

studies in language & capitalism

Democracy, the Academic Field and the (New Zealand) Journalistic Habitus

Sean Phelan
Massey University

Abstract

The relationship between journalism and the academy is historically fraught. Any mention of the word 'theory' is only likely to exacerbate these tensions, since it perhaps signifies, most clearly, the division between both identities. Drawing on the social theory of Pierre Bourdieu, this paper considers, with particular empirical reference to the New Zealand context, the often antagonistic relationship between the 'journalistic field' and the 'academic field'. I examine how academic identities are sometimes represented 'fantasmatically' (Glynos and Howarth, 2007) in journalistic discourse and explore the contradictions between journalism's official commitment to democratic values and the desire of at least some journalists to silence or lampoon academic voices, or insist that theoretical reflection is somehow incompatible with good journalism. The articulation of particular journalistic identities is contextualised with reference to the more 'objective' logic of the New Zealand journalistic field and, in particular, the structuring of its concrete relationship with the academic field through journalism education programmes. Although the culturally sedimented practices precluding the possibility of a different inter-field dynamic are considerable, I conclude by 'visualising' an alternative relationship, one constituted, on all sides, by what Williams Connolly (2005) characterises as a properly democratic ethos of 'agonistic respect' across difference.

Introduction and context¹

On March 21 2006, *The Dominion Post* – New Zealand's second biggest selling and Wellington-based daily newspaper – published a characteristically polemical piece by its self-styled 'Curmudgeon' columnist, Karl Du Fresne.² Headlined 'An assassin in academia', the column formulated a very barbed and, no doubt to some, quite comical reproach of a recently published press release by Massey University management lecturer, Craig Prichard (for more on the logic of Prichard's intervention as a critical management studies scholar, see Bridgman, 2007). The context of the press release was the immediate aftermath of the publisher Fairfax's landmark purchase of the online auction website, Trade Me, which, in keeping with an archetypal new economy success story (Prichard, Boon, Bill and Jones,

Studies in Language & Capitalism is a peer-reviewed online journal that seeks to promote and freely distribute interdisciplinary critical inquiries into the language and meaning of contemporary capitalism and the links between economic, social and linguistic change in the world around us.

2006), started out from modest beginnings to become 'New Zealand's leading internet business' (Fairfax, 2006). Straying from the dominant media construction of the sale as a national triumph, Prichard (2006) characterized it instead as an 'opportunity lost' for New Zealand. Citing the agricultural co-operative movement as an historical antecedent, he argued that, rather than privately transferring the wealth to eleven recipients, the \$700m generated by the sale should have been 'creatively distributed' among the site's large community of users. Prichard recognised that Sam Morgan, the founder of Trade Me, and his fellow investors deserved a 'healthy return for their hard work and investment'. However, appropriating a demotic local idiom, he queried 'whether this kind of [private] distribution of value really amounted to "a fair go" for all those involved in creating the value that the sale realizes'.

Du Fresne's rebuttal was fierce. In a kind of hand-me-down version of the anti-theory polemics articulated by people like Windschuttle (2000), he responded with an ad hominem attack against not only Prichard but also Foucault and Marx. The 'previously unheard' of Prichard was characterised, in a distinctly kiwi metaphor, as a 'tall poppy assassin' with a 'distrust' and 'envy' of those who succeed in business. The 'intrigued' Du Fresne recalls how, after Googling Prichard, he:

stumbled into a morass of impenetrable academic mumbo-jumbo liberally sprinkled with reverent references to Michel Foucault – the leftwing French philosopher succinctly described by Bob Brockie³ in this paper recently as a fruitcake – and Karl Marx, whose theories probably killed more people in the 20th century than any other single factor (Du Fresne, 2006).

The relevant section of the column ended by positing what it characterized as a 'stark contrast' between the entrepreneurial brilliance of Morgan and Prichard:

safe and smug in his taxpayer-funded academic post, who as far as I can tell hasn't contributed a damned thing to the country's well-being and, indeed, seems bent on undermining those who do (Du Fresne, 2006).

This paper wants to situate Du Fresne's column as a specific Aotearoa New Zealand articulation of a well established antagonism between journalism and the academy (Zelizer, 2004; Macdonald, 2006; Gasher, 2005). As many have observed (Reese & Cohen, 2000; Turner, 2000; Skinner, Gasher & Compton, 2001; Hirst, 2008), this antagonism is especially fraught when what are often pejoratively coded as the 'theoretical' imperatives of the academy are seen as encroaching on the 'practical' disposition of journalism. Backgrounded

by these antagonisms, there are at least five ways of responding to Du Fresne's attack. First, one could conclude that he is simply representative of himself. Indeed, one could conceivably argue (this is certainly the assumption that animates the internal logic of his column), that, despite the fact that Du Fresne is the former editor of a national newspaper,⁴ his *overtly* conservative and neoliberal identity is a minority one within mainstream New Zealand journalism. Second, one could take Du Fresne's 'curmudgeonly' identity at face value and, if one was sufficiently qualified to do so (the fact that he isn't qualified clearly doesn't dissuade De Fresne from offering a confident diagnosis of Prichard's psychological disposition), formulate an individuated psychoanalytical explanation for his hostility. Third, one could invoke a 'freedom of the press' argument, as many journalists instinctively do, and read such invective as confirmation of the vibrancy of New Zealand's media democracy, thus treating anyone who frets about the ethical and ideological implications of such exchanges as 'thin-skinned' and in need of 'toughening up'. Fourth, one could formulate a straightforward political economy diagnosis and observe that, as a Fairfax employee (the Dominion Post is one of a stable of New Zealand newspapers owned by the publisher), Du Fresne was 'putting the boot into' someone who reflected badly on his employer. Or, fifth, one could simply conclude that Du Fresne is 'right' and that no more needs to be said about the matter.

There is no doubt some explanatory value in the first four responses. Yet I want to treat Du Fresne's column as a platform for a more expansive dialectical analysis⁵ that argues it can be read as a 'fantasmatic' articulation of an antagonism to academic identities that is a more general attribute of the New Zealand journalistic 'habitus'. By 'fantasmatic', I mean, most simply, a logic of ideological fantasy, which Glynos and Howarth (2007) conceptualize, following Žižek (1989), as the affective force that 'grips' a subject's identification with a particular discourse. Two points centring Glynos and Howarth's account (also see Glynos 2001) of the fantasmatic are worth noting cursorily. First, they stress that 'for something to function fantasmatically.... it needs to come to embody a general public's view, or at least the relevant audience's view' of the particular individual or group (p.174) – in this case, academics who explicitly position their identity as 'critical' or 'theoretical'. Second, they stress how the fantasmatic 'typically isn't articulated explicitly', but is, more commonly, implicit in a particular discourse. In this respect, Du Fresne's overt antagonism to the figure of the critical academic can be understood as atypical, because it articulates a discourse that, although latent, typically 'resists [explicit] public official disclosure' (p. 148) in the mundane interactions (Rowe & Brass, 2008) between journalism and the academy. I am suggesting that it can justifiably be called a 'fantasmatic' representation, because it voices a political-cultural disposition that, in my assessment, is present and felt, yet often unsaid

(partly because it is shared and doesn't need to be said), in the mainstream New Zealand journalistic field.

My understanding of 'habitus' follows Bourdieu, who, in Wacquant's reformulation, conceptualizes it as a description of how:

Cumulative exposure to certain social conditions instils in individuals an ensemble of durable and transposable dispositions that internalize the necessities of the extant social environment, inscribing inside the organism the patterned inertia and constraints of external reality (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 13)

Although the formal discussion of Bourdieu's work here is skeletal, it is important to stress that the category of habitus cannot be separated from the other conceptual dimensions of Bourdieu's work, in particular the category of 'the field'. If habitus can be described as way of indexing a 'socialized subjectivity' or posture (ibid, 126), then field is a heuristic attempt to capture how group subjectivities are dialectally structured by, and simultaneously structuring, what Bourdieu calls a 'network, or a configuration, of objective⁶ relations between positions' (Benson & Neveu, 2005, p. 3).⁷ The category of habitus is operationalized here in a methodologically limited way, because the dynamic formation of New Zealand journalists' subjectivities clearly can not be reduced to specifically journalistic experiences. Nonetheless, it is still useful to speak of an analytically distinct journalistic habitus, because as Bourdieu observes: 'Habitus being the social embodied, it is "at home" in the field it inhabits, it perceives it immediately as endowed with meaning and interest' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 128).

The focus of my analysis is centred on the relationship between the New Zealand journalistic field and the academic field, particularly with respect to how they intersect in the structural organisation of journalism education. The wider network of capitalist and liberal democratic field relations that structure the hegemonic configuration of the particular inter-field relationship is not explored in any detail, though they do background the subsequent discussion of the relationship between democracy, journalism and education. The paper does not purport to offer a comprehensive assessment of the particular inter-field relationship; its register is more of a conceptually experimental essay, rather than a detailed theoretical or empirical treatment. However, it should hopefully be clear that the dynamics and logics of the journalistic field/academic field relationship cannot be understood in isolation from a wider network of neoliberalized field relations - or, to use a discourse theoretical vocabulary, a more general discussion of how the 'the social' has been 'filled' or 'hegemonized' (Laclau, 2005; Glynnos and Howarth 2007).⁸ Of particular background

importance here, from a political economy of media perspective, is the market-driven, deregulated and duopolistic character of the New Zealand media system, (Hope, 2005), which has been described as one of the most open and corporate-driven communication markets in the world (Herman & McChesney, 1997).

The argument is developed in four distinct parts and shares a broad conceptual affinity with arguments that have been made in other national contexts (Skinner, et al, 2001; Gasher, 2005; Macdonald, 2006; Garman, 2005). First, I examine a second journalistic text that is articulated from a field position directly opposed to Du Fresne. Second, my analysis of both journalistic texts is contextualised with reference to the 'objective' structures of the academic field that most obviously relate to the embryonic formation and inculcation of journalistic identities. Third, I discuss the question of democracy and probe some of the ironies, but also the implicit counter-hegemonic possibilities, behind journalism's putative identification with a 'democratic' ideology. Fourth, I draw on William Connolly's (2005) account of pluralism to 'visualise' a normative alternative to the current hegemonic models of media democracy. I end by emphasising the importance of the academic field as a space for nurturing a subjectivity of democratic possibility, while simultaneously recognizing the combination of economic, cultural and institutional factors inhibiting its articulation.

'Theory' is the problem

The second text I want to look at is by Chris Trotter, who writes a Fairfax-syndicated column under the banner identity of 'From the left'. As the branding suggests, Trotter articulates an identity that, within the relational logics of the mainstream journalistic field, is the political opposite of his corporate stablemate De Fresne. Nonetheless, Trotter's *Dominion Post* column of August 10 2007 shows how both journalists articulate an antagonism to academic field identities that indexes a specifically journalistic habitus. Trotter's column is especially pertinent because – like a more recent Du Fresne (2008) book review (see below) - it discusses the condition of New Zealand journalism with primary reference to the country's journalism schools.

The immediate prompt for the article was an EMPU (Engineering, Printing and Manufacturing Union) organised conference 'Journalism Matters', which was convened to discuss the deleterious impact of corporate structures on New Zealand journalism. These commercial pressures were brought clearly into view by the April 2007 announcement by APN, Fairfax's main corporate rival, that it planned to 'out-source' its magazine and newspaper sub-editing function across titles (EPMU, 2007). The neoliberal corporatization of the local print media industry has been accelerated by the subsequent announcement that

Fairfax, which currently owns nine daily newspapers, two Sunday newspapers and a wide range of local weeklies, has cut a number of New Zealand jobs, 'mostly in the sub-editing area' (New Zealand Herald, 2008). The short-term commercial success of this strategy was affirmed by the recent news that Fairfax Media Limited increased its annual profits by 46.8 per cent, with its New Zealand operation garnering special praise for how it had 'push[ed] annual earnings up 3.1 per cent... despite tough economic times' (Vaughan and Weir, 2008).

Trotter's column takes a stance that, not surprisingly, is implicitly supportive of a conference interrogating the effects of neoliberal and corporate logics on journalistic practices. However, approaching the issue in a more tangential way, he argues that 'the possibility should not be discounted...that the poor quality of much of our journalism is the fault of the practitioners themselves'. What is particularly interesting is how he structures his argument as a critique of the *raison d'être* of journalism education programmes. The article is worth quoting from at length:

The owners and managers of our daily newspapers, like so many employers, are routinely astounded by the failure of our tertiary institutions – including, unfortunately, our journalism schools – to turn out graduates who can think independently and write clearly. Even more worrying... is that so few of these graduates have anything they want to say. Journalism has always been a political vocation. The first newspapers were highly partisan affairs, financed (and often also written) by individuals who wished to influence local and/or national affairs.... Think of Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation – owner of *The Sun* and *Fox News*....The idea that journalists should always strive for "objectivity" would be laughed at by such men. Sadly, anyone entering today's journalism school with Mr. Murdoch's partisan spirit would soon have it beaten out of him by his teachers....The "professionalisation" of journalism, with its university degree courses and formal examinations, has come at the expense of what was formerly a "learn as you do" training regime run by the media itself. It may have been rough and ready, but this "on the job" education with its practical rather than theoretical emphasis, produced highly experienced journalists with a shrewd understanding of what motivated the prime news drivers in their communities. The state's takeover of journalism training, while relieving the news media of its in-house training costs, has tended to favour theory over practice. Students who follow unorthodox ideas and practices get "C"s. Rule-followers are rewarded with "A"s. Hard-hitting and crusading journalism struggles to emerge from this environment (Trotter, 2007).

There are clearly a number of distinct issues raised in this extract. Despite the many problematic aspects of Trotter's argument, one cannot but agree with the assertion (which of course is strongly supported by a relevant research literature) that professional and pedagogical overidentification with the doctrine of 'objectivity' often conceals – either deliberately or unconsciously – the politicized nature of journalistic practice. (For a concise critique of objectivity that discusses the particulars of the New Zealand context and explicitly challenges the pro-objectivity stance of Du Fresne, see Hirst, 2008). That said, Trotter's argument is clearly a peculiar one in many respects. In particular, the claim that the structures of New Zealand journalism education are enslaved to theory and indifferent to practice will sound very odd to anyone familiar with the local context. To be fair, Trotter does conceive of theory in a particular way that is very different to its typical representation in critical discourse; 'theory' is basically equated with the doctrine of journalistic objectivity. Nonetheless, his perception of a dichotomy of theory and practice is likely to irk many New Zealand journalism educators (Robbie, 2007), because most journalism schools, including the limited number of University-based courses, are structured around a strongly 'vocational' logic that involves ongoing liaison with industry and, in some cases, student production of a portfolio of published and typically unpaid stories. Conversely, the notion that the journalism schools are a 'hotbed of theory' is likely to sound very ironic to media, communication and cultural studies scholars, who – if my own position is representative – are more likely to lament the atheoretical and conservative character of New Zealand journalism education.

However, instead of simply dismissing Trotter's article, I want to explicate the discursive logic underpinning his conception of 'the problem' and briefly explore how it contextualises the relationship between the academic field and the journalistic field. My analysis obviously focuses on the New Zealand context, though it broaches questions that are indicative of a more general liberal democratic relationship between the two fields. I understand discourse in the sense advanced by Laclau and Mouffe (2001, p. 105), who define it as a 'structured totality' that is constituted by the partial fixing of relations between different signifiers. Their account emphasizes the 'antagonistic' character of discourse(s) and how those identities that are Othered are central to the articulation of a positively-claimed identity. In other words, the representation of the Other functions, to use Derrida's paradoxical formulation, as a 'constitutive outside' in the construction of one's own identity (Glynos and Howarth, 2007).

Working with this poststructuralist account of discourse, one can identify how Trotter's argument is constituted through an interrelated set of binary logics, where the academic field is Othered and an archetypal journalistic mythos is affirmed. The sphere of formal journalism education, or what is more commonly signified in New Zealand as 'training', is rendered

'equivalent' (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001) with, among others, the signifiers, 'professionalization', 'formal exams and degree courses', arid 'theoretical' knowledge, 'state takeover', 'rule followers and uniformity', 'people with nothing to say', and 'anti hard-hitting and crusading journalism'. Conversely, the notion of a *proper* journalistic disposition is equated with the signifiers 'learn as you do', 'on the job training', 'practical knowledge, 'shrewd understanding', 'political engagement' and 'thinking independently'. Hence, if one accepts the premise – as I do – that some of the problems of New Zealand journalism can be linked to the structuring of journalism education, Trotter implies that the best way to address the problem is to disembody journalism education from the repressive technocratic logic of the academic field and return it to the days of 'on the job' training. In other words, if journalists are to 'think independently', and better understand the inherently political character of journalism, Trotter's impression is that the academic field has no useful function in this respect and, by implication, is incapable of reconstituting itself in ways that are aligned with his own conception of journalism as politics. The presupposition seems to be that the role of 'training' is best left to the infrastructures of the media industry itself, which, coming from someone whose identity hinges around his antipathy to the market, adds further irony to Trotter's argument.

The subjective stance and the objective structures

My assessment of the two journalistic texts now needs to be contextualised with summary reference to the objective structures of the New Zealand journalistic field/academic field relationship that most obviously relate to the education of journalists. I have argued that both journalists assert an antagonism to the academic field, but in different ways that are structured by two different discourses about *what* constitutes theory. Du Fresne perceives an academy contaminated by ideology and politics (theory as indulgent philosophizing), while Trotter indicts the University environment for its arid professionalism and depoliticization of journalistic identities (theory as political detachment). Despite these differences, I see this shared antagonism as indicative of a distinct journalistic habitus. This is to say that the subjective dispositions of both journalists should not be understood as free-floating or individualistic, but symptomatic *and* constitutive of the 'objective' structures of the New Zealand journalistic field. The italicized emphasis is worth accentuating, because Du Fresne and Trotter are, in another sense, not 'typical' journalists, but high profile media intellectuals with a disproportionate power to publicly define journalistic identities. This paper does not offer a detailed discussion of the wider social practices that structure this hegemonic journalistic subjectivity (Macdonald, 2006), in particular the close institutional relationship between New Zealand journalism schools and the media industry, which, as in other national contexts, is often strategically articulated as a cross-field identification with a euphemistic

and industry-centric discourse of 'professionalisation' (Resse & Cohen, 2002; Garman, 2005). Nonetheless, one can at least make some general observations about how the construction of journalistic identities is dialectically structured by the disciplinary organisation of media, communication and journalism education in New Zealand.

One of the most culturally distinct features of the New Zealand academic field is its pronounced demarcation of 'journalistic', 'media' and 'communication(s)' identities. These structural and structuring logics are signalled by a number of indicators. For example, they are evident in the generally self-contained organisation of different professional bodies. Specific journalist identities are primarily affiliated to JEANZ, the Journalism Educators Association New Zealand, whose membership remains rooted in polytechnic cultures. The JTO (Journalists Training Organisation), the national body responsible for training, accredits ten Journalism Schools, only three of which are based in the University system (Journalists Training Organisation, 2008). 'Communication' identities are aligned with either NZCA (the New Zealand Communication Association) or the trans-Tasman, ANZCA (Australia and New Zealand Communication Association). Media, cultural and film studies researchers, if they feel a sense of group affiliation, are likely to identify with the still embryonic Media Studies Association of New Zealand (MEDIANZ).

These professional associations are indicative of an academic field logic where, in general, 'journalism' is signified as 'applied training', 'communication(s)' is signified as 'practical' and 'business- and organisational-centric', while media studies and cultural studies are signified as 'theoretical' and 'critical'. This bald assessment of the New Zealand context is of course crude and most programmes articulate an identity that purports to 'combine' theory and practice. However, the soundness of the general observation is supported by the fact that these broadly convergent identities are, despite their different institutional articulations, often demarcated within universities. For instance, the formal institutional structuring of the Bachelor of Communication degree programme at Massey University is organised around an administrative distinction between Department of Communication, Journalism and Marketing offerings in 'communication management', 'public relations' and 'journalism studies'⁹ and a School of English and Media Studies programme in 'media studies' and the 'creative arts'. A homologous distinction structures the administration of Waikato University, which demarcates the Department of Management Communication from the Department of Media and Film Studies. These quasi-disciplinary national distinctions are not absolute. Otago University is the home of a Department of Media, Film and Communication, Auckland University of Technology is developing a more expansive model of journalism education within a School of Communication structure, while Canterbury University articulates an intra-

Department identity that aligns 'journalism and mass communication'. Yet, even within the latter structure, the pedagogical process remains organized around a clear distinction between a 'theoretical' degree and 'practical' journalism qualifications.

It would be foolish to suggest that these hegemonic configurations are unique to New Zealand. Similar institutional distinctions can easily be identified in other national contexts (Gasher, 2005; Turner, 2000; Skinner et al, 2001),¹⁰ and identifying a broad structural homology should not imply a determinate outcome in terms of course content. Yet, broadly speaking, one consequence of the strong demarcation of quasi-disciplinary identities in the New Zealand context is that most specifically journalistic courses, particularly 'graduate' level courses, contain little or no 'theory' (as the term is typically understood in critical academic discourses). This is not to say that relevant papers or courses include no nominal 'theory', because even the most un-ambitious and applied course is likely to articulate its identity as a 'combination' of theory and practice. The need for scepticism about a contemporary rhetoric that promises to combine theory and practice is epitomised by the fact that the essentially 'empty' (Laclau, 2005) appeal to theory – which can of course signify a wide range of often contradictory meanings – was being used to bolster a discourse of New Zealand journalistic 'professionalism' as early as 1907 (Elsaka, 2005).¹¹ Therefore, to clearly distinguish what I understand by theory, this paper sides with people like Prichard, who equate 'theory' with reading – or at least distilling – the insights of critically engaged thinkers like Marx, Foucault, Bourdieu, Laclau, Fairclough, etc. and, what in a more precise disciplinary context is variously signified as 'journalism studies', 'critical communication studies', 'media studies', 'cultural studies' and 'critical political economy' scholarship. Hence, as I articulate it, to do theory in a 'critical journalism pedagogy' (Macdonald, 2006) is to reflect on, firstly, how knowledge and power are mutually constituted and, secondly, how power relations are articulated through practices of journalistic meaning-making and interpretation (Skinner et al 2001; Zelizer, 2004; Garman, 2005).¹²

I have obviously constructed the argument in a simplistic way that lumps a diverse array of conceptual perspectives into a singular category of 'theory'. However, my core argument about pedagogy is that these indicative theoretical resources need to be disarticulated from the enduring assumption in New Zealand and elsewhere (Skinner et al, 2001; Gasher, 2005) that they are the inherent 'property' of media studies and cultural studies programmes positioned in opposition to journalism. Instead, they need to be rearticulated, in contextually sensitive ways, as part of the formal education of journalists, particularly in universities. To not draw on them is, in my view, to simply position the academic field, either inadvertently or consciously, as a space for inculcating and reproducing the kind of journalistic habitus

represented by high profile journalists like Trotter and Du Fresne – or, at best, to critique the dominant habitus in an atheoretical and opinionated posture that remains distinctly journalistic, and which implicitly delegitimizes conceptual vocabularies that many students may have acquired during their undergraduate years. In short, I am suggesting that the relationship between academic field and journalistic field imperatives is imbalanced under a hegemonic ‘training’ regime that is structurally precluded from assessing journalistic practices from a theoretically-informed distance.

To be fair, the argument about the neglect of ‘theory’ – as I define it - needs to be qualified. Even some of the more resolute vocational elements in New Zealand journalism education are attempting to develop a more reflexive approach. This is exemplified by the most recent edition of the JTO’s, *Intro: A Beginners Guide to Professional News Gathering*, which features theoretical elements that were apparently absent in previous editions of the edited collection. This comparison between editions is not mine, but the assessment of one Karl Du Fresne (2008), who, in a derisory review of the book, lamented the contrast with the ‘much sharper practical focus’ of the 2004 edition; and, ironically, defended the doctrine of objectivity that Trotter constructs as the ‘theoretical’ enemy. Du Fresne has favourable things to say about some of the chapters in the book, but predictably denounces those elements that he suggests ‘more properly belong in media studies texts’. Reanimating the basic script used to attack Prichard, the new elements are characterised, inter alia, as a ‘theoretical swamp’, ‘a mire of academic theorizing’, ‘esoteric views’, ‘gibberish’, ‘politically correct silliness’ and ‘woolly ideas [that] are often expressed in an arcane, impenetrable language’. The anti-intellectualism of this review was explicated by AUT journalism Professor Martin Hirst, who, in a direct reply, responded to Du Fresne’s assessment with the rejoinder, ‘when “too much” theory is barely enough’.

Hirst’s rebuttal of a position that is typically unchallenged in New Zealand journalism does at least suggest that discursive spaces are emerging that challenge the hegemonic training model. In addition, some recent developments within the University system, such as the development of more theoretically-oriented ‘journalism studies’ programmes, point to the emergence of a clearer distinction between University and polytechnic cultures. However, one doesn’t have to look very far to point to the persistence of a delimiting conception of the relationship between the journalistic field and the academic field which, despite the incoherence of the different journalistic discourses, remains embedded in the assumption that ‘theory’ – however it is to be codified - is the enemy of practice. These hegemonic limits were exemplified by the configuration of the discussion panel on a recent broadcast of the Media7 programme, which was billed as an examination ‘of the often uneasy relationship

between journalism and academe'. None of the three members of the panel offered what could be called a distinct academic perspective on New Zealand journalism. Two members represented the more liminal figure of the practitioner-academic and both were, or had been, institutionally located outside the University system. The third member of the panel was a working journalist. Consequently, in the spirit of Trotter's column and Du Fresne's review, the general tone of the discussion was – to quote from the promotional blurb – structured by the question: 'does modern journalism education emphasise theory over practical skills?' (Media7 Blog, 2008).

My point is not to suggest that industry-centric perspectives are illegitimate or irrelevant. However, it is to highlight the deeply ideological nature of a discussion on a programme that, ironically, self-regards itself as a reflexive media space. And by ideology here I have in mind the concrete theoretical account formulated by Laclau (2005), who describes an ideological representation as a 'particular' discourse misrecognizing itself as the 'universal' one.

The question of democracy

So, what has the argument formulated so far got to do with the question of democracy? Well, one thing that seems self-evident about the hegemonic construction of journalistic identities is their strong identification with the signifier 'democracy' (Turner, 2000; Reese and Cohen, 2000). Of course, asserting an identity as 'democratic' doesn't make it so and mainstream journalistic identification is clearly aligned with a particular conception of democracy that has been hegemonized in capitalist liberal democracies. But, leaving aside the obvious critical objections, if we empathetically internalize the ideological identity (Deuze, 2005) of mainstream journalism, and the discourse of the 'fourth estate', journalism's official commitment to democratic values seems clear. One might assume, however naively, that this presupposes a normative ethos of respect for plurality and difference, even with the terms of the hegemonic liberal democratic order. Yet, as I highlighted in the earlier analysis, this commitment to a democratic ethos is often very superficial. Du Fresne assumes the role of lampooning a lone voice of qualified dissent to the Trade Me sale, though, notwithstanding the scornful tone, he does at least bring attention to Prichard's press release, which was basically ignored by most media. The only other mainstream journalistic outlet to cite it was the fortnightly magazine *National Business Review*, which was similarly disdainful in its assessment of Prichard's intervention (Bridgman, 2007, 127). In contrast to Du Fresne, a putative interest in democratization animates Trotter's column. Nonetheless, his conclusion seems to be that, when it comes to journalism at least, democratization has little to do with the world of education.

Therefore, despite their political differences (which are emblematic of the spectrum of democratic possibilities within mainstream media), both Du Fresne and Trotter articulate a conception of public democratic space, where 'the media' is fantasmatically misrecognized as the 'centre' (Couldry, 2003) of the social, and where, as Bourdieu (1998) argued so strongly, media intellectuals seek to colonize the public sphere and symbolically annihilate perspectives deemed external to the journalistic field (which, in turn, misrecognises itself as *the* space of popular democracy). One consequence of this ideology, or what Bourdieu would call *doxa* (Bourdieu and Eagleton, 1994, p. 268), is that the journalistic field becomes the site of a mundane 'symbolic violence' which is exemplified by the imperialistic logic underpinning Du Fresne's representation of Prichard as the 'previously unheard of management lecturer'. This banal, yet supremely hubristic, formulation prompts the obvious questions 'unheard of' 'where'? and by 'whom'?, the clear implication being that he has not been consecrated by the mainstream journalistic space. This posture of mundanely annihilating the democratic contribution of social spaces beyond the purview of the journalistic field is amplified by Du Fresne's suggestion that Prichard 'hasn't contributed a damn thing to the country's well being', the presupposition being that national 'well-being' has no longer anything to do with the sphere of education. Moreover, given the very accessible register of Prichard's Trade Me press release, there is considerable irony in Du Fresne's denunciation of the former's use of 'impenetrable [and, by implication, elitist and unrepresentative] academic mumbo-jumbo'.¹³

Although it might seem pessimistic, I want to redirect the formal identification with democracy that animates Du Fresne's disdain for the figure of the 'elite' academic by reformulating this paper's argument as two normative questions: how might the journalistic field function as a more genuinely democratic space? and, in particular, what could the academic field do to cultivate a more democratic 'mediapolis'? (Silverstone, 2007). In considering these questions, I find value in William Connolly's distinction between the pluralist norms of contemporary liberal democracies and what he envisions as a 'deep pluralism' (Connolly, 2005, p. 59). He conceptualises the latter as an ethos that cultivates a respect for and engagement with difference and a 'sensitivity [that is] attuned to the contemporary need to transfigure relations of social antagonism into relations of agonistic respect' (ibid, p. 48). This ethos is imagined as a way of being that seeks to tame the 'existential resentment' (Connolly, 2008, p. 57) that often imbues the recognition that all of us live in a world where not everyone shares our faith and worldview.¹⁴ Connolly tries, in effect, to move beyond the standard poststructuralist truism about the contingent and contestable nature of identity, to ask how recognition of the fact of contingency might inform the performative and relational dispositions that we bring to our everyday encounters with

identities different to our own. Hence, although he laments the political-cultural practices that are often performed in the name of 'democracy', Connolly encourages us to reflect on the radical potential of an existing liberal vernacular as a discursive resource for moving beyond the surface pluralism of the present.

Transposed to the antagonistic relationship between the journalistic and the academic fields, Connolly's ethos of deep pluralism would recognise the fundamental differences between the figures of the practitioner, practitioner-academic and academic, yet encourage modes of engagement where no-one seeks to symbolically annihilate the perspective of the others.¹⁵ Projecting this ethical disposition onto *all* identities is important, because it is to concede that critical academic discourses may also be imbued with fantasmatic logics that reduce the complex power relations of the journalistic field to the strawman figure of the 'journalist-automaton'. Of course, in 'visualizing' (Connolly, 2008) an alternative inter-field relationship, I am not trying to sideline the dialectic of cultural, political and economic factors that delimit the possibility of deep pluralistic relations in Aotearoa New Zealand. The most obvious structural constraint is the cosy, yet, on its own terms, quite successful institutional relationship between New Zealand educators and the wider media industry, where the academic field effectively renounces much of its (formal and latent) autonomy to 'serve' (Skinner et al, 2001) the training needs of the established industry infrastructure. What is displaced by these institutionalised practices is the possibility of an open-ended and theoretically-informed discussion of what mainstream journalism *could* be and an exploration of 'alternative' journalisms (Atton, 2003) that interrogate profit-centred corporate logics. These absences seem increasingly unsustainable given the corporate- and technology-led 'transformations' (Deuze, 2005) in capitalist media industries, which, if recent New Zealand trends are anything to go by, are unlikely to offer graduates the kind of employment opportunities that they did in the past. In this respect, Gasher's (2005) appeal to Canadian journalism educators seems equally appropriate to the New Zealand context:

Rather than serve the news industry, a function that journalism schools have come to take for granted.... they should instead position themselves as serving journalism in all its burgeoning forms; that is, journalism schools *must make a distinction* [italics added] between the news industry and journalism (p. 665).

The argument should not be misconstrued. I am not suggesting that the academic field should over-assert its autonomy in ways that are suddenly indifferent to practitioner perspectives, because such a move would most likely undermine some of the reasons for positive student identification with the current model. As elsewhere (Resse and Cohen,

2000, p. 215), many students are conceivably drawn to New Zealand journalism courses because of their strong vocational character and it would be wrongheaded to suggest that the educational infrastructure should be indifferent to 'applied' or 'skills-based' concerns. However, I am suggesting that if anything remotely like Connolly's democratic ethos is to be articulated in an educational context, this must be part of a wider infrastructural logic where educators reclaim some of their field-autonomy from industry, partly by opening up the pedagogical process to theoretical logics that are not premised on overidentification with the figure of the mainstream practitioner or the more liminal figure of the practitioner-academic. The challenge becomes one about imagining the future of our mediatized democracies and the distinct epistemological and civic contribution that the academic space could make to that process. These questions are, in short, too important for journalism education to remain primarily structured by industry-centric and capitalist imperatives.

Conclusion

This paper has examined two fragments of New Zealand journalistic discourse that articulate what I have characterised as an anti-democratic hostility to the academic field. I have argued that this subjective stance is symptomatic and constitutive of a more objective journalistic field logic and habitus that finds concrete material expression in the institutional design and structuring of journalism education programmes. My view is that New Zealand journalistic education is embedded in a fundamentally conservative network of surface pluralism that is insufficiently questioning, or worse indulging of, the kind of habitus exemplified, in different ways, by Du Fresne and Trotter. I have suggested that the academic field will continue to function as an instrument of the existing hegemonic order, so long as the teaching of journalism continues to be largely divorced from those critical pedagogical resources that can help illuminate some of the censoring and anti-democratic blind spots within the hegemonic journalistic habitus. This reconstitution of academic field identities needs to be done in a way that is not dismissive of journalists' positive ideological identification with democracy. Nor should it speak over the self-interpretations of journalists themselves; or be conveniently misread as the view that because journalism students should read Bourdieu, they should write like him also. Instead, although a common discursive articulation should not be assumed (Tønder, and Thomassen, 2006), 'democracy' should function as one of the master signifiers behind the attempt to articulate a more reflexive form of journalism education.

My argument should not be caricatured as the view that theory is the 'answer' to the complex quasi-structural problems of contemporary journalism or that theory should colonize the identity of journalism schools. Nor is it to say that theory should be taught in a way that

assumes a politically timid distance from the material 'realities' of the journalistic field; or what Derrida (1994) would more accurately call its 'artificiality', since the latter formulation stresses how, in a heavily mediatized world, 'actuality' is 'made' and 'actively produced'. However, it is to ask: what precisely is the academic field for if the process of educating journalists sidelines rigorous conceptual and critical inquiry into the question of democratic and political possibility? (Gounari, 2006). My argument is that the academic space must articulate a democratic identity that is about more than simply 'serving' (Gasher, 2005) the existing hegemonic order, otherwise we will have submitted to a universe where Bourdieu's (1998) concerns about the oppressive 'heteronomous' effects of mainstream journalistic field logics have already been normalized.

Finally, although the paper has focused on the specific relations between the academic field and the journalistic field, the argument clearly has implications for how the journalistic field negotiates relations of difference more generally. Ethnicity, economy, class, religion, gender are all sites of political-cultural conflict, where, to use Connolly's (2005) formulation, the antagonistic dimension is often unsatisfactorily 'transfigured' into relations of 'agonistic respect'. This paper assumes, like Silverstone (2007) that the political-cultural disposition of our media spaces is central to humans' capacity to transfigure. These are not just issues for journalists and educators, but for the entire polity in today's mediatized democracies.

Notes

1. I would like to thank Tim Corballis, Lincoln Dahlberg, James Hollings, Craig Prichard and Verica Rupar for their comments on an earlier draft.
2. I cite *The Dominion Post*, though Du Fresne's column is syndicated to a number of other Fairfax papers, including *The Press* and *The Nelson Mail*. This syndication of op-ed journalism is a commonplace feature of the regionalised and quite monopolistic New Zealand newspaper market. For example, even in the capital city Wellington, it is routine to find 'dairies' – i.e. local corner shops – that only stock *The Dominion Post*.
3. Brockie is the author of a weekly science column in *The Dominion Post*.
4. Du Fresne edited *The Dominion*, which merged with *The Evening Post* to become *The Dominion Post* in 2002.
5. My understanding of dialectical analysis loosely follows the non-deterministic account of Fairclough (2003, p. 214), who describes it as a method of analysis that assumes that 'processes, flows and relations have primacy over [what are often represented as distinct] elements, things, structures, etc'.
6. Despite its differences from a more prototypical poststructuralist identity, Bourdieu's work follows Laclau (2005) and others by recognising the inherently contingent, hegemonized and politicized nature of social objectivity.
7. Bourdieu's field theory is structured by a heuristic distinction between autonomous and heteronomous fields, which, to put it simply, attempts to map the 'relative' independence and dependence of different social spaces. Autonomous social fields are those that function primarily in terms of codes, logics, discourses, etc, that are internal to the particular field(s). Heteronomous social fields are, in contrast, structured more by practices that are, strictly speaking, external to the particular field. Thus, working with this ideal-type distinction, the general character of the

liberal democratic journalistic field can be described as heteronomous (Bourdieu, 1998), in that most 'mainstream' media institutions are structurally constrained by their dependency on advertising and sales; or, in the case of state-owned media, doubly constrained by their more direct vulnerability to the shifting imperatives of the political field (Champagne, 2005).

8. My understanding of hegemony follows Laclau, who, as Howarth (2004) observes, offers a theorization that goes beyond the narrow equation of hegemony with 'states of domination and political supremacy' (p. 256). In Laclau's account, hegemony not only functions as a category for conceptualising how *dominant* forms of social order have been constructed, but 'has been generalized into a more universal tool of analysis - functioning at the ontological level - and thus can be applied to the construction of *all* [italics added] forms of social order (270).
9. The more explicit theoretical focus of the 'journalism studies' major functions as a point of distinction with Massey's flagship 'graduate diploma in journalism', which continues to function as the standard 'professional' qualification.
10. At the same time, these distinctions do not seem to be as pronounced or as sedimented in other countries. For example, a more formal alignment of identities is suggested by the organisational constitution of MeCCSA, the Media, Communications & Cultural Studies Association in the UK, and the administrative organisation of prestigious Schools like the Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies. A pattern of converging identities is also indexed by the general absence of 'media studies' as a rival institutional signifier in US universities, and the organisation of professional bodies like ACEJMC, The Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications.
11. Elsaka (2005, p. 74) cites the following extract from a 1907 publication of the New Zealand Institute of Journalists: [the NZIJ will devise] 'measures for testing the qualifications of candidates for admission to professional membership of the Institute by examination in theory and in practice, or by any other actual and practical test'.
12. This is to envision a curriculum that not only foregrounds the 'question of epistemology' (Skinner, et al, 2001; p. 346), but also a concern with ontology, which Glynos and Howarth (2007, p. 109) describe as a mode of inquiry into the 'categorical and existential preconditions' of the social practices that are deemed worthy objects of knowledge in the first place.
13. Clearly, there is a good chance that this article could trigger a similar comical response if, to use a surveillance metaphor, it came under the journalistic radar. No doubt, extracts could be uprooted to coherently fit with the 'mumbo-jumbo' and 'pointy-head' stereotypes.
14. One of the salient features of Connolly's (2005) work is his attribution of the theological category of 'faith' to all belief systems and philosophies.
15. Of course, it can be difficult enough to find 'agonistic respect' for different belief systems within a neoliberalized university keen to serve industry and public policy imperatives. There is considerable irony here from a journalism education perspective. Because while, on the one hand, journalism education is critiqued within the academy for being insufficiently 'academized', its model of industry liaison is, in many respects, the discursive logic guiding a wider process of university 'restructuring'.

References

- Atton, C (2003) "What is 'alternative' journalism?", *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism*, 4 (3) pp. 267-272.
- Benson, R, & Neveu, E (2005) *Bourdieu and the journalistic field*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Bourdieu, P & Eagleton, T (1994) "Doxa and common life: an interview" in S Žižek (ed) *Mapping ideology*, London: Verso.
- Bourdieu, P & Wacquant, L (1992) *An invitation to reflexive sociology*, Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Bourdieu, P (1998) *On Television and Journalism*, London: Pluto.
- Bridgman, T (2007) "Assassins in academia? New Zealand academics as critic and conscience of society", *New Zealand Sociology*, 22 (1), pp 126-143

- Champagne, P (2005). "The 'double dependency': the journalistic field between politics and markets", in R Benson, & E Neveu, *Bourdieu and the journalistic field*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Connolly, W. E. (2005) *Pluralism*, Durham: Duke University Press.
- Connolly, W. E. (2008) *Capitalism and Christianity, American style*, Durham: Duke University Press.
- Couldry, N (2003) *Media rituals: a critical approach*, Oxfordshire: London.
- Derrida, J. (1994) "The deconstruction of actuality: an Interview with Jacques Derrida", *Radical Philosophy*, Autumn. Accessed from http://www.radicalphilosophy.com/default.asp?channel_id=2190&editorial_id=11041 on August 15, 2008.
- Deuze, M (2005) "What is journalism? Professional identity and ideology of journalists reconsidered", *Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism*, 6 (4) pp. 442-464.
- Du Fresne, K (2008) "Intro: what the journalists of the future are expected to read", *Scoop*. Accessed from <http://books.scoop.co.nz/an-intro-to-different-ideas-about-journalism/> on September 1 2008.
- Du Fresne, K (2006). "An assassin in academia", *The Dominion Post*, 21 March.
- Elsaka, N (2005) "New Zealand journalists and the appeal of 'professionalism' as a model of organisation: an historical analysis", *Journalism Studies*, 6 (1), pp. 73-86.
- EPMU (2007). "EPMU condemns APN outsourcing", *Scoop*, Press Release, April 13. Accessed from <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/PO0704/S00167.htm> on September 1 2008 .
- Fairclough, N (2003) *Analysing discourse: textual analysis for social research*, London: Routledge.
- Fairfax (2006) "Fairfax To Acquire Trade Me", *Scoop*, Fairfax Press Release, March 6. Accessed from: <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/BU0603/S00071.htm> on September 1 2008.
- Garman, A (2005) "Teaching journalism to produce 'interpretive communities' rather than just 'professionals'", *Ecquid Novi*, 26(2), pp. 199-211.
- Gasher, M (2005) "Commentary: it's time to redefine journalism education in Canada", *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 30, pp. 665-672.
- Glynos, J & Howarth, D (2007) *Logics of critical explanation in social and political theory*, London: Routledge.
- Glynos, J (2001) "The grip of ideology: a Lacanian approach to the theory of Ideology", *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 6 (2), pp. 191-214.
- Gounari, P (2006) "Contesting the cynicism of neoliberal discourse: moving towards a language of possibility", *Studies in Language & Capitalism*, 1, pp 77 – 96.
- Herman, E & McChesney, R (1997) *The global media: the new missionaries of corporate capitalism*, London: Continuum.
- Hirst, M (2008) "In defence of theory - a reply to Mr du Fresne's review of Intro", *Scoop*, accessed from <http://books.scoop.co.nz/an-intro-to-different-ideas-about-Journalism/> on September 1 2008.
- Hope, W. (2005) 'Editorial: corporate media news', *Pacific Journalism Review*, 10 (2), pp. 5-7.
- Howarth, D (2004) "Hegemony, political subjectivity, and radical democracy", in S Critchley & O Marchart (eds) *Laclau: a critical reader*, Routledge: London, pp. 256-276.

- Journalists Training Organisation (2008) "National qualifications". Sourced from <http://www.journalismtraining.co.nz/schools.html> on September 15.
- Laclau, E (2005) *On populist reason*, London: Verso.
- Laclau, E & Mouffe, C (2001, original 1985), *Hegemony and socialist strategy*, London: Verso.
- Macdonald, I (2006) "Teaching journalists to save the profession", *Journalism Studies*, 7 (5), pp. 745-764.
- Media7 Blog (2008) "17 September". Accessed from <http://tvnz.co.nz/view/page/1595409/1754879> on September 20 2008.
- New Zealand Herald (2008). "Fairfax Media set to cull 36 editorial jobs in NZ", August 26. Accessed from http://www.nzherald.co.nz/business/news/article.cfm?c_id=3&objectid=10529103 on September 15, 2008.
- Prichard, C, Boon, B, Bill, A & Jones, D (2006) "Creativity and class", *Ephemera*, 6 (4), pp. 517-525.
- Prichard, C (2006) "Sale of Trade Me a lost opportunity", Massey University Press Release. Accessed from http://masseynews.massey.ac.nz/2006/Press_Releases/03_15_05.html on May 15, 2008.
- Reese, S D & Cohen, J (2000) "Educating for journalism: the professionalism of scholarship", *Journalism Studies*, 1 (2), pp. 213-227.
- Robbie, D. (2007). "NZ: Making public journalism matter", Pacific Media Centre, August 12. Accessed from http://www.pmc.aut.ac.nz/niusbeat/070812_OM-MakingPublic.shtml on September 1, 2008.
- Rowe, D & Brass, K (2008) "The uses of academic knowledge: the university in the media", *Media, Culture and Society*, 30 (5), pp. 677-698.
- Silverstone, R (2007) *Media and morality: on the rise of the mediapolis*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Skinner, D, Gasher M J & Compton, J (2001) "Putting theory to practice: a critical approach to journalism studies", *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism*, 2 (3) pp 341-360.
- Tønder, L & Thomassen, L (2006) *Radical democracy: politics between abundance and lack*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Trotter, C (2007) "NZ: preaching to the converted", *The Dominion Post*, August 10. Accessed from http://www.pmc.aut.ac.nz/niusbeat/070810_OurMedia.shtml on May 15, 2008.
- Tully, J (2008) (ed) *INTRO: a beginner's guide to Professional News Journalism*, Wellington: New Zealand Journalists Training Organisation.
- Turner, G. (2000) "'Media wars': journalism, cultural and media studies in Australia", *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism*, 1 (3), pp. 353-365.
- Vaughan, G & Weir, J (2008) "New Zealand 'stands out' for Fairfax", *Stuff* website, August 22. Accessed from <http://www.stuff.co.nz/4664482a13.html> on September 15, 2008.
- Windschuttle, K (2000) "The poverty of cultural studies", *Journalism Studies*, 1 (1), pp. 145-159.
- Zelizer, B (2004) *Taking journalism seriously: news and the academy*, London: Sage.
- Žižek, S (1989) *The sublime object of ideology*, London: Verso.

About the author

Sean Phelan is a lecturer at the Department of Communication, Journalism and Marketing, Massey University, Wellington, where he teaches and researches on news media, political communication and critical communication. He has published articles on neoliberalism, the September 11 attacks, the 2003 Iraq war and Aotearoa New Zealand race relations. Email: s.phelan@massey.ac.nz.

Democracy, the academic field and the (New Zealand) journalistic habitus

Phelan, Sean

2008

<http://hdl.handle.net/10179/9699>

20/01/2020 - Downloaded from MASSEY RESEARCH ONLINE