

going down | the hole

*Beaconsfield, Celebrities and the
Changing News Culture in Australia* | JASON BAINBRIDGE

We didn't realise the hype would be as big as it has been, and it hasn't really sunk in yet. When we were down the hole one day, I remember tapping Brant on the shoulder and asking him if he thought we'd make the front page of *The [Launceston] Examiner*, our local paper. Then we get out and Oprah wants to interview us!

Todd Russell¹

I would like my life to settle down and to be normal again ... Before we could go outside and there would be no cameras on us but now cameras follow Dad and everyone wants his autograph ... And I wish the media would mind its business because they say things that are not true.

Maddison Russell (Todd Russell's daughter, from a writing competition)²

— INTRODUCTION

By the time this article sees print, the events at Beaconsfield, Tasmania will have joined a backlog of similar news moments, largely unremembered by all but those who were personally affected by what happened there. Yet for fourteen days in mid-2006 this small mining town became, like so many places before it, 'the network executive's best friend'³ and an indication of a significant change in the way television news is reported and packaged in Australia.

At 9.23 pm, on 25 April (Anzac Day), a rockfall at the Beaconsfield gold mine killed miner Larry Knight (his body was recovered two days later). On 30 April, two miners—Todd Russell and Brant Webb—were discovered to still be alive one kilometre underground. According to the director of the rescue team, Peter Hatswell, the men were discovered when 'Patrick [Ball, the underground mine manager] or one of the shift bosses, heard them down there

singing country-and-western songs';⁴ they had survived on water dripping from the mine walls collected in one of the miner's helmets and a muesli bar. They would remain there for another ten days until, on Tuesday 9 May at 4.00 am, the rescuers finally broke through.

That night television channels Nine and Seven both announced (separate) benefit concerts for Beaconsfield, a Channel Seven presenter jumped into the back of 'his friend' Todd Russell's ambulance, the CEO of the Nine Network turned up at the local bar, setting down a \$15,000 tab, and on the following Thursday Russell and Webb made their first media appearance since emerging from the mine ... on *The Footy Show*. Beaconsfield was an event in every sense of the word. As a news story, it was a world exclusive, focusing on the longest time miners have spent alive underground in recent memory and something that was especially timely given the recent mining tragedy at the Sago Mine in West Virginia, USA. As a media event it dominated front pages around the country⁵ and was a major ratings coup. To put it into perspective:

In a normal ratings week, the top 10 ratings chart begins with a show that attracts about 2 million viewers in the mainland capitals, and tapers off to a show that gets about 1.3 million. [In the second week of May, during the unfolding events in Beaconsfield] every program in the top ten got more than 1.6 million, and five got more than 2 million ... Tuesday [the day the miners came out of the mine] was the most watched weekday of the year ... Between 6 pm and 10.30 pm on Tuesday, 5,026,600 people in the mainland capitals were watching free-to-air TV—400,000 more than on the equivalent Tuesday [in 2005].⁶

But, beyond any of this, Beaconsfield is a notable event because it marks a change in the way television news is packaged and reported in this country, confirmation of the increasing tabloidisation and commodification of news in Australia and the impact of celebrity on news production.⁷ This essay looks at the period from Russell and Webb's rescue up to and including Channel Nine's screening of an exclusive interview with the men on 21 May 2006. It uses the reporting of Beaconsfield as a way of exploring notions of celebrity and infotainment and concludes with suggestions for further research.

— CONTEXT

While there has always been a rivalry between Australia's commercial television stations, in the last two years the ratings war between channels Nine and Seven has become increasingly intense. Traditionally, Nine has been virtually unassailable—as reflected by their network slogan, 'Still the One'—particularly in news and current affairs, whereas Seven's strength came from local drama and some imported product. But the success of Seven's morning news program *Sunrise* and its 5.30 pm game-show lead-in to the news (*Deal or No Deal*) allowed Seven to wrest the lead from Nine in the latter part of 2005. By 2006 this had carried over

to the all-important 6.30 pm current affairs arena where Seven's *Today Tonight* started to regularly outperform Nine's *A Current Affair*. Nine's slip in the ratings was highlighted when Seven, together with the fourth commercial network, Ten, and multicultural broadcaster SBS and public broadcaster ABC, voted against Nine being the pool broadcaster at Beaconsfield. Suddenly, Beaconsfield had become the proverbial jewel in the ratings crown, the test to see which channel viewers would go to for 'the big events'.⁸

It was at this point that Beaconsfield moved from simply being a news story to being a media event. Four of the networks sent teams to Beaconsfield and announced live broadcasts that would break into existing programming whenever the rescue occurred. It is this willingness to break into existing programming, to disrupt the schedule, that heralds the media event.⁹ Seven and Nine further increased their chances of 'being the first' by hosting their Melbourne news broadcasts and current affairs programs live from the mine, often producing a strange disjunction between location and content. In Seven's *Today Tonight* for example, anchor Naomi Robson appeared on location at the Beaconsfield mine and, after an update on the situation there, threw to a story on dieting (on 1 May 2006) leading ABC's *Media Watch* to decry that 'even down at Beaconsfield they were still looking for miracles'.¹⁰

In an article on Beaconsfield for *Crikey.com*, Martin Hirst describes this form of news reporting as 'the blanket', a relatively new reporting style he identifies as arising with the coverage of Princess Diana's death. For events that 'attract the genuinely empathetic and the curious voyeur' the media 'has to throw a blanket over them and promote constant repetitive coverage'.¹¹ This results in a 'one in all in' approach to reporting where 'once one media outlet decides to throw the "blanket" over an event, everyone else has to scramble and catch up', that is, 'everyone has to be "under the blanket"'. To improve on a network's viewership the network has to be seen as 'owning the story', which means:

sending the network's highest profile reporters, anchors and on-air 'stars' into the centre of the story. This creates an impression that the network is taking the story seriously and that its high profile talent really cares about the ordinary folk caught up in a [sic] drama.¹²

Furthermore, it establishes a hierarchy among news organisations, with television crews and reporters taking precedence over newspaper journalists in the battle for the breaking story, the best shot, the grab, the scoop. While newspapers traditionally set the agenda for news, the media event displaces the newspaper, so it is television (and particularly the morning news series) that establishes the direction of reporting for each day.¹³ Television's prominence is maintained through convergent technologies, like the internet, where webcams kept a watchful eye over Beaconsfield on the *A Current Affair* and *Today Tonight* web pages.¹⁴

Of course, the other reason for Australia's free-to-air television networks having to go to blanket live coverage of events like the Beaconsfield rescue is in order to compete against

cable (pay) television's news coverage. Discussion of this factor is beyond the scope of this essay, which focuses on the impact Beaconsfield had on the free-to-air channels (particularly Nine and Seven), but the coverage of Beaconsfield also confirms the significant inroads being made into news coverage in Australia by pay television, primarily because of pay television's ability to provide live and open-ended news coverage. The blanket coverage of Beaconsfield is therefore indicative of the money, time and resources the free-to-air sector is willing to spend in order to compete with pay television and assert primacy in the news arena.¹⁵

But media events like the Beaconsfield rescue also problematise ideas of agenda setting as they 'clear the air of competing issues ... [and] demand rapt attention to the only legitimate event on society's agenda'.¹⁶ This creates problems when other stories that have competing news values arise—like the Torres Strait Island survival story (where a father, son and nephew survived twenty-two days at sea) and the Federal Budget, which both ran during Beaconsfield. That the Beaconsfield story ultimately 'blinded' the audience to these other stories reveals not only how precedence among news stories is determined, but also how the imperative to inform is ultimately subordinated to entertainment. Hirst puts this down to cultural, technological and racial demands—the 'blanket effect' described above, the relative inaccessibility of the Torres Strait castaways (being based at sea rather than land) and the fact Beaconsfield involved 'two white boys from Tasmania' versus 'three brave Indigenous sailors from non-mainstream northern Australia'.¹⁷ In an amazingly forthright editorial, Garry Linnell, editor of the *Bulletin*, confirmed that Beaconsfield's coverage was in direct proportion to the way 'the media valued lives and stories', going on to reduce news coverage to a series of equations, where one white Australian life is worth several thousand African ones, based not in racism but 'on [the] interest level of [the] Australian public'.¹⁸ The media event is therefore most often based around two news values: proximity and human interest.

Margaret Simons describes the decision to cover Beaconsfield rather than the budget as a choice between 'the money or the miracle'.¹⁹ While clearly an important story, the budget lacks 'the elements' of Beaconsfield, what Seven news director Peter Meakin calls 'the bitter-sweet story'.²⁰ Once again, Simons sees this as a significant change in the role of newspapers since the introduction of online news. 'More than ever,' Simons concludes, 'people are looking to papers for *depth*, rather than *news*'.²¹ Beaconsfield therefore highlights the ways in which newspapers are increasingly becoming adjuncts to television and online. Here, the 'newness' or 'currency' of news becomes the province of the electronic media with the print media being left to fill in the details, offering perspectives and providing background information. In this case, Channel Seven, through its morning infotainment program *Sunrise*, was the first to break the news that the miners were out.

Sunrise can be classified as an infotainment show as it provides a mixture of 'soft' news, live performances, consumer affairs and celebrity stories. The genre is part of the trend toward tabloid television that started in the early 1990s and had become the mainstream 'norm' by the middle of that decade.²² Screening on Channel Seven between 6.00 am and 9.00 am, *Sunrise* follows the lead of American morning television by blending regular news bulletins with celebrity news, international stories and social issues. The audience is continually reminded that this is a 'news' series through the use of the ubiquitous 'CNN' crawl across the bottom of the screen—and by the fact that newsreader Natalie Barr and sports reporter Mark Beretta are included among the 'friends' the audience is encouraged to 'wake up with'.²³

Since its debut, *Sunrise* has steadily eroded the ratings of Nine's then dominant breakfast news program *Today* and now consistently out-performs *Today* in the ratings. (Former *Today* hosts Liz Hayes moved to *60 Minutes*, Steve Liebman retired after a heart attack and Tracy Grimshaw moved to *A Current Affair*.) A great deal of *Sunrise*'s success comes from the chemistry and easy banter of its hosts, Melissa Doyle and David Koch. Both project an everyman/familial appeal that manifests in their on-screen appellations of 'Mel' and 'Kochie'.

Mel and Kochie offer a carefully constructed, easy intimacy. Peter Meakin, Seven's director of news and current affairs, describes Mel and Kochie's appeal as being based in part on the fact that 'They don't look like TV stars, there is a down-to-earth quality about both of them, that's why they work and that's why the show works. They have got the common touch.'²⁴ Adam Boland, *Sunrise*'s executive producer, claims that this enabled Mel and Kochie to build a relationship with the Beaconsfield miners and their families. 'The families trust Mel and Kochie, they trust the *Sunrise* team; we've been seeing them on a daily basis.'²⁵ Indeed, on the Tuesday the miners were released Mel and Kochie promised the Russells they would fly back to Beaconsfield on the weekend.

Mel and Kochie are ambiguous personalities. In their continual conflation of private (frequent discussions of their families and, in Koch's case, opinions) and public (interviews, reports, hosting engagements) Mel and Kochie are simultaneously everyday people and television hosts, journalists and friends. This raises the possibility that, like radio talkback hosts, they may not actually be subject to the same ethical codes as journalists. Indeed, this was the defence raised in the talkback radio 'cash for comment' scandal, implying that talkback radio hosts could not be held to the same ethical standards as journalists.²⁶ But in the case of *Sunrise*, it also means that Mel and Kochie can function as celebrities.

The celebrity is defined by Todd Gitlin as 'the familiar stranger'²⁷ and we can clearly see how this definition applies to Mel and Kochie. They are at once made intimate through the

familial details they provide, but remain forever strangers, removed from their audience by the television screen. As a way of teasing out this idea of the 'familiar stranger', Chris Rojek describes the way audiences can develop 'parasocial' relationships with people they only know through the media in ways that are similar to 'real' friends and colleagues.²⁸ This became apparent during Mel and Kochie's time in Beaconsfield, where they were continually approached by people in the town and, more particularly, through the connection Russell felt with Kochie from watching him at the end of his shift (Russell worked 6.00 pm to 6.00 am, the time that *Sunrise* usually starts), 'in a small life in a small town, Koch loomed large from the screen—a link to a wider, more interesting and light-filled world'.²⁹ According to Wright, before he had even come out of the mine Russell asked if he could meet Kochie as soon as he could: 'Tell the fat bastard I want him here when I come out—I've got something for him'.³⁰ Upon his eventual release he (allegedly) shouted out to Kochie and waved him over to the ambulance where he presented him with his miner's identification tag.³¹ Boland defended Kochie's 'raw emotion' and claimed the ambulance incident was spontaneous with 'no expectation beyond a meeting at some stage, anything could have happened'.³² More cynically, Daniel Boorstin refers to celebrities as 'counterfeit people'³³ and, judgments aside, the term seems apt here. Mel and Kochie are indeed 'counterfeit people', constructions that, however familiar they may seem, must remain very different to the 'real' Melissa Doyle and David Koch. Furthermore, a counterfeit person is one who can move between multiple roles. Unlike the vast majority of journalists, Mel and Kochie are simultaneously journalists and friends, capable of using the 'parasocial' relationship they've engendered through *Sunrise* to get the story (if not the exclusive) they are after.

Sunrise also blurs the division between consumer (a capitalist construction) and citizen (a political construction) by allowing their viewers to 'set the agenda' for parts of the show using instant polls that encourage responses from the audience via emails, letters and SMS messaging. Martin Hirst and Roger Patching suggest this could be another 'news' function coming out of the MEAA Code of Ethics' directive that journalists should 'inform citizens and animate democracy'. But while polling the audience for what is important to them is certainly cheaper than investigative reporting and encourages the perception that *Sunrise* 'campaigns for populist issues', Hirst and Patching go on to suggest that these polls are more motivated to 'animate' the target demographic than any notions of democracy.³⁴

Encouraging audience involvement that is underscored by the easy banter of its presenters, *Sunrise* develops a community feel, reinforced by the tagline 'wake up with friends', the presence of roving weatherman Grant Denyer in various small-town communities and the launch (in 2006) of 'the *Sunrise* family'—an official fan club viewers can join online. Therefore, when both channels Nine and Seven announced separate benefit concerts, it made sense that the 'community' series, *Sunrise*, would host the *Sunrise* benefit concert. Featuring

singers Anthony Callea and David Campbell, this was promoted as a ‘three-hour broadcast [during which] Mel and Kochie will be reunited with many of the town’s miners, family members and rescue workers who they became so close to during the rescue of Todd Russell and Brant Webb’,³⁵ so that even the press release underscores Mel and Kochie’s friendliness. The most recent example of the journalist as ‘friend’ would be the appointment of Katie Couric (lured by a US\$20 million salary) to CBS’s nightly news. Like Mel and Kochie, she brings with her a ‘parasocial’ relationship with viewers, honed through her time on America’s *Today* show (which is something of a model for *Sunrise*) and her appointment has been regarded as a ringing endorsement of this kind of ‘celebrity journalism’.³⁶

Ultimately the *Sunrise* benefit concert went to air with news bulletins and the ever-present crawl announcing that Channel Nine had secured the exclusive interview ‘after Channel Seven had pulled out’. There was a subtle shift over the course of the concert with Mel and Kochie frequently reminding the audience that they must not forget the other heroes—the rescuers. But Mel and Kochie also used the opportunity to consolidate their role as ‘friends’. They spoke publicly during the benefit of how they had encountered Russell’s family, how they had told them there were no hard feelings and that this was what was best for them. More extraordinarily, the following day both admitted that they found it hard, given the nature of the miners’ exclusive with Nine (which barred the miners or any of their family members from attending the *Sunrise* concert or inviting the *Sunrise* hosts to their home for a farewell morning tea), that they couldn’t see the miners anymore. Mel went so far as to add: ‘I miss them’.

Hirst views such anchor investment in the story (where the anchor ‘becomes an integral part of the story in some way’) as a by-product of ‘owning the story’³⁷ and thereby branding the story for the network. Here, the aim is to make it impossible to think of Beaconsfield without thinking of Mel and Kochie and therefore associate the event with the Seven network. But Beaconsfield is replete with examples: Naomi Robson’s (host of Seven’s *Today Tonight*) “‘princess’ performance’;³⁸ Kochie’s ‘bloke’s bloke bonding with the trapped miners’; Richard Carleton’s (Nine’s *60 Minutes* reporter) on-air death following a question at a media conference (on 7 May).³⁹ In each instance the story becomes about the reporting of the story. Even after the story, the reporter is still implicated: the Australian *Women’s Weekly*’s cover-story focuses on (Nine’s *A Current Affair* presenter) Tracy Grimshaw’s ‘anguish’ with the heading ‘Beaconsfield has changed my life forever’.⁴⁰ Again, Boorstin is valuable here, referring to such stories about the reporting of the story as ‘pseudo-events’, becoming further and further removed from the original story. Beaconsfield can therefore be once again classed as an event because it generates its own ‘pseudo-events’—stories about its stories. The actual issue of mine safety is left to small pieces on news bulletins, with in-depth coverage being given over to the miners, their families and the reporters involved.

Beaconsfield also reveals the many layers of celebrity at work in the packaging of the news story. Nine CEO Eddie McGuire is quoted as having been in Beaconsfield 'to support colleagues after the death of journalist Richard Carleton at the mine site',⁴¹ but rumours circulated that McGuire had already been negotiating with the Australian Workers' Union's Bill Shorten to lobby for a Nine exclusive with the men and that when he saw Kochie being welcomed into the back of Russell's ambulance, McGuire realised he needed to go to Beaconsfield himself to counter Mel and Kochie's influence. He needed to trump their celebrity with his own.

McGuire first appeared at Beaconsfield in a live cross to reporter Martin King at local bar on *A Current Affair*. Stepping out of the background, McGuire is seen chatting with locals, dressed down for the occasion. According to both Young and Meade, McGuire announced his presence at the bar by saying: 'I am coming out of retirement to host one more *Footy Show* here in Beaconsfield ... Free drinks on me', going on to state that one of the local's responses was 'Lock it in' (echoing McGuire's famous phrase from his time hosting *Who Wants to be A Millionaire?*).⁴²

Graeme Turner notes that the celebrity typically emerges from either the sports or entertainment industries;⁴³ through his role on *The Footy Show* Eddie McGuire conflated both, becoming president of Collingwood Football Club and presenter of the game show *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* Furthermore, the celebrity is highly visible in the media; McGuire hosted *The Footy Show*, *Millionaire* and several special telecasts for Nine (including the Logies awards and the tsunami benefit concert) and commentated the football while being president of Collingwood. After his move to CEO, McGuire's attempts to turn Nine around had been widely reported and his private life had increasingly become an object of discussion (arguably before this his 'private life' amounted to reports on his football-related activities).

Eddie McGuire is therefore the inverse of American celebrity mogul Donald Trump. Whereas Trump went from CEO to game-show host (in *The Apprentice*) McGuire went from game-show host (*Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*) to CEO of Nine. Paul Leeds, media buyer Starcom executive, identified McGuire's style as different from other media executives because of his 'on air experience ... Eddie has a high public profile rather than business profile ... That's the major difference', leading Westerman to question whether Channel Seven had been outmanoeuvred by 'the Eddie McGuire cult of personality'.⁴⁴

Being a celebrity CEO has several implications. McGuire is at once a commodity responsible for other commodities. He can use his celebrity to benefit the network (to win the exclusive interview with Russell and Webb he allegedly drew on his private life, the fact that his father was a miner, as well as various football stories) but the fact he is CEO also means that he

trumps all of the other celebrities on his network. McGuire acknowledges that ‘if it means the difference to getting a win, me doing something, you don’t have to ask me twice’.⁴⁵ Similarly Michael Smith, of Inside Public Relations, explains that in contrast to a celebrity like Kochie, ‘The big advantage is that Eddie can do the whole box and dice. He’s the boss.’⁴⁶ The celebrity CEO can therefore match the ‘power of influence’ normally wielded by the celebrity with genuine economic power.

But McGuire’s celebrity can also work against him. Turner notes that ‘audiences regard the celebrity more ambiguously: their success is as likely to be attributed to good fortune as to ability, and they may be objects of derision as well as desire’.⁴⁷ In part Turner attributes this to the fact that celebrities ‘seem defined by their constructedness’ lacking ‘the certain authenticity’ belonging to stars that ‘made it possible to argue they served a social function’.⁴⁸ Hence, during the events at Beaconsfield, we have McGuire’s incessant appeals to authenticity—putting on a bar tab, talking about his love of football, dressing down and referring to his father’s work as a miner. Like Mel and Kochie, he functions as a ‘counterfeit person’, moving between the multiple roles of CEO, de facto journalist (in that he gets the story) and friend.

We can see some of this negative backlash emerging during McGuire’s time in Beaconsfield. As Boorstin once again notes, the celebrity is disparaged as being ‘famous for being famous’.⁴⁹ Here, McGuire’s ubiquitous appearances at Beaconsfield earned him the appellation ‘Eddie Everywhere’. Westerman goes on to cite an insider who said in reference to Beaconsfield: ‘It’s all about Eddie now’⁵⁰ while *Crikey.com*’s Glenn Dyer notes the difficult position Eddie’s dual role can put him in: ‘if it’s Eddie the manager doing the interview, where does the commercial side of the transaction start and finish, and where does the journalistic side of the transaction start?’⁵¹

This idea of journalist as friend really informs both networks’ approach to Beaconsfield and carries through to their ‘benefit concerts’; as noted above, on the night of the miners’ rescue channels Nine and Seven both announced separate benefit concerts. While Seven’s aired as part of *Sunrise* the following week, Channel Nine’s aired through a series of live crosses on *The Footy Show* that Thursday. It was held at the Beaconsfield Community Centre, to raise money for the Australian Workers’ Union’s Beaconsfield Mines Support Fund. By couching their presence in Beaconsfield in ‘benefit concerts’, both networks concealed their efforts to brand the story by performing some broader public good.

— NEWSTAINMENT

The Footy Show is a national sporting series on Channel Nine. Depending on what part of the country you’re in (traditionally the northern part of Australia is dominated by rugby, the

southern part by Australian Rules football) one version of *The Footy Show* airs in primetime with its counterpart airing thereafter. While *The Footy Show* has flirted with news (especially in breaking stories related to the sport), it is primarily a variety/panel show—with a penchant for bad jokes and men dressing up in women's clothing.

The choice of *The Footy Show* as the frame for a live cross to Nine's Beaconsfield benefit concert is an interesting one, primarily motivated by McGuire (as former host of the show), by the timing of the event (this is the earliest in the schedule Nine could have arranged such a concert to be screened) and by the interests of the miners (both are devotees of the AFL and Beaconsfield as a whole is described as a 'football community'). Allegedly part of McGuire's rapport with 'the boys' was developed through trading stories about football. There was, therefore, a strange disjunction that the benefit concert appears, exactly the same, on both footy shows. Again, depending on where you were in the country, the event was framed by either the AFL or NRL *Footy Show*—even though the logo that appears onstage, the presence of McGuire and the interests of Beaconsfield were all clearly filtered through the AFL. Together, with musical performances from popular *Australian Idol* runner-up Shannon Noll, the concert featured AFL 'identities' Dermott Brereton, Billy Brownless, Nathan Brown and Peter Hudson paired with NRL 'identities' Phil Gould and Andrew Johns and Melbourne Storm players Billy Slater and Michael Crocker.

It is Russell and Webb's appearance on *The Footy Show*, ostensibly to thank their rescuers and 'Australia for their support',⁵² that marks the most profound shift in the way news is reported, underscored by the fact that it was branded as 'a *Footy Show* exclusive'.⁵³ Moving beyond 'infotainment', what we have here is what Hirst and Patching refer to as 'newstainment': the way 'news information is being steadily diluted with entertainment values ... to the point that it is becoming impossible to tell where news ends and entertainment begins'.⁵⁴ Their use of the term comes from the satirical Australian news series *CNNNN (The Chaser Non-stop News Network)* which self-referentially branded itself as 'newstainment' by blending elements of the current affairs program and the game show in audience participation segments like 'body count bingo'.⁵⁵

Prior to Beaconsfield 'newstainment' was the province of satire, but with Russell and Webb's appearance on *The Footy Show* the news story suddenly spills outside the category of news and becomes variety. News is therefore packaged as entertainment, as another segment (albeit the most important segment) of the variety show that is *The Footy Show*.⁵⁶ This also has the effect of subordinating news to the general principles of television (flow and delay)⁵⁷ where our consumption of Russell and Webb's story is delayed (by the bidding war, by the wait for the exclusive interview) and yet flow is maintained (through the appearance on *The Footy Show* the miners remain visible, encouraging us to keep watching, awaiting the big interview).

In many ways this makes *The Footy Show* a kind of audition, a way of testing whether the miners are ‘worth’ the price of a big interview, how well the miners will relate to an audience and a teaser for the main event—the highly priced interview itself. As Dyer puts it:

TV producers say that it [*The Footy Show* appearance] will also be a low cost way of screen-testing the two miners to see what sort of TV talent they are and whether it will be worth paying a lot of money for exclusive rights. Tonight could show that one or both are natural TV talent ... Consider the Footy Shows tonight a trial run...⁵⁸

Furthermore *The Footy Show* marks the point at which the Beaconsfield story becomes a commodity. *The Footy Show* appearance prompted widespread media speculation that the miners’ future deals could be ‘devalued’, the first time the story is discussed in economic terms. Michael Smith, of Inside Public Relations, saw it as the right decision for the men to take: ‘They can’t afford to sit around for weeks, and it gets the thank yous out of the way’.⁵⁹ McGuire himself concurs when he says:

This is just an amazing story and I don’t think it devalues it at all ... To be perfectly honest (their appearance) shows what ripping blokes they are ... In the past we’ve seen people go from hero to zero in these TV bidding wars. These blokes are just natural blokes ... if they lose some money tonight [with *The Footy Show* appearance] they’re not too worried, because they’re actually coming down to raise money for their colleagues.⁶⁰

— CHEQUEBOOK JOURNALISM

The commodification of the story is confirmed in the following exchange between McGuire and the miners at the conclusion of their speech:

Eddie: Todd, I’ve gotta ask you though—I’d get sacked as the journo—I’d have to front the CEO tomorrow if I didn’t ask you a question about what it was like down in that mine.

Todd Russell: Listen mate—Tell me how big your chequebook is and we’ll talk.

Brant Webb: Fair call.

[Eddie smiles and laughs, crowd applauds and cheers.]

While chequebook journalism has been around for as long as the newspaper, rarely has it been so openly referred to or produced such a positive reaction from an audience. Its recent prevalence may in part be a result of the impact of media convergence on journalism, where television stations and magazines with common ownership (for example PBL which owns both Channel Nine and the magazines *The Bulletin* and *Women’s Day*) will combine to buy a story that can then appear across a number of platforms. In this case, along with the attendant media interest during the rescue, Russell and Webb featured as the cover story

in three consecutive issues of the *Bulletin*, on both editions of *The Footy Show*, in a two-hour interview on Channel Nine on Sunday, with follow-up stories on *A Current Affair*, Nine (and WIN) *News* and *Today*, a *Woman's Day* story and a *Women's Weekly* story, all properties of Publishing and Broadcasting Limited (PBL). A book on the rescue of Todd and Brant, *Bad Ground*, was later produced by *Bulletin* national affairs editor Tony Wright.

The Media Entertainment Arts Alliance (MEAA) code of ethics does not preclude chequebook journalism—though the 1990s review committee recommended the automatic disclosure of payments to sources.⁶¹ In relation to ‘non-celebrities who are associated with a newsworthy event, often a tragedy’, the category into which both Russell and Webb clearly fall, the review committee also raised the question: ‘so long as other relevant ethical standards are met, have people a right, in effect, to ‘commodify their suffering?’⁶² Leading up to *The Footy Show* appearance McGuire was reported as urging the miners to ‘quickly’ negotiate a media deal ‘to make the most out of their ordeal financially’.⁶³ He went on to add: ‘I want these guys to get as much hooch as they can out of this, because they have gone through an ordeal’.⁶⁴

Chequebook journalism serves as the clearest indication of the way news is increasingly being treated as another commodity.⁶⁵ Much like the civil remedies for the law of torts, chequebook journalism actually places a monetary value on suffering, on injury, on life. Chequebook journalism is of central importance in what American news critic Daniel Hallin terms journalism’s ‘ambivalent identity’, that precarious balance between ‘the public-interest culture of journalism and the culture of commodity-production’.⁶⁶ The acceptance of chequebook journalism as just another business expense is indicative of how journalism’s acceptance of the free market economy frequently overrides the public functions of the news media in a variety of ways; chequebook journalism ‘keep[s] that information out of rival media’, thus ‘subver[ting] the rights of the people they are supposed to champion’;⁶⁷ chequebook journalism encourages ‘greed on the part of the seller and a frantic, unseemly scramble between buyers to outbid their rivals’;⁶⁸ finally, chequebook journalism ultimately results in ‘embellishment’ of what actually occurred, as interviewees try to live up to the cost of the story.⁶⁹

Former *Sydney Morning Herald* editor David Bowman criticises the 1944 Australian Journalists Association (AJA) code of ethics for its failure to deal with public concerns about privacy and chequebook journalism. But at the same time, Bowman suggests that journalists ‘have no choice but to abide, by and large, by ethics accepted by the public’.⁷⁰ What then are we to make of the public’s ethics following the audience’s response to Russell’s comment about Eddie’s ‘chequebook’ with, as Emma Tom describes it, ‘an almighty cheer’?⁷¹ Dale suggests the motivation for this action may be ‘because the audience was made up of Beaconsfielders who relished the thought of a couple of local lads screwing big media

types from the mainland'.⁷² More importantly, it reveals the public's increased knowledge, acceptance and support of chequebook journalism in cases like Russell and Webb's.

Another issue that is raised here is what is actually being commodified: the 'suffering' (the story) or the miners themselves? Russell lashed out at cameramen while attending a Bridgenorth Parrots football game in northern Tasmania, asking them to 'Leave me alone ... have some respect', and Meade and Rintoul suggest that for Russell, 'selling his story for millions means he has no privacy, not so soon after Australia has claimed him as the embodiment of courage, not so soon after he has become public property', referring to the miners as 'the most sought-after media commodity on, it would seem, the planet'.⁷³ Therefore, through the commodification of their stories, Russell and Webb themselves become commodities too.

The potential for Russell and Webb to become celebrities was ever present throughout the Beaconsfield event. They were constantly framed in media reports as 'real working-class Australians', 'ripping blokes', 'natural blokes',⁷⁴ and *The Footy Show* also became an opportunity for the miners to display how well they can perform their 'ordinariness'. As Turner notes, for the 'ordinary' celebrity 'ordinariness is constructed in particular ways that serve the interests of the program ... [because] the ordinary is enabled by the appeal of the celebrity'.⁷⁵

The problems of celebrity became another 'pseudo-event' spinning out of the story. The *Bulletin* featured a companion piece on the perils of celebrity and interviews with other celebrities equating celebrity to another peril the miners have to overcome.⁷⁶ The 8 August 2006 edition of Tasmania's *Mercury* newspaper similarly featured Russell on their front page with multiple references to 'the pit of celebrity'; Russell complaining: 'It was hard to start with, all the media attention. Some of them just don't respect anyone's privacy ... They hounded us, you've got no idea.'⁷⁷ Six months on (31 October 2006), the *Bulletin's* article to coincide with the release of *Bad Ground* was titled 'The Reluctant Rock Stars' but the words on the cover were perhaps more telling: 'Still trapped ... Fame. Fortune. Nightmares. Why the Beaconsfield miners can't escape their demons.' Once again, the horrors of celebrity are equated with the horrors of the mine. Fame and fortune are akin to the psychological trauma of being buried alive and all three are 'demons' from which the miners are trying to 'escape'.

Beaconsfield therefore becomes a site for a complex layering of celebrity, where a network CEO and hosts of an infotainment show use their celebrity to try to win an exclusive with two individuals whose visibility via tragedy is making them celebrities too. Notions of celebrity similarly recur in the high-profile reporters assigned to Beaconsfield, undermining Naomi Robson's credibility and memorialising Richard Carleton. The visibility of the event also enabled a number of other potential celebrities to emerge, including Beaconsfield minister Frances Seen (who kept the town together during the event) and, most notably,

Australian Workers' Union president Bill Shorten, whose regular presence at Beaconsfield prompted some to proclaim him as a potential candidate for the Labor party leadership.⁷⁸ Despite then Labor leader Kim Beazley endorsing Shorten as 'the interpreter for Australia', at the time of writing neither of these latter individuals appear to have maintained their celebrity.

Alleged interest from America's *Good Morning America*, *Today Show* and *Dateline* on NBC, ABC's *Primetime* and the American *60 Minutes* led to the miners appearing on *Good Morning America*, but a lukewarm reaction to their appearance suggests they 'failed' this audition and, despite Russell's comments to the contrary, their celebrity appears to be flagging.⁷⁹ Coverage of a meeting between Russell and the Foo Fighters (first raised during the Beaconsfield event) attracted relatively little coverage. At the date of writing, Russell and Webb are listed as 'speakers for public events' with entertainment promotions firm Entertain Oz, founders of the Russell-Webb Legacy Trust to 'benefit the youth of the West Tamar' and have released a book, *Bad Ground: Inside the Beaconsfield Mine Rescue* with journalist Tony Wright. Donations from proceeds of the book go to the cause. Their deals earned them about AUD\$2.5 million in total,⁸⁰ though in an appearance on *Enough Rope* agent Harry M. Miller suggested that the miners had a true market value of between five and six million and had been undervalued.⁸¹ Both men continue to suffer 'long-lasting psychological and physical trauma' and continue their rehabilitation.⁸²

And the rest of the celebrities circulating around Beaconsfield? Richard Carleton was valorised on *60 Minutes*. Naomi Robson continued to be dogged by questions of credibility, her appearances at Beaconsfield compounded by errors of judgment following the death of Crocodile Hunter Steve Irwin and trying to 'rescue' an Indonesian child from an alleged tribe of cannibals; she resigned from *Today Tonight* at the end of 2006. Despite Beaconsfield being his 'final on-air' appearance, Eddie McGuire returned to host a 'World Cup' edition of *The Footy Show* and the game show *1 vs 100*; he resigned as CEO of Channel Nine on 30 June 2007. Finally, Mel and Kochie continue to lead *Today* in the ratings and are increasingly regarded as two of the most powerful people on Australian television;⁸³ their celebrity has translated into hosting jobs on a popular primetime series *Where Are They Now?* and Seven's 'fifty years of television' special.

— THE 'EXCLUSIVE' IN THE AGE OF CONVERGENCE

Following a brief bidding war between Nine, Seven and various agencies, the miners finally signed with Channel Nine in an exclusive deal estimated to be worth between \$2.75 and \$3 million⁸⁴ and were represented by 22 Management's Sean Anderson. The interview aired in a two-hour special titled 'The Great Escape' from 8.30 to 10.30 pm on Sunday 21 May with *A Current Affair* presenter Tracy Grimshaw.

Nine needed the exclusive as it came at a point where, for the first time in twenty years, the channel's dominance as 'Number One' was in jeopardy.⁸⁵ Indeed, media analyst Steve Allen went so far as to describe the Beaconsfield exclusive as the 'circuit breaker to bring people, the public, back to realising that Nine are number one in current affairs and news'.⁸⁶ 'People know when the big stories happen, the place to be is Nine', McGuire was described as saying 'with some satisfaction'⁸⁷ when he confirmed the miners had signed with Nine. Seven framed the report, which broke just before the *Sunrise* Beaconsfield benefit concert on the Wednesday, by saying that they had withdrawn their offer at 6.00 pm, three hours before Nine's announcement. Their stated reason was that 'the story had "moved on" and there had been too much leakage of information about the pair since they had been freed'. Neil Mooney, executive producer for Seven's *Today Tonight*, stated that he didn't like paying for stories but in the age of convergence it is rarely television stations that make the deal; Nine could rely on *The Bulletin*, *Woman's Day* or *Women's Weekly* (from the Australian Consolidated Press (ACP) arm of PBL) while Seven could use *New Idea* (from its Pacific Magazines stable).⁸⁸

Aside from the status benefits to the station (confirming Nine as the 'home of news') the exclusive had some additional positive flow-on effects. First, it removed 'the blanket', finally branding the media event as the property of one station. Reports in the *Mercury*, for example, featured a front-page image of the miners actually branded with the graphic '9 EXCLUSIVE'. Similarly, the coverage inside featured an inset piece with Nine's interviewer, Tracy Grimshaw, who described the interview as 'the most extraordinary interview, certainly the most intense interview I've ever done'.⁸⁹ The *Examiner* also featured a similarly branded cover image ('9') on its front page.⁹⁰ Secondly, there were the financial benefits through advertising revenues generated during the interview (estimates of around \$80,000 to \$100,000 per thirty-second spot, averaging between \$4 and \$6 million across the two hours). Third, the interview was also an important part of Nine's ratings flow as it aired on a Sunday night. Nine had won the previous Sunday with the Logies (Australia's television awards ceremony) and were expected to win the following week with the Rugby League State of Origin game. (Ultimately the interview garnered the fifth spot in the top ten shows of the year, achieving an average national audience of 2.58 million and a peak of more than three million.) Fourth, the interview was used to publicise Nine's *News*, *Today* show and *A Current Affair* in the lead up to, and after, the event (for example, additional excerpts were shown in *A Current Affair* the following night and Grimshaw discussed her interview with the miners on *Today*). Finally, the story was covered in PBL's ACP magazines with (three) cover stories in *The Bulletin* and additional cover features in *Woman's Day* and *Women's Weekly*.

Interestingly, this convergence allowed the story to be gendered as 'there was a feeling at ACP that the story was too "male"⁹¹ resulting in the story being divided between ACP's stable.

The 'male' angle was presented in the *Bulletin*, which recounted the miners' story as a tale of mateship and male bonding in adversity.⁹² To tie in with the interview ACP published the *Bulletin* on Sunday evening so it would appear on newsstands on Monday. This marked the third consecutive cover story on the miners, commencing with a re-covered 'souvenir edition', 'The Great Escape' (16 May 2006); the miners would ultimately cover feature on four editions in total. The 'female' angle was presented in *Woman's Day* and in *Women's Weekly*. Both of these magazines were released in the days following the interview. *Women's Day* (28 May 2006) refers to the miner's love for their wives with the heading (in large pink lettering) 'How Love Pulled Us Through'. Russell says: 'I wrote a letter on my overalls telling Carolyn I loved her' while Webb claims 'Did we cry? Yeah I reckon, it was a bit emotional'. The report is rounded out by interviews with the miners' respective spouses, Rachel Webb and Carolyn Russell, and pictures of the miners with their families. Similarly, it was the emotional response to Beaconsfield of *A Current Affair* anchor, Tracy Grimshaw, that was foregrounded in the *Women's Weekly* story:

I felt the tears welling up, I unashamedly admit that ... I was just so happy that they were out ... In that moment I was transplanting myself into their shoes and thinking ... It was an intense, emotional ride for us—what must it have been like for them?⁹³

Grimshaw goes on to describe the story as 'life-changing', the 'most unique story' covered in her 'twenty-five years' of television and 'it was impossible not to be touched by what was happening ... I constantly found myself wondering "How would I cope if I were in this situation, if this was happening to me?"' She compares maintaining her professional demeanour during the day with the fact that the story 'pushes every single button of your human instincts'—especially the death of her colleague Richard Carleton. The story ends with a full page photo of Grimshaw at the fence of the Beaconsfield mine, looking at the flowers and notes left there for Larry Knight with the caption: 'Tracy reflects on the fragility of life and the power of love and family in the wake of the mine disaster'. Here is the essence of Boorstin's 'pseudo-event', a story about reporting the story, filtered through Grimshaw's opinions and emotions.

The choice of title for the exclusive, 'The Great Escape', is also interesting. Allegedly derived from a comment by Bill Shorten,⁹⁴ 'escape' rather than the perhaps-more-accurate 'rescue' has the added commercial benefit of placing agency in the hands of the miners themselves rather than the rescuers, perhaps justifying the exclusive interview with the miners (and the exclusion of the rescuers).⁹⁵ 'The Great Escape' theme is maintained through the headline on the *Bulletin* (16 May 2006), throughout Nine and PBL's reportage of the event and through the rest of the media coverage (for example, *Mercury*, 22 May 2006). The first *Bulletin*

story, 'Day of Reckoning', maps the way the stories will run, moving from a consideration of the union/safety/mine issues to focus on the miners; the repackaging/additional cover of the magazine 'The Great Escape' rather than the original cover title 'Man Made Disaster' reflects the change in focus, while the substitution of 'Souvenir Edition' for 'Special Edition' marks the change from news story to media event. Indeed, 'The Great Escape' was such a successful brand that it was still being referenced in the *Mercury* three months later—'Todd Russell would love to make another Great Escape'.⁹⁶ This also allowed the miners to be folded into discourses of heroism and mateship, both by the Nine Network, and by the Australian government at a lavish reception for the miners and their rescuers held in Canberra on 29 May 2006. Endless reports refer to the 'million-dollar mine heroes', but as Tom notes this is 'a dumb idea. Surviving two dark weeks of defecating into a helmet in an oozing subterranean crevice doesn't make you heroic. Inventive, resilient and phenomenally lucky, maybe, but not heroic.'⁹⁷ Both miners acknowledged this at the parliamentary reception, Webb (forgetting his script) stated 'We're not heroes of course. The people that saved us are the heroes' and Russell agreed, saying 'they're the true heroes'.

— CONCLUSION

In 1999, a study of the coverage of celebrity stories across a variety of media by Bonner, Farley, Marshall and Turner concluded that 'the interest in celebrities may be another symptom of the media's gradual disarticulation from a model of media practice that foregrounds the dissemination of information, and its increasing alignment with a model that more directly participates in the process of disseminating, interrogating, and constructing identities'.⁹⁸ It is suggested that the reporting of Beaconsfield marks the next step in this continuing disarticulation and, more specifically, Beaconsfield reveals a number of issues arising from this disarticulation. First, is the increased use of celebrity as a reporting strategy, recasting both the journalist and the CEO as 'friend' and the layering of celebrity—including the possibility of celebrity—that has come to exist in every 'big' news story. Secondly, Beaconsfield marks the point at which 'newstainment' emerges as a real genre. Here, the story develops through a variety of contexts as the semiotic excess of the media event moves it outside the conventional news format and spreads it across all facets of network programming and (eventually) its allied convergent media industries, allowing the story to be framed, gendered and repackaged in a variety of ways. Finally, Beaconsfield reveals the increased visibility and public acceptance of chequebook journalism as a part of news culture.

Central to all of this is the notion of commodification, both of the news story (which becomes an event) and those who are part of it (who become celebrities). In this way, news becomes a 'product' and aspects of the news story—including the fate of the Beaconsfield

mine, the role of unions and the issues of industrial health and safety—remain largely under-represented in favour of exclusives and ‘pseudo-events’ about the reporting of Beaconsfield. For these reasons, Beaconsfield should not be dismissed as just another news story but should, rather, be regarded as indicative of the ways in which news is increasingly being reported, packaged and folded back into larger entertainment structures.

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1. Qtd in N. Brown, ‘How Love Pulled Us Through’, *Woman’s Day*, 28 May 2006, p. 4.
2. Qtd in Tony Wright, *Bad Ground: Inside the Beaconsfield Mine Rescue—The Brant Webb & Todd Russell Story*, Pier 9 (Murdoch Books), Millers Point, 2006, p. 317.
3. Alison Caldwell, ‘TV Networks Battle for Miners’ Story’, *PM*, ABC Online, <<http://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2006/s1635542.html>>.
4. Quoted Paul Lockyer, ‘Beaconsfield Rescuer Recounts Mission’, *The 7.30 Report*. Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 16 May 2006, <<http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2006/s1640108.htm>>.
5. For an overview of this coverage, see Monica Attard, ‘Front Page—Media Swarm Into Beaconsfield’, *Media Watch*, ABC Television, 8 May 2006, <<http://www.abc.net.au/mediawatch/transcripts/s1633681.html>>. For more details of the media encampment at Beaconsfield see Wright, *Bad Ground*, pp. 251–4, 278–80.
6. David Dale, ‘Australia: Two Men Down a Hole Drive a Big Week for TV Channels’, *Asia Media: Media News Daily (from the Age)*, 15 May 2006, <http://www.asiamedia.ucla.edu/article-pacificislands.asp?parentid.com.html>. Dale puts these figures down to a ‘never-to-be-repeated combination of a heroic rescue [Beaconsfield], fancy footwork [Seven’s *Dancing with the Stars* finale], fabulous frocks [Australian television awards, the Logies] and a federal budget’. Beaconsfield is the connecting event, throughout the week, encouraging viewers to remain by their televisions.
7. See Barbara Alysen, *The Electronic Reporter: Broadcast Journalism in Australia*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2006, pp. 228–38 and Graeme Turner, *Ending the Affair: The Decline of Television Current Affairs in Australia*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 2005.
8. Ironically, in accordance with police rules, the actual moment the miners were released was covered by a single TV camera and one stills photographer.
9. Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, p. 5.
10. Attard, 2006.
11. This was parodied at the end of the ABC’s *The Chaser’s War on Everything*, which replayed the scene of Webb and Russell leaving the mine over and over again over their end credits. For more on *The Chaser* see below.
12. Martin Hirst, ‘Torres Strait & Tasmania, Worlds Apart’, *Crikey.com*, 15 May 2006, <<http://www.crikey.com.au/articles/2006/05/12-1513-904.print.html>>.
13. *Crikey.com* notes that ‘the Beaconsfield story really broke at the worst time for newspapers’. Margaret Simons, with Michael Newhouse and *Crikey* correspondents, ‘Budget or Beaconsfield?’, *Crikey.com*, 15 May 2006, 2:38 PM, <http://www.crikey.com.au/articles/2006/05/10-1527-7540.print.html_>.
14. Twice this sense of visibility and playing to the voyeur was interrogated. Once, following the death of Richard Carleton (see below) where his colleagues screened his body from the cameras (and the children at the scene) with blankets. Secondly, when Carolyn Russell (Todd’s wife) and friends filmed the journalists via ‘Wombat Cam’, turning the tables on the journalists, as it were, to provide a private video record for Todd on all the

- interest that he and Brant had generated. See Wright, *Bad Ground*, p. 304.
15. I am grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers for this journal for pointing this out. For an overview of the introduction of pay television into Australia see Terry Flew, 'Television and Pay TV', in *The Media and Communications in Australia*, Second Edition, ed. Stuart Cunningham and Graeme Turner, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 2006, pp. 173–88. For an overview of the effects of cable news live coverage generally see Piers Robinson, *The CNN Effect: The Myth of News Media, Foreign Policy and Intervention*, Routledge, London and New York, 2002.
 16. Dayan and Katz, p. 222.
 17. Hirst, 'Torres Strait & Tasmania'.
 18. Gary Linnell, editorial, *The Bulletin*, 23 May 2006, p. 8.
 19. Simons et al., 'Budget or Beaconsfield?'
 20. Peter Meakin, Channel Seven's Director of News and Current Affairs, qtd in Amanda Meade, 'McGuire Scores First Points', *The Australian*, 11 May 2006, <<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,20867,19094479-7.com.html>>.
 21. Simons et al., 'Budget or Beaconsfield?'
 22. See John O'Neil and Catharine Lumby, 'Tabloid Television', in J. Schultz (ed.), *Not Just Another Business: Journalists, Citizens and the Media*, Pluto Press in association with Ideas for Australia, National Centre for Australian Studies, Monash University, Sydney, 1995, p. 153. Also Martin Hirst, Tiffany White, David Chaplin and Justine Wilson, 'When Too Much Entertainment is Barely Enough: Current Affairs Television in the 1990s', *Australian Journalism Review*, vol. 17, no. 1, 1995, pp. 79–98 and John Langer, 'Tabloid Television: Popular Journalism and the "Other News"', *Communication and Society*, Routledge, London and New York, 1998.
 23. *eNews* reports that Nine and PBL have tried to steal Melissa Doyle away twice, 'Mel and Kachie TV's Most Wanted', *eNews*, <<http://www.ebroadcast.com.au/enews>>.
 24. Qtd Meade.
 25. Qtd Meade.
 26. ABA, 'Key Findings of the Investigations into Radio Stations 2UE, 3AW, 5DN and 6PR', Australian Broadcasting Authority, 2000, <www.aba.gov.au/radio/investigations/projects/commerc_radio/report/html/key_findings.htm>.
 27. Todd Gitlin, *Media Unlimited: How the Torrent of Images and Sounds Overwhelms Our Lives*, Metropolitan Books, New York, 2001.
 28. Chris Rojek, *Celebrity*, Reaktion, London, 2001.
 29. Tony Wright, 'Striking Gold', *The Bulletin*, 23 May 2006, p. 25.
 30. Wright, *Bad Ground*, p. 279.
 31. This is an important turning point in the Beaconsfield story, both in terms of the ethical questions it raises, the importance of celebrity and the resulting appearance of McGuire on the scene. Koch described the event himself on *Sunrise* when he answered a message from a viewer who described the act as 'disgusting'. Koch replied: 'You'll be waiting for a long time mate, if you want an apology ... Look, I might be a boofhead sometimes, but I'm not a big enough boofhead that I'd jump a fence and jump into an ambulance uninvited ... Basically, the story behind it is that we have got to know Todd's family pretty well because they're all big *Sunrise* fans and Todd's a huge *Sunrise* fan, as were many of the rescue workers, and he would send up messages to us through the rescue workers and we would send replies back and the day before yesterday he sent a message saying 'tell that fat ugly so and so ... to be at the gate when I come out in the ambulance', qtd Amanda Meade and Stuart Rintoul, 'Eddie gets the Media Brawl Rolling', *Australian*, 11 May 2006, <<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/printpage/0,5942,1909509.com.html>>.
- Koch tells a similar story in his appearance on the ABC's satirical news series *The Glass House* and this is confirmed in Wright, *Bad Ground*, p. 278. Note that Wright, *Bad Ground*, also implies that the real turning point was the death of Richard Carleton (see below).
32. Qtd Meade.
 33. Daniel Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-events in America*, Atheneum, New York, 1971 [1961]. Boorstin defines the permutations of celebrity at length on pp. 45–76. Again, thanks to Sarah Gillman for pointing this out.
 34. Hirst and Patching provide this analysis as part of a case study of Channel Seven's attempt to 'poll' their audiences compiled for their textbook, Martin Hirst and Roger Patching, *Journalism Ethics: Arguments and Cases*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2005, pp. 109–14.
 35. Seven Press Release, qtd in Meade, 2006.
 36. Andrew Tyndall qtd in Gerald Tooth, 'Uniform Defamation; and the Cost of Celebrity Journalism', *Media Report*, ABC Radio National, 13 April 2006.
 37. Hirst.
 38. Naomi Robson, anchor of Seven's current affair program *Today Tonight*, was accused of bringing a 'makeup Winnebago' with her to Beaconsfield, something she later denied on air, claiming she did her own hair and make-up and slept in the back of a truck (*Today Tonight*, Channel Seven, 3 May 2006). The 'Winnebago' was satirised by

- both *Media Watch* and *The Chaser's War on Everything*. Robson was later criticised when she left Beaconsfield on Sunday to attend the Australian television awards ceremony, the Logies, in Melbourne. In both cases these issues become the basis of subsequent reports (the anchor implicated in the story) and Robson refuted them with appeals to authenticity (that she did her own make-up and had to sleep in the back of a truck).
39. Richard Carleton was filing a story for *60 Minutes* on mine safety issues (later completed by his Tasmanian colleague Charles Woolley). At a press conference he asked mine manager Matthew Gill a question about the mine, turned and walked away and collapsed and died shortly thereafter (see Wright, *Bad Ground*, pp. 284–9 for more detail). Wright notes that with 'Carleton's death, the accusations ... the anguish ... the long-held concerns ... all these were swept aside as the rescue effort maintained its momentum' (Wright, *Bad Ground*, p. 289). Ironically, according to Young, Carleton's death 'calmed relations between the media and some locals' who were tiring of the media's presence and intrusion (Wes Young, 'Carleton Death Calms Beaconsfield Tensions', *Crikey.com*, 15 May 2006, <<http://www.crikey.com.au/articles/2006/05/08-1626-4067.print.html>>). It also gave *60 Minutes* its highest ratings of the year to that point. See Wright, *Bad Ground*, pp. 278–80 for more details on the ambivalent relationship between the Beaconsfield community and the media.
 40. We could include here the war of words between Seven and Nine, following Nine's *Today* show running advertisements during the interview with Webb and Russell that described Koch as an 'ambulance chaser' under footage of him getting into the back of the ambulance with Russell. This resulted in Seven circulating an embarrassing gaffe by *Today* presenter Jessica Rowe and was commented upon in the satirical news series *The Glass House* where David Koch was a guest (31 May, ABC TV).
 41. Helen Westerman, 'Exclusively Eddie', *The Age*, 12 May 2006, <<http://www.theage.com.au>>.
 42. Wes Young, 'Eddie's Shout', *Tasmanian Times.com*, 17 May 2006, <<http://tasmaniantimes.com>>.
 43. Graeme Turner, *Understanding Celebrity*, Sage, London, 2004.
 44. Both quotes come from Westerman.
 45. Qtd Westerman.
 46. Qtd Westerman.
 47. Graeme Turner, 'Celebrity', in Stuart Cunningham and Graeme Turner (eds), *The Media and Communications in Australia*, Second Edition, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 2006, p. 361. This is evident in the mixed reaction to McGuire's appearance. There was already a 'Help Shut Up Eddie McGuire!' online petition in effect before McGuire's assumption of the role of CEO. Subsequent to Beaconsfield McGuire was tagged with the appellation 'Eddie Everywhere' (see Matthew Schulz, 'Does Eddie Ever Sleep?', *Herald-Sun Sunday*, 14 May 2006, <<http://www.heraldsun.news.com.au/printpage/0,5481,19126937,00.com.html>>). A weblog referred to by Young also acknowledges McGuire's new power: 'Media is a powerful tool', it reads, 'So is Eddie McGuire'.
 48. Turner, 'Celebrity', p. 361.
 49. Boorstin, p. 57.
 50. Qtd Westerman.
 51. Gerald Tooth, 'Beaconsfield: Mining for Heroes' Gold', *Media Report*, ABC Radio National, 11 May 2006.
 52. A *Current Affair* host Tracy Grimshaw, qtd Meade.
 53. As announced on-air and repeated in sources like Westerman.
 54. The idea appears as part of a case study in their textbook, Hirst and Patching, 269–70. The notion of 'newstainment' draws on ideas first put forward by theorists like Langer, 153–4 and O'Neil and Lumby.
 55. It should be noted that with the rise in 'news as entertainment' there has been a commensurate rise in public scrutiny through critical series like *Media Watch* and satirical series like *Frontline* and *CNNNN* (which gave rise to *The Chaser's War on Everything*). See Pitila Clark, 'Littlemore's Legacy', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 January 2006, p. 34. Perhaps not so coincidentally all of these series air on Australia's public broadcaster, the ABC.
 56. The two *Footy Shows* received an audience of 1.570 million nationally—but the ratings for *The Footy Show* serve as a reminder that this remains a news story and therefore news values like 'proximity' come into play. The closer to Beaconsfield, the better it rated—705,000 (1 in Melbourne), 394,000 (5 in Sydney), top ten in Brisbane (with 201,000) and Adelaide (154,000), but only 116,000 in Perth (number 14 in the most watched programs) (All ratings sourced from OzTAM.)
 57. Flow and delay are derived from the notion that television is a commodity that is never completely consumed. *Flow* is maintained through scheduling, advertising and narrative structure encouraging audiences to continue their consumption from one moment to the next. But complete consumption is indefinitely *delayed* by commercials, narrative developments and scheduling.

58. Glenn Dyer, 'The Miners' Footy Show Test', *Crikey.com*, <<http://www.crikey.com.au/articles/2006/05/11-1518-6359.print.html>>.
59. Qtd Westerman.
60. Qtd Jane Holroyd, 'Eddie Denies \$3m Offer to Miners', *Age*, 11 May 2006, <<http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2006/05/11/1146940644852.html>>.
61. Ethics Review Committee, MEAA, AJA Section, *Ethics in Journalism: Report of the Ethics Review Committee, MEAA, AJA Section*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1997, p. 40.
62. Ethics Review Committee, p. 40.
63. Holroyd.
64. n/a, 'McGuire Denies \$3m Deal for Miners', *Herald Sun*, 11 May 2006, <<http://www.heraldsun.news.com.au/printpage/0,5481,19098647,00.com.html>>.
65. J. Avieson, 'Chequebook Journalism: A Question of Ethics', *Australian Journalism Review*, vol. 14, no. 1, 1992, pp. 44–50.
66. Daniel C. Hallin, *We Keep America on Top of the World: Television Journalism and the Public Sphere, Communication and Society*, Routledge, London and New York, 1994, pp. 1, 4.
67. Avieson, p. 45.
68. Martin Hirst, Tiffany White, David Chaplin and Justine Wilson, 'When Too Much Entertainment is Barely Enough: Current Affairs Television in the 1990s', *Australian Journalism Review*, vol. 17, no. 1, 1995, p. 195.
69. Karen Sanders, *Ethics & Journalism*, Sage, London, 2003, p. 115.
70. David Bowman, 'Ethics in Journalism', *Australian Journalism Review*, vol. 5, 1983, p. 37.
71. Emma Tom, 'Blokes from Beaconsfield Deserve a Slice of the Action', *Australian*, 17 May 2006, <<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/printpage/0,5942,1915929.com.html>>.
72. Dale.
73. Meade and Rintoul.
74. na, 'McGuire', *Herald-Sun*, 2006.
75. Turner, 'Celebrity', p. 366.
76. Bernard Lagan, 'Your Time Starts Now', *Bulletin*, 30 May 2006, pp. 24–5.
77. M. Sayer, 'The Pit of Celebrity', *Mercury*, 8 August 2006, pp. 1, 6.
78. Tony Jones, 'Bill Shorten on Speculation He Will Move to Federal Politics', *Lateline*, ABC Television, 18 August 2006, <<http://www.abc.net.au/lateline/content/2005/s1441093.htm>>.
79. Adam Harvey, 'Miner's Lucrative Deals in Doubt', *Sunday Telegraph*, *News.com.au*, 4 June 2006, <<http://www.news.com.au/story/print/0,10119,19350969,00.html>>.
80. Tony Wright, 'The Reluctant Rock Stars', *Bulletin*, 31 October 2006, pp. 26.
81. Andrew Denton, 'Interview with Harry M. Miller', *Enough Rope*, ABC Television, 30 October 2006.
82. Wright 'The Reluctant Rock Stars', p. 29.
83. Matt Price, 'The Rise and Rise of Sunrise', *Weekend Australian Magazine*, 8–9 July 2006, pp. 26–30.
84. While the final figure remains unclear—most estimates place it at \$2.6 million—one would assume it would actually be in excess of the \$2.75 million offered by Seven and *New Idea*. See Kelvin Healey, 'Miners Wooed with Millions', *News.com.au* (from the *Sunday Herald-Sun*), 14 May 2006, <<http://www.news.com.au/story/print/0,10119,19130831,00.html>>.
85. For example, according to the OzTam ratings during the Beaconsfield event, on Wednesday May 10 Seven's *Today Tonight* was the most watched program of the night with 1.741 million, almost half a million more than ACA's 1.32 million. Seven News came second with 1.653 million, to Nine's 1.349 million (about 300,000 behind). That morning, Seven's *Sunrise* earned 549,000, well ahead of Nine's *Today* with 266,000 viewers. On Monday *Sunrise* earned 544,000 viewers to *Today*'s 368,000. On Tuesday (the day the miners were released) *Sunrise* earned 839,000 compared to *Today*'s 529,000 and Channel Ten's morning news 50,000. At one point *Sunrise*'s figures peaked at 1.02 million, close to three times the normal peak for that time of day (all figures from OzTam and enews).
86. Brigid Glanville, 'Miner's Story: Talk of a Hollywood Film', *AM, ABC Online*, 20 May 2006, <<http://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2006/s1642917.html>>.
87. Helen Westerman and Dan Harrison, 'Nine Secures Miner's Story', *Age*, 17 May 2006, <<http://www.theage.com.au/news/national/nine-secures-miners-story.html>>.
88. *New Idea* gained their own 'exclusive' when they published extracts from Brant Webb's father-in-law, Michael Kelly, for 'an undisclosed sum' (Meade and Rintoul 2006). The extracts appeared in the 15 May 2006 edition of *New Idea*.
89. Doug Conway and John Ferguson, 'The Great Escape—Courage Unlimited/Pair's Plan to Self-Amputate/The Interview of a Lifetime/Five Days In, a Touch of Hope/Words of Love Were Hardest', *Mercury*, 22 May 2006, pp. 1–4.
90. Fran Voss, 'Miners' Amazing Tale of Survival: Farewell Letters the Hardest Part', *Examiner*, 22 May 2006, pp. 1–2.
91. n/a, 'Great Sums of Money for the Great Escape', *eNews*, <<http://www.ebroadcast.com.au/enews>>.
92. Tony Wright, 'Out of the Darkness', *The Bulletin*, 30 May, 2006, pp. 16–23.

93. Grimshaw qtd Sheather, *Women's Weekly*, May 2006, p. 21).
94. Shorten is credited with telling the Nine Network, following Russell and Webb's release: 'The great escape is over ... a giant rock of pressure has been taken off these families'. Rick Rycroft, 'Aussie Miners in Good Health After Rescue', *ABC News* <<http://abcnews.go.com/International/print?id=1939009.html>>.
95. One of the few places the rescuers did appear was on ABC's *The 7.30 Report*, where Peter Hatswell from NSW Mines Rescue Service was interviewed by Paul Lockyer, and in the *Age* ('Miner's Tale from the Bowels of the Earth', 13 May 2006). The rescuers are given some more attention in Wright, *Bad Ground*, and were featured on a 2007 episode of *Australian Story*. Larry Knight's family were also featured on a subsequent episode of the series.
96. Sayer, *Mercury*, 8 August 2006, p. 1.
97. Tom.
98. Frances Bonner, Rebecca Farley, P. David Marshall and Graeme Turner, 'Celebrity and the Media', *Australian Journal of Communication*, vol. 26, no. 1, 1999, pp. 55–71.