so forth, and you just can’t do it in those sorts of times, war is a messy, long range thing. The Northern Alliance, a week or so after those stories were starting around, basically toppled the Taliban. So there is a danger of too much reading into minute developments.
GD: Which I suppose is encouraged these days with the immediacy of everything, with 24 hr news etcetera?

MC: Well that’s right, exactly.

GD: How do you mitigate that?

MC: By just doing your job as well as you can really. You want to be there first, but accuracy is key. And is a war, so much is unclear, that if you do get Reuters or CNN or whoever is calling a development, and you can’t verify it all you can do is say, “CNN and Reuters are saying that…”. Just attribute everything.

GD: Is there an acceptance then that what was claimed the previous day might be disproved the next day, that acceptance of the news being reality being more fluid that say a domestic politics setting?

MC: As I said you basically just attribute everything, and you have to assume you have an intelligent audience – they want to know what is happening and they want to know what the debates are, but they don’t want to be spoon-fed the stuff. They also respect being told what we can’t know and what we don’t know and what we are not being told, what we haven’t heard and stuff like that.

GD: And part of that is obviously the relationship between the news organisations and the military, which was sort of a significant part of the Iraq story and the stage management that the military tried to get away with?

MC: But all you can do in those circumstances is talk about it, constantly acknowledging that this is coming out of the US military, or this is coming out of the Pentagon. I know that Richard Allston got terribly excited by a little bit of attitude being shown by one of our reporters, whereas in fact what he was doing was – maybe his
terminology could have been better, but constantly pointing out “this is a military briefing”, and people can take, people understand what this means.

GD: I was talking to Jonathan Harley about this and he was saying really given that Centcom was really the epicentre of that stage management – how do you contend with that as a journalist, and he said you just write it as hard as you can. But it seemed to me that there was a sort of parallel universe, at Centcom, on one had the daily news conference and the ‘story’ based on the little bits of information that come out. On the other there was this Hollywood studio, set up in the desert, really nothing of any importance coming out of it, particularly from the ADF, being particularly tight lipped about it.

MC: That’s part of the story – you talk about that and you acknowledge it. But you know after acknowledging it there’s only so much you can do with it.

GD: Again with embedding, was that a concern?

MC: There’s a lot of discussion about embedding, there are issues there that the journalist becomes very dependent on the protective force around them and they can come to empathise with them, and the embedding was with the American force and not an Australian force, but in the end we got good material out of it, so you know, there was even talking to the soldier can be really interesting [sic]. I don’t know if you saw the documentary Soundtrack to War, an Australian documentary maker who basically spent a lot of time with the infantry and so on. Basically, talking to them about what music they like and so on, and as a result, you actually get a much better insight into the cultural ‘gap’ between the soldiers and the situation they were going into.

GD: And in that situation, given the political pressure coming to bear on the ABC is there ever an anxiety about going too far with anything.
Mc: I wouldn’t say anxiety, there’s a constant awareness that you have to look at facts and opinions in some ways, we reflect the political debates that circulates around this stuff. But we try not to be a part of the political debates ourselves. Alston’s intervention was completely outrageous, although it really happens after the war so it was really in the mop up. The US was on a bit a of a victory dance at that stage.

Gd: Presumably these are all considerations that take place from your perspective as a producer, in coordination of the coverage.

Mc: To some extent the issues there are not that different from the issues if you’re doing Canberra. How do you cover emotional issues without becoming partisan? The 2001 election I was overseas for, but some of the ABC’s coverage did get quite emotional.

Gd: So how does a journalist try to negotiate that then?

Mc: You just try to apply what your professional instincts are, and that is to be as honest as you can be and to not shield the public from the implications of what’s going on, but at the same time not running a campaign on it.

Gd: And at what level were decisions occurring with regards the sorts of interviews you do or the sorts of people you get on…?

Mc: Well, the only, there was a bit of logistic negotiation that so and so was going to be asleep until this time [sic].

Gd: How does the ABC distinguish itself, I suppose?

Mc: For one thing we actually take foreign news much more seriously than other organisations, certainly any other electronic media. There’s SBS (Special Broadcasting Service) but SBS don’t have the resources. We distinguish ourselves by having
experienced foreign correspondents on the ground and having the outlets and, certainly in radio, by actually talking about these things at some length.

GD: How important is scepticism?

MC: Essential. If you are not sceptical about what you’re being told, not cynical, sceptical – you don’t assume that the people are lying to you. Journalism is partly saying, “what is their interest in this?” If you are not sceptical you may as well just be running press releases. And I think to some extent the federal governments complaints about the ABC were that we were not just running press releases – they would be much happy with just a wire service.

GD: Is there any place for the national broadcaster to be a more patriotic broadcaster?

MC: It depends how you define patriotism. I think you can define various concepts and principles – the freedom of information and an informed public is quite patriotic [sic]. I think that if your defining it in terms of being more gung-ho, then no, that is not our job.

GD: What about the ABC having to compete against commercial organisations.

MC: Well, we do. You have to watch what the commercials are doing.

GD: When does that become a consideration?

MC: It becomes a consideration when you think we are lagging behind other people's coverage. The ABC justifies itself as the premier electronic news organisation in the country. If people are finding they get their information more quickly somewhere else, then they probably will. And that sort of lessens our importance, so there a fair degree of enlightened self interest in all of this.
GD: Successful operation from your point of view?

MC: I think we did extremely good reporting.

GD: What might you have done better?

MC: You know, thing that is showed up to me was how absurd and overwrought the ABCs complaints system was. Apart from that you know, I think we were appropriately dispassionate and appropriately comprehensive. And I hope we were up to date.

GD: Security

MC: We didn’t have someone in Baghdad because of concerns over security. So you can flip your coin on that one. You have to keep your journalists alive – and embedding is one way of getting some access to a frontline somewhere with some degree of safety.

THE END
Giles Dodson: What was it that you were most proud of or what do you consider the most valuable achievement of the SMH in the reporting from Iraq?

Peter Kerr: It was on a par with the best coverage anywhere, and I think part of that was the ability of the Herald to provide a very comprehensive rundown of what was going on. Drawing on sources of reporters on the ground either in Iraq or around Iraq but also in Washington and London and Turkey and other places, but also because the Herald draws information by subscribing to publications like the Washington Post, the New York Times, the LA Times, the Boston Globe, the Telegraph of London, the Guardian, among others. I think broadly, the balance and comprehensiveness of the coverage was good, because it didn't have, in my opinion, it didn't have the American slant or the British slant or the Iraqi slant, I think it was you know, very balanced – but probably the single most achievement was probably having Paul McGeough in Baghdad, when shock and awe began and through that period, so I think the single most achievement would be the bravery of McGeough to remain in there and the courage of Fairfax in agreeing to let him being there.

GD: Was pulling people out something you considered?

PK: Absolutely, yes, no there was a lot of concern, at Fairfax, not only for McGeough, but for everyone involved in the war. There was talk in the lead up to the invasion, Saddam having chemical and biological weapons, no one knew exactly what would happen, there was concern that people on the front line, whether that be actually in Iraq or in countries that might have been hit if Iraq struck back. Turkey or Kuwait or Qatar or Israel. If it had the capacity to deliver chemical or biological weapons then reporters would have to be ready for that and there was debate at Fairfax over whether we should have people inside Iraq or nearby. If we did have them there, how we could do as much
as we could do to guarantee their safety and with McGeough there was significant
debate about whether he should remain in Baghdad when we knew that the Americans
were planning to bomb Baghdad and the Americans warned all journalists to leave. So
it wasn’t just a matter of us worrying about him, it was a matter of us being warned by
the invading power that journalists should be removed. So therefore that adds another
level of responsibility in keeping him safe. But on balance it was decided that he should
stay.

GD: Was it simply the fact that it was simply too important a story to miss out on, so to
speak? Presumably you could have used stock footage from the BBC or purchased
photographs from agencies or someone else who was there? It was important for the
Herald to have their own people on the ground?

PK: I think so, that as a matter of principle it’s important for the Herald, it’s important
for any news organization, who is trying to report accurately, fairly and in a balanced
fashion to have a firsthand account of what’s going on. The invasion of Iraq was one of
the most significant events in recent years and we thought that it was important for
impartial and balanced coverage and to bring an accurate account for readers of the
Herald, for someone to be there, rather than us to rely for example on the Washington
Post or the New York Times that would provide a good viewpoint but perhaps one that
was slanted from an American point of view.

GD: What would you do differently in terms of you coverage, if you had your time
again or there was another war, for example?

PK: I’d be stretched to think how we would have covered Iraq much more differently –
we had, as I said very comprehensive coverage, we had photographers and journalists
placed in Baghdad, embedded with US forces, with the Australians at the central
Command post in Qatar. We had the London correspondent who also travelled to
Turkey, we had Washington covered, we had London covered and it was probably the
most planned in advance coverage the Herald’s had in some time. I suppose you can always do things better but I can’t think of any major flaw in the way it was covered.

GD: Sure, sure, can you explain to me, I know it is complex I’m sure, but can you explain the actual process you go through as an editor, and especially given the wealth of information – all that stuff coming to you and having to process that. What is the actual process that you go through? How do you decide what becomes front page, what gets left out that sort of thing? Because there must have been such an overwhelming amount of information coming out of Iraq.

PK: I think when you have that amount of information coming on such an event of such magnitude then you are to an extent swamped and it’s a matter of trying to keep your head above water, but it’s something we do every day in a sense. A large part of the day is the news gathering process and everyday it’s not dissimilar, just a smaller magnitude, it’s a matter of gathering news from the wires and from the papers that we get news from, I think with Iraq there was probably a greater effort to get up to the minute information from cable news services and websites. We do that anyway, but with Iraq it was the first time that that war was enacted real time on Fox and CNN and the BBC so that was something that was more of a focus in Iraq than otherwise. And then the rest of the news comes from the reporters and local news services and all that is gathered and continued to be gathered throughout the news cycle. In terms of Iraq and how it was dealt with, a lot of extra staff were put on to gather that from all those different sources, put it into a central place and then it has to, as in any news day, go through a conference process where a list of everything that is available at that given time is put to the editorial conference. The photos are shown on a screen in the conference room or printed out and laid on a board. With Iraq it was often themed so it was broken down into themed pages – page one is the biggest and the best and the most dramatic, and then beyond that we tended to theme things on whether it was say, external influences, what was going on the ground, the impact on Iraqis that sort of thing.
GD: And what sorts of things determined what became front page? What determined the biggest or most dramatic?

PK: Well, same as any newsgathering and news judgement exercise. Part of it is exclusiveness, part of it is what would be regarded as the most newsworthy and I think, I don’t know how much you are reviewing what different news outlets did on any particular day, but I think you would find, if you compared say the Herald or The Australian or the Telegraph or the Independent, the Guardian and the Telegraph there, if you matched like outlets or publications I think you would find that there becomes what is regarded as a natural news lead for the day. That tends to be what is on the front page the same way that Kovco was on the front page of all the newspapers here today. Then beyond that it becomes a matter of trying to create balance and comprehensiveness and also to tell a human tale, so often on a given day, in the specific instance of Iraq coverage it might have been an image that was particularly emotive, or was seen to have a particular part of the news theme of the day.

GD: You were talking just before about the similarities that tend to arise in terms of the leading stories of the day and about general judgments in terms of newsworthiness, do think that things tend towards a certain similarity is because there is an inherent essence or character of something which is newsworthy or is that people are thinking about things in the same way as each other, editors at the Herald are thinking about things the same way as the editors of the Australian are because they’ve worked in the same industry for so long or they have had the same training.

PK: I think it’s a mix of both, I do believe in the idea that there is an inherent newsworthiness in something and I think for example that someone leaving a CD-ROM of the interim Kovco investigation in an airport lounge when the investigation has already been a stuff up before, there is an inherent newsworthiness in that and that’s identified by the people who work for the Australian or the Herald.
GD: But something like that feeds into many stories, simply the act of leaving something behind is not newsworthy, but because on so many levels it says something about the management of the defence department, it says something about the army, all those sorts of things on top of the human story of this tragedy. Now in terms of a war, you've got a bomb blowing up a building, it might be any other day of the week that it would be front page news. But it's a war and bombs go off and they're dramatic and interesting. In terms of from a photographic sense, something like that, they are not telling you much more about [sic], just a building being blown up is not telling you much more about what's actually going on – do you understand?

PK: I think so. Let's say if you've got a situation like in Iraq where a war happens over a number of weeks and on some days there might be a story of natural obvious newsworthiness and it might be, Blair announcing that he may do something in particular to help the war effort – that is a significant news development in terms of that story and it might be identified naturally by a range of different media as a natural inherently newsworthy occurrence, but with an event as big as a war from many different fronts um there won't always be that and people make different judgements and they make different judgments for hugely complex range of reasons. I think and in the same way that different news judgements will be made on any given day between a broadsheet Herald and a tabloid Telegraph then different judgements are going to be made also on an event like Iraq. I think the Herald is quite rightly proud of trying to be as balanced and as fair and as comprehensive as possible and tries to go beyond a single bomb blast to tell the story, but on the other hand I think the Herald should also acknowledge that they can't come to an editorial conference table without preconceived notions of what the news is and how it should be told.

GD: Just to move away from the mechanics of newsgathering and production and that sort of thing, I just wanted to ask a few questions more generally about journalism. I am sort of interested in the idea of professionalism amongst journalists and I was wondering what in your opinion, I am sure through your long experience as a journalist
and now as a more senior journalist, what is or what makes up, or what defines, a professional journalists?

PK: One is accuracy, so wanting to get it right and be willing to go the extra distance to get it right, part of getting it right is fairness and that involves a level of commitment to the reader and also to the people or person whose story is being told, along with that comes balance, there is a effort in a professional journalist to recognise that there are various different side to any story and viewpoints and effort to balance all those different viewpoints out and to portray them.

GD: Just on the question of balance, there is two sides to every story, of course?

PK: More than two sides.

GD: More than two sides. But are there not many sides which are not of, necessarily of equal importance or inherent news value. How does this get negotiated, by a professional journalist? You know, for example you may have a story – the Iraqi propagandists pushing a line and on the other side the American propagandists doing the same and in the end you are not actually left with much.

PK: There’s no in between.

GD: Well, there is no in between, yeah. You have two false sides, one might argue, to the same issue.

PK: Yeah, well you can only try I suppose and you don’t throw your hands up and say it all too hard. You have to approach every issue on a case by case basis and you can only delve as far as you can given the time frame you have available and remembering that a lot of these things are done with a deadline and I am constantly amazed that journalists I deal with can do what they do with such tight time frames.
GD: Presumably context is a big one as well – in terms of weighing up sides of stories and balance and claims of truthfulness that sort of thing?

PK: Yeah, I think that, yeah, well it has to be.

GD: How valid or how central is the value of ‘objectivity’ in professional journalism do you think?

PK: Well I think objectivity comes into that sense of accuracy, balance and fairness. I think if you are serious about getting those things right, then you can’t do it without attempting to be objective, and the journalists that I deal with at the Herald, I am sure, because I see it, do make an effort to be as objective as they can be. Sometimes that might mean a journalist, or an editor acting on their behalf seeking for them not to be involved in a story because they might be regarded as being partial or involved or they might be perceived to be seen that way. But on the other hand I have also seen enough to know that there is really is no such thing as complete objectivity and to acknowledge that any news person the same as any academic or the same as anyone in any field bring to any situation that they’re dealing with a range of biases and preconceived notions so it’s a constant battle but it’s a battle that I think journalists are aware of and deal with as best they can.

GD: It becomes particularly, um how shall we say, important during war for example, when you have such a contentious issue as in the, you know, illegality of war, one might argue, or the possible consequences and there is someone reporting on that, um and then you might have someone who is confined to a hotel room in Baghdad or embedded with American forces how relevant or how possible is objectivity during wartime and how is it negotiated, what things are done to maximise the potential for balance and fairness, all that sort of thing.

PK: Well, I think any individual, whether they are in a Baghdad hotel or embedded with an American unit is mindful of where they are and the restrictions that they have
and tries to if they can to counterbalance their specific moment in time and place with information from other sources for a start. So that even if you are in a Baghdad hotel you have access via the internet if that is available or by phone to knowledge of what’s going on out there. Away from that I think that the person who’s embedded is the one who, that would be locked away from information also, but I know that that was recognised by the journalist who was embedded, Lindsay Murdoch and by the editors who put him there, was something that we hadn’t really done before and it carried with it the burdens of being able to tell a story from what might be regarded as only one viewpoint. But on the other hand one of the I think you just have to recognise that and its balanced by the individual and by the editors by knowing they are drawing information from a huge range of sources and situations so when it comes to putting that story or stories in the paper you’re not just drawing on an single source and copy coming from McGeough in Baghdad would be informed by information we were getting from other sources, and I think that’s one of the benefits the Herald had from the array of other journalists that were involved, the array of other sources, not just the Washington Post and the New York Times, but as I said monitoring the BBC, CNN and Fox and indeed Al-Jazeera.

GD: Talking of embedding, what your attitude as an editor or as a journalist yourself to that whole exercise?

PK: Yeah, I think it was useful, I think we got some very good stories out of being there, one of the stories Lindsay reported on was a claim by one of the Americans that he was with that they had used as an agent orange type material.

GD: Was that the one, was it napalm?

PK: Yeah, napalm.

GD: He reported it as being napalm but it was actually ‘white phosphorous’ or something like that, but it was more or less the same thing.
PK: Yeah, and we wondered at the time if it could possibly be napalm and we wondered perhaps we shouldn't run a story saying that is was napalm, if perhaps it turned out it wasn't and I think ultimately some British, I think it was British, anyway British or American journos managed to establish afterwards that is was phosphorous and it wasn't dramatically different from napalm anyway, so being embedded allowed that story to be told, in the scale of things it might not be a massive story, but it's one you otherwise wouldn't have had.

GD: How acute was the concern of how the news you were generating of Iraq, was going to be received in Australia – especially with regard to the governments criticisms of the ABC, for example was there much concern in the news room?

PK: No, I don't think so. No I think that an editor comes in, like any of the journalists around them, has a belief that you can do your job as best you can and in a fair a way as possible and as balanced a way as you can do and that's the best you can do.

GD: There was a lot of frustration though with the strategies of the Australian military officials, especially in the initial stages.

PK: Oh, the Australian military has an appalling reputation with any of the journalists that I have dealt with who have had anything to do with them. They are, whether or not you think it’s a good or a bad thing, it is acknowledged that they way they approach the media is very different to the Americans or the British or other, but if we are talking about the Coalition they’re the ones that really count. They lock down information, incredibly protective and this is amazingly frustrating for any journalist who has anything to do with them.

GD: And I imagine that’s the same but to a lesser degree with the Americans and the UK?
PK: Well the American military is quite open, that’s my experience anyway, they’re are the ones who allowed, they went out of their way to help journalist become embedded and while some of that material was censored as they were concerned that reporters didn’t give out information that would endanger military or indeed civilian lives. Lindsay managed to tell a story that a material like napalm had been used, quoting an American military official, I mean that’s pretty amazing really, meanwhile you have and the British tend to be more cooperative, although less so than the Americans, but the Australians go out of their way to obfuscate and make life difficult and [Tom] Allard, if you have spoken to him can expand on that.

GD: What do you think can be done when the media comes up against this obfuscatory tactic?

PK: Yeah, look, not much I don’t think. It’s a product of a range of different things someone like Allard or McGeough might be able to expand on it, but part of it is a product of a military like other departments, being driven by a government that is entrenched, that has been in for ten years now and I think whenever you get a government that has been in power that long you get a level of control over the bureaucracy. But I think it’s a cultural thing within the defence dept, that’s the way they operate and I don’t think it’s going to suddenly change, there has to be an impetus for change and I suspect a bunch of journalists complaining about it is not a significant enough impetus for change.

GD: Just to end on a couple of things. In terms of the Australian military officials being difficult to deal with but also there have been stories, perhaps not in your direct experience, but there have been stories coming out of Centcom of people questioning the usefulness of journalists being there because they were getting so little good information coming out – do you think that the military always has the edge over the media and if it does what can the journalists do to sort of resist the logic of the military? We’ve all seen the Centcom displays with the videos of bombs hitting targets and all
that sort of stuff – it becomes an irresistible logic almost in people’s reporting, they ask
questions but there are themes that end up rising to the top, do you know?

PK: Yeah, I think that um, those daily briefings at Centcom to an extent became
counterproductive or lacking in advantage for the military in what they were aiming for,
which was putting their spin on what was going. For Australian purposes those
briefings became almost immaterial because we were getting information in advance of
that to an extent anyway, particularly when you had American and others journalists
embedded from CNN and Fox and getting firsthand accounts that were ahead of what
Centcom was doing.

GD: And having to wait for confirmation of those.

PK: yeah, so I suppose in terms of what can be done it’s the same as anything in a
situation where journalists are being hamstrung or frozen out you chip away as best you
can and in terms of, it’s slightly different in a wartime scenario. You’ve got the battle
zone and outside the battle zone and it was particularly for Allard where you had not
really much access other than what you were being spoon fed, he found he actually got
better information for outside those daily briefing from the Americans than from inside
the briefing from the Australians who basically just wouldn’t talk.

GD: I was interested to watch the documentary ‘Control Room’ about Al-Jazeera and
their operations in Iraq of journalist talking, I suppose you’d say behind the scenes with
American press officers in their little back rooms – and I never actually saw any of that
or any expositions of that in the media, there was the daily conferences with the
generals, but then even in the news stories it didn’t really come across that this other
sort of informal area of activity was going on.

PK: I think you’ll find that whenever there is a media event going on, I imagine that
sort of thing happened in Beaconsfield – you have a press conference where things are
said in public but where a lot of your useful information comes from is outside those scripted events.

THE END
Giles Dodson: Please discuss the Herald’s aims in reporting the Iraq war?

Peter Kerr: It was a bit unusual given the amount of time there was to get ready for it and there was a lot of preparation involved. And in terms of goals and aims it was to cover the war as comprehensively as possible and is as balanced a fashion as possible, drawing on all sources of information that were available and anticipating the places that reporters and photographers would have to be, while also guaranteeing the safety of those reporters and photographers, so there was considerable planning to do with getting reporters and photographers physically prepared for those sorts of things. Everyone undertook hostile environment and training, and they were equipped with all the necessary technological gear that might anticipate them being in the field, and anyone who was going to be in the field anywhere near there was going to be violence was and anticipating at the time the claims that Hussein chemical, biological and nuclear weapons. The company actually went to the trouble of buying suits for those people that might be on the ground in Iraq, or nearby like in Istanbul or on the border with Turkey or in Kuwait or Qatar.

GD: Given that you had all these people in the field, how were the decisions made what would run prominently, from an editorial perspective, presumably ….daily meeting

PK: There was material not only from the people in the field, but also people in say London or in Washington, and also the not inconsiderable access to information through the Washington Post, the New York Times, the Los Angeles Times and the Guardian, etcetera. So the structure of the team or teams that were in place in Sydney to cover it was fairly sophisticated in terms of having the general run of the way that the news desk gathers and considers news in editorial conferences and after that dealing with a lot of different pages and breaking those pages up into “pod” editors, an editor for a package,
we might have someone in charge of a page or two pages or four pages, but the shifts had to start a little bit earlier and finish a little bit later to cover all that, information gathering happens as it happens on any newspaper anywhere – you gather all your information as early and as best you can and then you sit down with it in editorial conference say say, “ok we’ve got this, this, this and this, you would have heard on radio that this and this, we have reports from London and Washington, we’ve got this person on the ground here”, and we consider that. The photographic editor would run through. We had greater than usual access to photographs I think, so that would be a morning meeting and then another early afternoon meeting.

GD: And who is present at those sorts of meetings?

PK: My memory, is pretty much everyone; the editor, the deputy editor, the photographic editor, myself as foreign editor, my deputy was the Iraq news editor at the time, but generally everyone and it was pretty much all in because there was so much interest in it and the news was swamping most of the paper, we found that there were a lot of people there just because the sheer volume of it.

GD: In that situation where there is such a volume of information coming in, it must be particularly difficult to exclude things?

PK: Once you’ve got a system in place, there is a system in any newspaper or and media organisation, particularly now that you’re getting more information from wires than you would have, you’re getting more information from people in the field because they have got access to satellite phones and that sort of technology, you’re getting photographs from a wider range of sources and you’re also getting other new technologies too like videos that we can tap into too, being run on TV or online. But the filtering process is much the same with any project. It might be a bit more sophisticated, in terms of what you pick, any particular gatekeeper, whether it’s someone monitoring an agency wire, or photographs or someone monitoring reporters in the field, every particular gatekeeper who’s the liaison point person, has to make decisions on the run
and where will that story be filed because [sic] – here’s a story on AAP out of Istanbul, well, we’ve actually already covered that in this morning’s paper, or its actually only an incremental development so I’ll discard it, or it updates the information a little bit so I will file it according to a particular topic.

GD: Presumably there’s also the foreign correspondents, either embedded or in Baghdad or where ever they were are dealing with a similar thing in a sense, what they produce has to be a substantive change from what they produced yesterday to what degree do people in the field take direction from you

PK: Generally there’s a fair amount of flexibility, but at the Herald we tend to leave it up to the people that we trust in the field, because those people are there because we trust them and for the most part they are the most experienced journalists. And depending on where they are, if you were for example Lindsay Murdoch, embedded with US forces then we might ask a question of Lindsay, “do you know anything about this claim that such and such happened” But generally speaking, you would have to accept that Lindsay is bound by being with a particular group and whatever agreement he’s made, and is also only going to see a narrowly focus on stuff. So it’s very flexible and it’s not cut and dried, but generally we trust the correspondents to make their own decisions and it really depends on where they are, if you were in Washington for example, we have access to information and we would be asking them for their particular interpretation, and there might be give and take and we might say well actually that’s already been on radio this morning so why don’t you, for freshness of news, emphasis some other aspect of the story for tomorrow’s news.

GD: How aware was the Herald at the time of the dangers of being too close I suppose of too credulous [sic] when it comes to reporting the military operations – generally covering such an orchestrated event, both in a military and a media sense.

PK: Very aware, I think. I think some people found it more difficult than others, I know that Tom Allard found it very frustrating, because the Australians would tell him
nothing, so it was all but impossible to any information accurate or otherwise, from the Australians, only sort of very old and very militarised information from them. He found the British and the Americans more open and on the other hand the Americans were very good at putting on their slide shows and their spin on what they wanted to tell, I think everyone recognised that embedding with US forces gives you a particular view through a prism and a debate can go on about the values of embedding or not, but I think it was a useful exercise and I think if the opportunity was to come up again I think we would probably accept it while also accepting its limitation. But I think the benefit for the Herald as quite a big newspaper with quite a lot of resources is that we were able to balance our own information from eyewitness sources and correspondents in the field, a range of different media that we have access to, some left wing, some right wing, and some sort of in the middle, and my feeling is that having participated in we did the best we could to tread something of a middle path through the propaganda that would come from the Americans versus the propaganda that would come from the Iraqis and try as be as comprehensive and as balanced as possible with all the media we had out there.

THE END
GILES DODSON: What were the Age’s goals with regards to reporting the Iraq war? Given the significant lead time?

MICHAEL GAWENDA: There was a lead time obviously with the war; it was pretty clear there was going to be a conflict. I guess looking back there were two things we wanted to achieve – one to make sure we had our own unique coverage, when I say that we share with the Sydney Morning Herald, of the war so we had to look at what sort of contingencies were in place. It was expensive, so we were limited as to how much we could afford to do. But that was the first thing. The second thing was what other resources could we use, we have access to the Guardian, to the Daily Telegraph, to the New York Times and Washington Post, among other things and we wanted to make sure that we used those resources as well as we could within an Australian context. So that was the goal, obviously there were limits on funding – so we had Lindsay Murdoch embedded, Paul McGeough in Baghdad, there people who came in and out of the Middle East that helped with the coverage, but I would say that for the war itself, there were two main components, Lindsay’s embedded coverage there was Paul McGeough in Baghdad, and there was what we thought was applicable and appropriate from the services that we had.

GD: And how were decisions over resourcing made, by you?

MG: Well, it was made by me in consultation with the editor of the Sydney Morning Herald at the time as well, so it wasn’t just me, it would have been both of us talking about that and would have been made in consultation with senior editors on the papers, with the Foreign Editor and the Deputy Editor, so it would have been done on that sort of basis.
GD: With regards to editorial meeting, with regards to what gets included?

MG: We had an Iraq desk which we set up especially for the war, which the Foreign editor ran, we put some extra resources into it, plus we had sub which spent, months probably that covered the war. We did have an afternoon news conference at which Iraq was briefly discussed. Where was it up to? What was it doing? But then we would have a separate conference on the war with that team.

GD: That desk worked with a degree of autonomy then?

MG: That desk worked autonomously in the sense that it worked separately from the general news desk. Yes it was. You can imagine that was a very busy time – they worked damn hard, fifteen to sixteen hour days.

GD: And in your role as an editor, would you ever have to make calls that this would be excluded and this would be included?

MG: I made that call all the time. All the time.

GD: Overriding at time the opinions of subordinates?

MG: I can’t remember if there were major disputes about things. No I don’t think there were any major disputes about things. But in the end, most of the photographs chosen I approved, or I changed if I changed my mind changed the photograph. Or said maybe that story should be on the front and that story shouldn’t, but it was to do with what we were doing for that day and the next day and for Saturday, so I was regularly doing – that’s what editors do – I don’t know if they always do, but that’s what I thought my role was.

GD: Do you think because of the sheer volume of information coming out – I know at the Herald they were doing sort of weekly round ups,
MG: That’s what I mean. Because there was so much going on and so much happening that had to be done – the other concern of course was the safety of the correspondents, there was a big question about whether McGeough should stay in Baghdad – so I remember that was a sizable issue.

GD: And that was a decision made ultimately by Paul?

MG: I think it was made by Paul in the sense that I think we took, there were some doubts about whether he should stay, there were doubts in my mind about whether he should stay, no one knew what would happen, it was dangerous, but in the end Paul convinced us that staying was the right thing to do. But it was a big issue. And I think that in terms of our coverage Paul, and to a certain extent Lindsay, was [sic] at the centre of our coverage, the rest was sort of an add on.

GD: And that decision to remain in Baghdad was entirely justified in the end?

MG: Well, in the end it was. I mean it was hairy at times and after the invasion especially there were times when it was dangerous. Yes, I think it was justified. When you say it was justified, well, he survived it.

GD: But also the quality of what he was reporting and the insight that this gained

MG: Absolutely, had we not had that been an issue [sic], I would have said “good, go”. But the fact that he was there, he’s a terrific correspondent that he was Australian, which he gave us a perspective that we probably couldn’t have gotten from the other services, yes it was entirely justified.

GD: Who gets to be the foreign correspondents, how are they selected and who gets to go away and do those jobs?
MG: Well, there are a limited number of those jobs and a lot of people want to do them. And so you make the decision on the basis of, especially in a dangerous situation, you make the decision really on the basis of who has the experience, who is likely to be able to cope with the difficulties that the foreign correspondent in that particular situation is going to confront. There were, honestly, gender issues as well, there were women journalists on both papers, who I think felt aggrieved that they were somehow excluded, and I think there was some truth in that – that we did, without consciously thinking about it go for men. I think that that changed before the Iraq war, although there were women who put their hands up for Iraq, Paul was a natural choice. But it really changed with Bali. Where the women complained we were only sending men, and we started sending women. But I did think that this gender issue was neutralised, but I did think that not very many women had the experience of dealing with this kind of thing and those sorts of situations. But really you’re looking for someone who’s experienced, who’s done this sort of thing before, as far as possible will be able to look after themselves. And someone who is a terrific reporter. And knows the story.

GD: A once in a lifetime opportunity?

MG: Well, it was, obviously there are journalists who see it that way. And there are journalists who don’t. I mean there were journalists who...I think it’s a personal thing, and I think Lindsay had a pretty tough time, physically it was very very demanding, but he was desperate to do it and he had experience having been through the Timor thing, so yes it was tough. And there was competition too of course. I think he would have felt competitive too with Paul, that’s part of the whole system.

GD: And embedding?

MG: Well, my view is very simple. If the embedded reporting was all you had then that wouldn’t be very good and it would be a major concern. But taken in context as part of the coverage, it was better to have than not to have it.
GD: And now people have come to expect it. Is a precedent set?

MG: Yes, they demand it. And these days the technology demands it. I think that it will continue. It depends on the war, however. I hope there are no more wars, but I imagine there will be. And there will be situations where embedding will be impossible. You can’t for instance embed with the SAS and even the Americans didn’t embed with their special forces. So you have to take all that into account, but I do think that in general, the expectation will be that there will be embedding. What as journalists we’ve got to make sure is that that is not the only coverage we have. And that is difficult you see, I was worried about encouraging people to go in. There were freelancers who wanted to go in, not embedded, and I was worried about encouraging that in terms of the danger involved in doing that. You have to have a look at your responsibilities, here are people prepared to take risks that maybe they shouldn’t take. As it turned out it was relatively safe to be in Kurdistan, I am not sure how safe it was to be on your own elsewhere.

GD: With regards to embedding and the Central Command Theatre of News, and the Americans being particularly sophisticated in their attempts to spin the war, how does one deal with that relationship?

MG: It’s very difficult, the ADF were particularly difficult and they have remained difficult throughout the time the Australian troops have been in Iraq, access has been very difficult to get.

GD: How can journalists work towards to get the services to open up?

MG: With great difficulty. What it takes are journalists with experience to be able to cover it and cut through the spin, to be able to get a view beyond the spin. I think McGeough managed that, I think to a certain extent Lindsay managed that but it’s very difficult to do so you have to hope they can do that. In terms of telling the story, you
have to make sure you are telling your readers this is what the American’s are saying. This is what’s happening.

GD: Is this a story in itself?

MG: Yes it always is yes. You’ve got to remember that that this is not unique, it happens in every conflict that journalists have covered. There was a turning point in the Vietnam War, in a way, was the journalists on the ground, no longer believing what the military was saying. And saying that their eyes are telling them something totally different from what the military are spinning. So that challenge is there no matter what war you are covering.

GD: The military doesn’t forget.

MG: That’s true. But you would hope that there is some institutional memory (within the media corps). That senior editors or someone have been through this. That’s why I said to you we planned to send people who have been there before, and if they haven’t, then you send them with someone who has.

GD: Is the training sufficient?

MG: I think probably not. I think one of the problems of journalism in Australia is that the culture of news organisations is one that doesn’t consider training very highly. They think on the job training is all that is it about. We are better than we used to be and there are training course form journalists heading to dangerous places and we do send our journalists to those courses, but they’re expensive, and a five day training course is not enough. In some ways I think it should be incorporated into journalism training and teaching but it needs to be taught by people who have done it.

GD: How would you assess the quality of journalists these days?
MG: This is a vexed question. I think that, my view is that people who want to be journalists these days are better off doing a general course or a specialised course even, like law or science or even medicine. And then go into journalism, do a master’s or diploma or whatever, rather than the undergraduate training in journalism which I don’t think is all that useful.

GD: Was there any consideration about how the Age’s coverage would be received in a political context? Given the context of Alston’s attacks on the ABC for supposedly being biased.

MG: Yeah, there was no consideration on my part of that. I wanted to report the war as fairly and as accurately and as trenchantly as we possibly could. In terms of the reporting I think we did that, if there we any sort of consideration they were about “there’s so much material, how do we get this down to a package that both captures what’s going on and doesn’t distort.” So there were no political considerations for me that I could think of. I mean there was covering the debate in Australia and on the op-ed pages I needed to make sure there was a rage of opinions about what was going on and why and I think we managed that pretty well as well.

GD: What improvements would you make?

MG: I think we did about as well as we could. There were some stories where I think we should have been more sceptical than we were. There was the story of that young woman the American, Private Lynch, which we swallowed at first and ran, and I think looking back it was probably an improbable story. We should have said “hang on, this is …” But it’s hard at the time, you make a decision, you’re on the spot you’re relying on other people’s reporting, you haven’t got your own reporter there that you can ask, “well, can you confirm this, is this true”. So there were several stories like that, looking back I think we could have been more sceptical about.
GD: Is there a danger for journalism – in so far as there is a need to be on the story as it happens, but without capacity to verify things?

MG: Absolutely, and it’s very frustrating when you’re running copy from journalists – and I think John Burns is a terrific reporter and has reporter on Iraq really well. Nevertheless, I could never speak to John Burns, I couldn’t, well I did once or twice, and it was impossible for him, he wasn’t going to some editor in Australia regularly about his coverage. So that’s a huge frustration. You’re running this copy but you can’t talk to the reporter. And you can’t say, what about this, why this, you know? That’s a frustration, but that’s about the limitation of what we can spend given the size of our papers and the size of our market. And I think we did pretty damn well, and it wasn’t cheap. And I think we did better than comparable papers in the UK or US. The US has got four or five really good news papers, and the rest are rubbish, dealing with a similar size market as the Age of the Sydney Morning Herald [sic].

THE END