

# THE CONSUMER, THE PRODUCER AND THE STATE: ANALYSIS OF A TELEVISION NEWS ITEM

THEO VAN LEEUWEN

This paper takes a detailed look at one news item, broadcast in March, 1981, by Channel 10 in Sydney. The item was part of the *Actionline* segment of Channel 10's *Eyewitness News*, a segment dealing with consumer affairs. It discussed a mail order company which, according to the then Minister of Consumer Affairs of New South Wales, Sid Einfeld, sold fake diamond earrings for a price far above their real value.

The first part of the paper discusses the unedited text of the three interviews that formed part of the item. The text was transcribed from a cassette copy of the original soundtrack. In the transcription which follows below, the sections retained in the final edited version of the news item are in italics. Where a 'reverse angle question' (recorded after completion of the interview itself) was used, it has been added to the transcription in italics within brackets. The analysis of the unedited interviews focusses on three aspects: the types of process used to encode the reported events (cf. Halliday, 1976); the kinds of question asked by the interviewer; and the construction of each of the interviews as independent texts, with emphasis on lexical and conjunctive cohesion (cf. Halliday and Hasan, 1976).

The second part of the paper discusses the edited version of the news item and considers the way in which the original texts are modified by editing and by the context in which they are now placed: documenting the ideologically motivated transformations effected by editing (an

aspect of mass media text production which normally remains hidden to the public) forms the main contribution to the text analysis this paper hopes to make.

Thanks go to David Clark-Duff, senior technician at Macquarie University, for his help in obtaining the text of the unedited interviews and for assistance with videorecording and photography.

## THE UNEDITED INTERVIEWS

### (1) Ian McMinn interviews Norma Holroyd, Mailex customer

McMinn: The Minister for Consumer Affairs, Sid Einfeld, is saying that they're not worth 25 cents. Would you be happy to pay 10 dollars for them?

Holroyd: *Yes I'd pay twen... ten dollars for them, yes.*

McMinn: *You don't think that's exorbitant?*

Holroyd: *No, I don't, I don't think, I don't know a lot about jewellery, but my daughter says, I'm listening to my daughter and she says they will not fade, they will not go yellow and the gold will not rub off, and I'll take all... she works in a jewellery shop and I'd listen to what she had to say. I wanted a pair of diamond earrings for 68 dollars and she said: Mum, you'd be just as happy or happier with standard earrings for 60 dollars and they look nice. You should go down and have a look at them.*

McMinn: And you're not worried that the Minister is saying that they're not worth ten dollars.

Holroyd: No, no, that wouldn't bother me as long as they look good on me, that's all that matters.

McMinn: Thank you very much.

### (2) Ian McMinn interviews Richard Smith, manager of Mailex

McMinn: Richard, the Minister for Consumer Affairs, Sid Einfeld, a man who's a very popular politician, has said that these diamonds aren't worth 25 cents.

Smith: *The Minister is a liar, I'm afraid. The diamonds are worth far more than 25 cents. You couldn't buy a pair of diamond earrings like this in any Sydney shop for less than 39 dollars. So he's a blatant liar.*

McMinn: *You're accusing the Minister of lying.*

Smith: *The Minister is lying under Parliamentary privilege, yes. If he'd care to come outside of Parliament to repeat these same things he'd have a million dollar lawsuit on his hands in 5 minutes.*

McMinn: But what could you manufacture them for in Australia?

Smith: These can't be manufactured in Australia. I've already checked with manufacturers here. They can't be manufactured for less than 10 or 12 dollars a pair. Basic manufacturing costs. That would mean that if they were manufactured for 12 dollars, say, they'd be retailing in big stores for 39, 40, 50 dollars.

McMinn: So, you're quite convinced in yourself that people are getting value for money.

Smith: They're getting excellent value for money. They're actually buying them for roughly a quarter of the normal retail price.

McMinn: What effect has this ad on your business?

Smith: Well as a result of his lies in Parliament people are phoning up and saying: Oh are they really worth the money, and: We want to cancel our cheque, and: Cancel our order, and you know, they believe the Minister, because the Minister is supposed to tell the truth.

McMinn: How much money could you lose on the deal if that trend continues?

Smith: Well, if his lies are believed through all the community, then we could stand to lose a quarter of a million dollars.

McMinn: Alright, thanks very much.

### **(3) Ian McMinn interviews Sid Einfeld, NSW Minister of Consumer Affairs.**

McMinn: Mr. Minister, I was talking to Richard James, the gentleman concerned, this morning, and he's called you an out-and-out liar in saying those particular earrings aren't valued or aren't worth 10 dollars. Now are you prepared to be called a liar?

Einfeld: Oh, all sorts of people call me all sorts of things, I mean, if that sort of man calls me a liar it's probably a compliment. The facts are: he's imported yesterday saying he's been cleared by the Department of Consumer Affairs in Western Australia, Victoria, and in Queensland. It just happens that

all the Commissioners of all Consumer Affairs Departments are in Sydney at this moment meeting together as they do once or twice a year. In Western Australia they they're l... looking, they're examining prosecution, examining whether the metal by the way is a health hazard in the ear. That's the metal amulets are. Nobody values them at all. All the reputable dealers here who give some sort of value ranging from about 25 cents to 2 dollars say they would never sell them ever and none of them ever got them in stock, because no reputable dealer would want to sell this sort of a diamond which by the way is covered by a pinhead. So you know it's one of those sorts of advertisements which tend to mislead the public and as a ... as a consumer representative it's my job to warn them if I think there's a chance that they'll be taken down or eh some way deceived and that's what I have done.

McMinn: Well what he says of course is to make them in Australia you couldn't make them and retail them for less than 39 dollars, I think the figure was, and he's saying that by... by raising this in Parliament as you did and working under Parliamentary privilege you're effectively destroying his business.

Einfeld: Well yesterday he said 39, today he said 40, in his... in his eh... in his leaflet he says 50, and *there's no there's not one recognized diamond... I would have seen about 12 who'd say they're worth anything at all or has any real intrinsic value. In fact one diamond cutter rang this morning and said even if it was a full karat, and its .005 a karat, as an industrial type thing it wouldn't be worth more than 15 dollars, but the whole thing is... is being blown up out of all proportions. My duty is to warn consumers who I think they're being deceived and everybody in Australia is examining it to see and by the way my lawyers are examining it into the Department to see if they should take any action.*

McMinn: Would you expect a writ from them?

Einfeld: I don't know what to expect. I certainly won't be buying diamonds and selling them, wouldn't know where to look for any diamonds. I know nothing about them and that's true. The only true thing that's been said. I act on the advice of my officers and they've been investigating and they know exactly what the situation is.

McMinn: So You're not worried about being called a liar. You're not worried about him taking a court action against you.

(So, Mr. Einfeld, it doesn't worry you that you've been called a liar in public, nor does it worry you that there could be court action.)

Einfeld: Oh, look, I... I don't want anything to happen against me. Why should I? I... I've gone through my public life I think untrammled and nobody ever suggested before... but if Mr James wants to use those sort of ridiculous words he can do whatever he likes. I don't care.

### Types of process

The first interview contains information about the diamond earrings, about the Minister of Consumer Affairs, about the Mailex customer's feelings, and about her daughter.

Information about the diamonds is mostly cast in the form of relational clauses: *they're not worth 10 dollars, they look good*, etc. In other words, we are not told where and how the diamonds were found, mined, shipped, cut, and so on, but what their value is. And we receive, in fact, two different messages about this value: messages with negative polarity, dealing with the economic value of the diamonds and coming from the interviewer, and messages with positive polarity, dealing with the aesthetic value and the use value of the diamonds and coming from the interviewee.

The clauses in which these messages are contained are inserted into verbalization clauses: *the Minister says they're not worth 10 dollars; she said (...) they look nice*. This is so for the messages coming from the interviewer as well as for the messages coming from the interviewee. But the actors of the interviewer's verbalization clauses are not those of the interviewee's: the interviewer's authority is the Minister, the interviewee's her daughter. Thus she implicitly rejects, not only the interviewer's concept of value, but also the authority he invokes, and therefore the protection of that authority, the Minister who claims to be a representative of her, the consumer: she has her own source of advice and protection, her daughter.

However, another topic is introduced as the main topic of the interview, the topic on which the interviewer asks his first question: the feelings of the consumer (*Are you happy...*). His third question also deals with this topic, and is in fact almost a statement: *and you are not worried...* But, in this case too, the interviewee rejects the assumption

implicit in his questions, the assumption that she, the 'duped' customer, should be unhappy and worried: she is not unhappy and she is not worried. That she lacks knowledge about the economic value of the diamonds, about *his* concept of value, does not bother her: *as long as they look good on me, that's all that matters.*

This first interview, then, is not about actions and events, but about evaluations. Two very different evaluations, backed up by two very different authorities, stand side by side, irreconcilable and unresolved. It is also about the feelings of the consumer, and, here too, two views stand side by side: the feelings which the interviewer thinks she ought to have, and the feelings she actually has.

The second interview deals with the diamond earrings, the Mailex customers, the Minister, and the Mailex manager, in other words, the interviewee himself.

It starts off in much the same way as the first interview: a relational clause, negatively expressing the value of the diamonds inserted in a verbalization clause: a judgment about the economic value of the diamonds backed up by the Minister's authority. But here the interviewee, as a manufacturer, does not mention that he has 'checked with other manufacturers'. He has his own authority: *they're worth far more than 25 cents.*

The clauses he uses are, for the most part, action clauses, even if they are often passivized and modalized (*they can't be manufactured for less*). In contrast to the first interviewee, he discusses the value of the diamonds in terms of the active process of manufacturing and marketing.

When talking about his customers, he also uses action clauses: *they are buying them...; they are phoning up...* He depicts the customers as people who actively participate in the economic process rather than as victims, condemned to passivity, helplessly delivered to feelings of happiness or worry.

It is important to note that this difference between the first two interviews is initiated by the interviewer rather than the interviewees. It is he who sets the tone: the consumer he asks '*Are you happy?*', the producer '*What can you manufacture them for?*', the consumer he approaches as a passive, ill-informed subject, the producer as an active, knowledgeable subject.

When it comes to the Minister, relational clauses reappear, both in the speech of the interviewer, who calls him a 'very popular politician', and in the speech of the interviewee, who calls him a liar. But McMinn's statements about the interviewee himself use action clauses (*you are accusing...; you are manufacturing...; you could stand to lose...*) or very positive cognition clauses (*you're quite convinced*). It is true, these

statements appear in the guise of questions, but they are either questions that take the form of statements, or questions in which the statement itself is not in question, only its degree (*how much*): McMinn clearly selects different processes for his two different interviewees.

So where the first interview is about evaluations and feelings, the second is about actions — the act of accusing, the active processes of manufacturing, selling and buying. And although this interview, too, is in a sense antagonistic, its antagonism is of a different kind: in the first interview two different concepts of value play a role; in the second interview interviewer and interviewee operate with the same concept of value, even if they disagree about the actual value of the diamonds.

The third interview deals with the diamond earrings, the Mailex manager's accusations, the workings of Government Departments of Consumer Affairs, and the Minister himself.

While McMinn, in the earlier interviews, reports the Minister's statements as strong and positive, he is unable to extract strong and positive statements from the Minister in this interview. The Minister almost exclusively uses relational clauses inserted in verbalization clauses: he attributes judgments about the value of the diamonds to Commissioners, dealers, diamond cutters, etc. Close reading of the interview in fact reveals astonishing differences in the figures of his sources and throws doubt on any assumptions one might have had about the conclusiveness of the research on which the Minister's pronouncements were based.

When it comes to Smith's accusations, the interviewer attempts to make them sound even sharper than they already were (*he's called you an out-and-out liar*), but the Minister refrains from retaliating in like manner. Instead of accusing Smith (here, for some reason persistently called James), he softens the impact of the counteraccusations to which he is more or less forced by using the passive voice, deleting the actor and qualifying with 'I think' (*I think they're being deceived*), or by making *the advertisement* rather than Smith the actor of the deception.

McMinn, however, continues to attribute to the Minister strong feelings (*So you're not worried...*) and positive actions (*You're destroying his business*), no doubt in an attempt to provoke him to a stronger reaction — a reaction which, however, is not forthcoming: Einfeld talks of himself in cognition clauses with negative polarity (*I don't know anything about diamonds* - note how he adds, astonishingly: *and that's the only true thing that has been said*), and the strongest statement to which he can be induced is *my duty to warn consumers*. It all sounds as if he is, in fact, rather worried, and constantly tries to minimize both the importance of the whole affair and his own responsibility in it. Discussing his advisers and experts, on the other

hand, Einfeld uses positive mental process clauses: *they're examining...; they're investigating...; they know exactly....* But there is no mention of the results of these investigations. Whether the diamonds are fake or authentic is never established.

This interview, then, provides information, not so much about actions and events, as about the mental processes of Einfeld and his advisers. And it does so in two very different ways, depending on whether the information comes from the interviewer or the interviewee. The interviewer makes no mention of the advisers, and attributes to the Minister positive mental processes, pictures him as actively intervening on behalf of the consumer. The interviewee, on the other hand, attributes weak or negative mental processes to himself, pictures himself as the spokesman of a large bureaucratic organization, and stresses the positive mental processes of his advisers. The interview also deals with the value of the diamonds, but the relational clauses which express this value, attributed to various advisers and experts, contradict each other so thoroughly that no positive information emerges.

#### *Questions and answers*

Every question is, in a sense, both a command and a statement. The command function implicit in questioning is the command to speak, the command to provide an answer. Not to answer a question is a strong rejection of the speaker, and if the speaker's right to ask questions is tacitly or explicitly guaranteed by some social institution, a strong rejection of that social institution. Refusing to answer the questions of media interviewers, for example, challenges the notion that such questions are asked on behalf of the public and its 'right to know', and that the assumptions implicit in these questions are consensual ones. Hence such refusals are often interpreted as admissions of guilt. By refusing to answer the questions of a media interviewer, interviewees lay themselves open to the suspicion that they have something to hide.

The statements contained in questions can be complete or incomplete. In WH-questions some information is lacking from the statement, and the question is in fact a demand to provide that lacking information. In polar questions only the polarity is lacking, so that the question constitutes a demand to supply the lacking polarity by affirming or denying the statement implicit in the question. The limit case is, of course, the statement itself. Here one answer only is sought: agreement. Tag questions seek it explicitly, by adding a tag like *isn't it* or *doesn't he* to a statement. But in a sense every statement demands agreement. To answer a statement is to agree or disagree, to confirm the information contained in the statement or to reject it, but not to supply information lacking from that statement.



Generally, the more information is lacking from the statement implicit in the question, the more the questioner is professing not to know the answer and the more likely it is that the question is a true information question. The less information is lacking from it, the more it is likely to be a control question, seeking to make the respondent fall into line with preconceived ideas, with knowledge that is, itself, not in question. Courtroom interrogations and job interviews (cf. e.g. Fowler *et al.* 1979, pp. 63-81) are just two examples of questioning used for the purpose of control.

The first interview opens with a statement: the value of the diamonds, as pronounced upon by the Minister, is literally not in question. The interviewee is not given a chance to react to this statement: another question is asked immediately, determining the direction of her reaction, a question about her feelings. In view of his opening statement, and in terms of the concept of value with which the interviewer operates, it can only be interpreted as a rhetorical question, only be answered with *no*. When the interviewee nevertheless answers yes, she is therefore not so much answering the question as disagreeing with the premises of the interviewer, rejecting both his concept of value and his assumptions about her, the consumer. She refuses to cooperate.

The interviewer does not accept this answer. He tries again, more insistently this time, using a statement, but turning it into a question by means of his intonation. Now, if she is to avoid sabotaging the interview by giving the same answer, she must defend her position, and this, after a hesitant and apologetic start, she does. She states her own values, her own sources. Into these the interviewer does not enquire further. He ignores her views, does not take up any of the points she raises, neither agrees, nor disagrees. He simply concludes the interview in terms of his own premises, his own original question. With this conclusion the interviewee can agree. An impression of cooperativeness is maintained, and this is necessary, for she is, after all, a member of the public on whose behalf he is supposedly conducting his enquiry.

But in fact the interview is not cooperative. It has all the appearances of a strategic interaction in which the interviewer is out to get a certain answer without, however, being able to demand it explicitly. The interviewee understands this only too well and takes advantage of the fact that he cannot force her to be the passive, distressed victim he wants her to be. She wins. But only for the time being: as we will see, the interviewer has other ammunition in store for her.

The second interview also starts off with a statement, and this time it isn't followed by a question. The interviewee has only one option: disagreement, and he gives the interviewer even more than he had, perhaps, expected. Sensational stuff: *the Minister is a liar*.

The interviewer then repeats this statement, as though he fears it will not count in the eyes of the audience unless initiated by him. Once again he gets the answer he is after.

From then on the interview becomes somewhat less strategic. The interviewee is rewarded for his cooperation with some genuine information questions — questions which allow him to picture himself as knowledgeable about his business and victimized by the Minister's action. But that part of the interview will never be seen by the audience.

The interviewer's attitude towards the Minister, in the third interview, is strikingly different from that he adopts towards his other interviewees. Einfeld is politely addressed as *Mr Minister*, and McMinn's overlong explanations and qualifications at times take the sting out of his questions. True, he uses the same strategies as in the other interviews — rhetorical questions, statements intended to provoke vehement denial — but his deferences gives them less force and conviction.

He opens with a rhetorical question: *are you prepared to be called a liar*. But the Minister hedges, does not provide the strong denial McMinn might have hoped for. Instead he gets himself tangled up in the inconclusive and often contradictory information on which he has apparently based his statements in Parliament. So McMinn tries again, now confronting the Minister more directly with Smith's accusations.

Again he does not get material to match the force of the Smith interview, and, in the end, rather than directly challenging the Minister's attempts to deny personal responsibility, it is he, once again, who provides the conclusion — in terms of his own premises, rather than in terms of anything the Minister has said: a final attempt to get what he wants. Initially he gets exactly the opposite (*I don't want anything to happen against me*), but in the end Einfeld reluctantly gives the interviewer something resembling the show of strength expected of him: *I don't care*.

An inconclusive, weak interview. But, as we will see, Channel 10 has the means to make the Minister, despite himself, appear a strong, decisive hero.

### *Constructing the text*

The most prominent lexical chain in the first interview is the one formed by expressions referring to the diamonds, the second most important one that formed by expressions referring to their price, and the third most important one that formed by expressions referring to the interviewee's feelings (*happy, happier, worried, bother...*). The last two recede into the background in the middle section of the interview, but return later, and so still form part of the main framework of the text.

Expressions referring to the Minister and his pronouncements occur only twice, both times in the speech of the interviewer, but, appearing both in the interviewer's opening statement and in his conclusion, they are nevertheless made to form part of the overall structure of the text.

Other lexical chains, e.g. the one formed by expressions referring to the interviewee's daughter, do not occur throughout the interview. The recurring themes are those and only those which the interviewer introduces in his opening question. Even though the interviewee rejects the interviewer's concept of value and his assumptions about her as a consumer, she is nevertheless bound to discuss the topics on which he has decided if the text is to be coherent. The topics she introduces herself inevitably remain sidelines, digressions.

The interviewer is also firmly in charge of the conjunctive structure of the interview. In the first question he introduces the topics — the interviewee then confirms one of these. In the second question he makes an adversative link with her previous statement. She denies his statement. The third question, though introduced by *and*, is in fact a conclusion, and one which she confirms. In each case, then, the moves that propel the argument forward are made by the interviewer and the answers function textually as confirmations within a semantic structure generated by the interviewer.

Expressions referring to Sid Einfeld and his pronouncements form the most important lexical chains in the second interview. There are 16 expressions referring to Einfeld and 7 referring to his statements (*said, lying, repeat, etc.*). The topic recedes into the background temporarily, but returns prominently towards the end of the interview. The diamonds and their price form another strand that runs through the whole of the interview.

Other topics (manufacturing, the consumers, the effect of the Minister's allegations) also recur, but not throughout the interview. Again: the main topics as well as the topics that occur during part of the interview only are first introduced by the interviewer. And the major semantic relations — the introduction of new topics, the drawing of conclusions — are, here too, generated by the interviewer.

Some of the threads that tie together the third interview are woven through the whole text, others are intermittent, and occur only in the speech of the interviewee.



Expressions referring to Richard Smith (the most prominent of the lexical chains in this interview) belong to the former category. Although Einfeld, in his long and rather rambling answers, usually steers away from this topic, every one of the interviewer's questions forces him to return to it. Other lexical chains belonging to this category are, once again, the diamonds and their price, but they figure less prominently

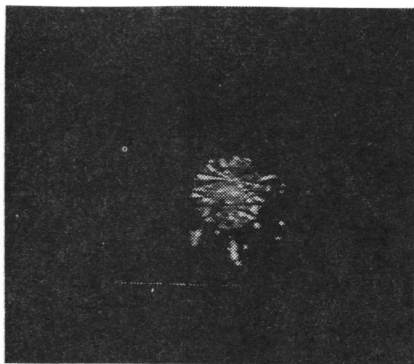
here than in the other interviews.

The Minister's answers are full of references to advisers and to the process of examining and investigating. But these are intermittent lexical chains. They are ignored by the interviewer, interrupted every time a question is asked, and then picked up again in Einfeld's next reply.

As far as the major conjunctive relations are concerned, McMinn, in his second question, uses an adversative link, contrasting Einfeld's statements to those of Richard Smith. His next two questions again relate to the preceding text as conclusions. Thus the second interview remains the only one in which McMinn introduces new topics during the interview. In the others his attention is fully taken up by the struggle to get the one answer he wants.

Overall, then, the kind of semantic links McMinn makes typify his strategy as an interviewer: he introduces topics, poses as an adversary, and draws conclusions.

1 0'00"	<p><b>MCS ANCHORMAN</b>          Consumer Affairs Minister Sid Einfeld has repeated outside Parliament warnings about mail order diamond earrings. Yesterday he savagely attacked Mailex International for selling 25 cent earrings for 10 dollars. However the company's manager Richard Smith has hit back, calling Mr. Einfeld a liar and threatening a million dollar lawsuit if the accusations were made outside the protection of Parliament. Ian McMinn reports.</p>	
2 0'24"	<p><b>CS EARRING IN BOX</b></p> <p>McMINN          (voice over)</p> <p>This set of diamond earrings sells for 10 dollars.</p> <p>Caption: Ian McMinn reporting Eyewitness News</p>	

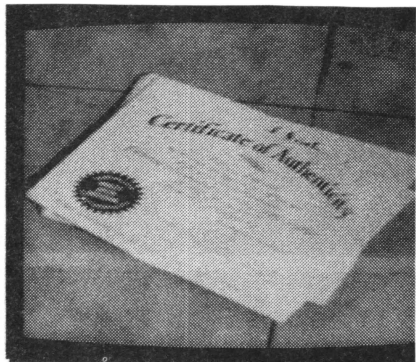


**CS ONE EARRING**

0'27" 3

McMINN  
(voice over)

The stone comes from the United States. It's cut in India.



**CS 2 CERTIFICATES OF AUTHENTICITY**

0'30" 4

McMINN  
(voice over)

20,000 sets have been sold...



**MLS CUSTOMER AND SALESMAN IN WAREHOUSE**

0'32" 5

*Low level sync sound fades in*

McMINN  
(voice over)

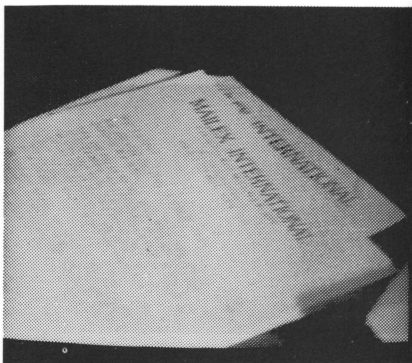
... at a profit of a dollar fifty each. Another 40,000 are on the way. Or at least ...

6 0'36" CS LETTER WITH MAILEX INTERNATIONAL LETTERHEAD

sync sound fades out

McMINN  
(voice over)

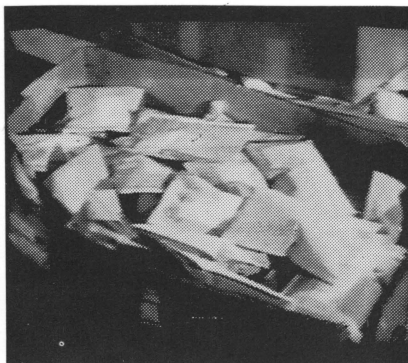
... that was the plan before Sid Einfeld stepped in.



7 0'39" FULL SHOT CRATE WITH EAR-RINGS IN ENVELOPES

McMINN  
(voice over)

But is 10 dollars a fair price?



8 0'42" CS NORMA HOLROYD

Caption: Norma Holroyd, consumer  
HOLROYD

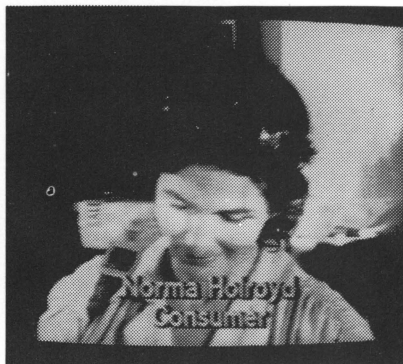
Yes I'd pay twen... ten dollars for them, yes.

McMINN  
(offscreen)

You don't think that's exorbitant?

HOLROYD

No, I don't, I don't think, I don't know a lot about jew ellery, but my daughter says, I'm listening to my daughter and she says they will not fade, they will not go yellow, and the gold will not rub off, and I'll take all... she works in a jewellery shop and I'd listen to what she had to say.



9 1'04" MC2S SMITH OVERSHOULDER  
OF McMINN

McMINN  
(voice over)

Mailex manager Richard Smith is a worried and angry man.



10 1'07" CS SET OF EARRINGS IN  
SMITH'S HAND

McMINN  
(voice over)

He says business is dropping off because of the Minister's privileged comment.



11 1'12" CS SMITH

Caption: Richard Smith, Mailex  
Manager

SMITH

Well, the Minister is a liar I'm afraid.  
The diamonds are worth far more  
than 25 cents...





Camera zooms out to MCS Smith  
oversoulder McMinn

SMITH  
(continues)

...You couldn't buy a pair of diamond earrings like this in any Sydney shop for less than 39 dollars. So he's a blatant liar.

McMINN  
You're accusing the Minister of lying.

SMITH  
The Minister is lying under Parliament privilege, yes. If he'd care...



CAMERA ZOOMS IN TO CS SMITH

SMITH  
(continues)

... to come outside of Parliament to repeat these same things he'd have a million dollar lawsuit on his hands in 5 minutes.



CS EINFELD

Caption: Syd Einfeld, Consumer Affairs Minister

EINFELD

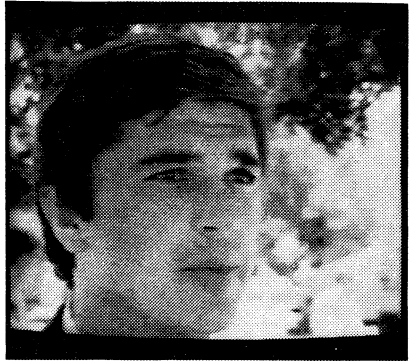
There's no... there's not one recognized diamond... I would have seen about twelve who'd say they're worth anything at all or has any real intrinsic value. In fact one diamond cutter rang this morning and said even if it was a full karat and it's .005 a karat, as an industrial type thing it wouldn't be worth more than 15 dollars, but the whole thing is... is being blown out of all proportions. My duty is to warn consumers who I think they're being deceived and everybody in Australia is examining it to see and by the way my lawyers are examining it into the department to see if they should take any action.



13 2'05"

CS McMINN

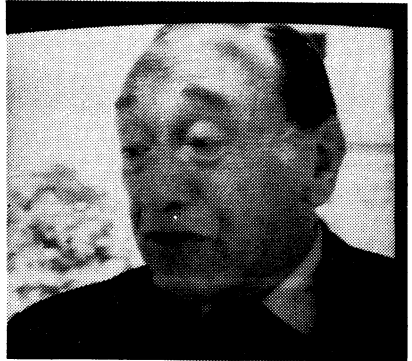
McMINN  
So Mr Einfeld, it doesn't worry you that you've been called a liar in public, nor does it worry you that there could court action.



14 2'10"

CS EINFELD

EINFELD  
I don't want anything to happen against me. Why should I? I... I've gone through my public life I think untrammelled and nobody ever suggested before... but if Mr. James wants to use those sort of ridiculous words he can do whatever he likes. I don't care.



2'23"

So far the interviews have been treated as individual texts, independent from one another. But in the completed news item they are that no longer. They become part of a larger text, the news item as a whole. And in this process every aspect of the interviews is modified. Editing creates deletions and rearrangements of parts of the texts and changes, in this way, both the import of the interviewee's statements and the interaction between interviewer and interviewee. And text construction is also modified: what was, within any one of the interviews, a prominent lexical chain, may, in the context of the news item as a whole, become a minor strand, a piece of background information, a digression; the major conjunctive relations now become, not those between the question and answer pairs, but those between the sections of the news item as a whole.

The anchorman's introduction opens with a verbalization clause (the 'phenomenon' of this clause could be replaced by a clause of reported speech preceded by *that*). But in the next clauses this is no longer the case. What were, in McMinn's questions, still verbalization clauses (*The Minister says...; Well what he says of course is..., etc.*) now become action clauses (*...he savagely attacked...; The company's manager (... hit back...)*): words are transformed into actions.

The diamonds and their price, on the other hand, do not figure very prominently in this introduction. Grammatically they become 'circumstances' tacked on to the end of the clauses. The main lexical chains are those formed by expressions referring to the Minister, to Richard Smith, and to their accusations, warnings, threats, and other speech acts. The dramatic confrontation gets the spotlight. The issue recedes into the background. As a result it becomes difficult to say whether in *...he savagely attacked Mailex International for selling 25 cent diamonds earrings for 10 dollars* the actual valuation of the earrings is still attributed to the Minister or stated as an indisputable fact.

By using the word *savage*, the introduction makes the Minister's 'attack' far more powerful than it in fact was: it transforms Einfeld's 'duty towards the public', his role as a spokesman for a large bureaucratic organization, into a heroic personal act. The introduction also obscures that Smith's threats, rather than just being reported, were in fact provoked by McMinn, and might not have occurred but for the intervention of Channel 10. The same applies to Einfeld 'repeating his warnings outside Parliament'.

While the anchorman, with all the weight of his position as an 'institutional voice' behind him (neutral studio background: detached camera angle; formal style of dress; impartial newsreader's delivery) pre-structures the issue in terms of its news values, personalizes it and confrontationalizes it, McMinn's voice over commentary does exactly the opposite. It confines itself to factual information about the diamonds, and, if anything, depersonalizes rather than personalizes: the diamonds become actor in a series of event clauses and passive action clauses from which the actors have been deleted, all this in contrast to the way the diamonds are dealt with in the Smith interview. And the images reinforce this. They, too, are matter of fact documentation: a kind of exhibit. People are seen only once in the context of an objectified visualization of the activities of the mail order company.

But, in the final line of the commentary, all this is linked up again with the introduction: *before Sid Einfeld stepped in*. In the end, this detached, 'documentary' section of the news item turns out to have served as background information, subordinated to the main topic, the confrontation between Einfeld and Smith. And the temporal conjunction

(before) suggests that this is to be seen as motivated not so much by considerations of construction, of a division between background and foreground information, as by the events themselves: it was a matter of events *before* it became a confrontation, *before* Einfeld stepped in.

Meanwhile the value of the diamonds and the question of their authenticity (although alluded to in one of the images) has barely been discussed — these matters, it seems, we must see as pertaining to the confrontation between Einfeld and Smith, rather than as belonging to the realm of hard facts.

The introductory question of the first interview (*Would you be happy to pay ten dollars for them?*) is replaced by a voice over question (*But is ten dollars a fair price?*). This is common practice in television news, but that doesn't make it less important: it creates the impression that the interviewee spontaneously takes up the topics she speaks about, rather than that she follows an agenda set by the interviewer. It obscures that the question she answers is not the question she was asked: she was asked about her *feelings*, not about an objective issue — now she appears to answer an objectively formulated question in a personal, subjective way, and this transforms her into a woman *unable* to discuss issues other than subjectively and emotionally, someone who, unlike Channel 10, cannot see the issue in its proper perspective.

In this light the reference to her daughter is no longer an affirmation of her own values and her own support system, but a sign of her ignorance, particularly as it follows her admission that she 'doesn't know much about jewellery'. In this light her arguments lose validity - that 'the gold will not rub off' is relevant to her being happy, but not the fairness of the price. And her strongest argument (*they look good on me*) is deleted altogether. Thus she becomes a stereotype of the gullible consumer, easy prey for the shady practices of sharp businessmen - a creature in need of protection.

The interviewer's role in provoking all this, meanwhile, has been much attenuated. He is no longer seen to provoke her opening statement and her defensive, almost hostile reaction, no longer seen to insist on the answer he is after by asking twice what is essentially the same question. He now seems only to *react* to her answers, a listener rather than an initiator.

From the second interview, too, the first question is omitted. Instead we see interviewer and interviewee talking and hear McMinn's voice over commentary. In this commentary Smith, the only interviewee who was *not* asked questions about his feelings, is introduced as a *worried and angry man* and the reason for his worries is given: ...he says

*business is dropping off.* The reference to the effect of Einfeld's allegations on his business is thus shifted from the end to the beginning of the interview and entered into the argument by the interviewee (*he says ...*) rather than by the interviewer (who originally had asked: *what effect has this had on your business*). In this way Smith's anxiety becomes the reason for his 'attack' on Einfeld.

Smith's statements, then, not only seem provoked by Einfeld rather than by McMinn, they also seem more irrational and emotional than they in fact were. Instead of a man who replies confidently, if sharply, he becomes a man who is caught out and tries to talk himself out of a corner by unfounded counteraccusations - desperate needs lead to desperate deeds.

The WH-questions and their answers are omitted altogether. While McMinn, during the interview, approached Smith as an active subject, he now introduces him in relational clauses and verbalization clauses, and from the interview itself only the relational clauses (Smith's accusations) have been retained.

In his introduction the anchorman twice used the phrase *outside of Parliament*, and twice he gave the word *outside* particularly strong stress. In the interview with Smith the camera zoomed in when Smith, towards the end of the interview, said *if he'd care to come out of Parliament to repeat these same things ...* The significance of this becomes clear in the third interview. Einfeld is filmed *outside of Parliament*, not afraid to face his enemy (in two other *Actionline* items, taped during the same month, Einfeld was interviewed, also by McMinn, in his office), and he is filmed 'repeating these same things'.

True, he does not say that the diamonds are worth only 25 cents, and one couldn't exactly say that he 'savagely attacks' Smith, but he does say *there's not one recognized diamond* (attributing this only in his next sentence to 'about twelve others'), he does not explicitly attribute *it's .005 a karat* to his experts, which makes him seem knowledgeable, and he states that his *duty is to warn consumers who I think they're being deceived*. There are some jarring notes of course (the diamond cutter who thinks the diamonds might be worth 15 (!) dollars; references to the investigations and examinations of others; the statement that *the whole thing is being blown up out of all proportions*), but at least Einfeld does not attribute every single thing he says to others, at least he does not do himself quite as much damage as in other, deleted parts of the interview where he hedges, and admits, for example, that he knows nothing about diamonds. And while his final statement does not exactly begin on a heroic note (*I don't want anything to happen against me*), in the light of his daring act of stepping outside of Parliament, and compared to the emotive reaction of the other interviewees, his defiant *I don't care is*

close enough to a show of strength.

So while the editing of the first two interviews has weakened the position of the interviewees, the editing of this interview makes Einfeld appear considerably stronger than he comes across in the unedited interview. And, once again, the efforts of McMinn in retouching the Minister's portrait have, for the most part, been erased.

## CONCLUSION

The news item as a whole, then, seems to *dramatize* the issue. A hero, Minister for Consumer Affairs, has proposed to come to the rescue of a poor, helpless and of course female victim, a consumer who has fallen prey to the tricks of a sly businessman, the baddie of the story. As the hero appears to succeed in his mission, the baddie goes into action and challenges the hero to a duel. The hero is not afraid to accept the challenge and comes outside to face his opponent. Or, to put it another way: the State, in the guise of a benevolent, protective father figure, steps in to protect the weak, ignorant and gullible consumer against the ruthless, selfseeking producer.

Within this drama, the interviews serve to establish the 'character' of the *dramatis personae* and to hint at the action. By 'hinting at action' I mean that these interviews do not serve to give information about a *tertium quid*, about actions, events, feelings, things people said some other time, some other place. They are themselves the actions, events, feelings and things said. Their place is the *here* and their time is the *now*. They serve as active speech acts that propel forward the drama, and all the decisions taken during the editing process serve to enhance precisely that function.

Of course, interviews are a little too static to do this by themselves. The storyline must be 'previewed' in the introduction, reinforced by linking narration and by the 'questions' (statements) that are retained: *you don't think that's exorbitant; Richard Smith is a worried and angry man; you are accusing the Minister of lying; you are not worried that there could be court action*. But the interviews still stand in for the action, remain the core of the drama.

The final *denouement* of the drama, meanwhile, is never shown, not in this item, nor in any follow-up item. The duel never takes place. And in fact it never took place: the issue never reached the courts, and by Christmas 1981 Mailex International was still advertising and selling the diamond earrings. If *Actionline* provided a service to the public, it was not by establishing whether or not the diamonds were real, not by determining the price for which they should be sold, not by actually protecting the public against the malpractices of Mailex International,

if malpractices they were. The action in *Actionline*, rather than *real* action on behalf of the consumer, was symbolic action on behalf, I think, in the first place of the media themselves. The public received a symbolic message: you need the media to tell you why you need the State. The item, in personalised and dramatized terms, defined the relation between the producer, the consumer and the State, and disseminated this definition to the consumer.

At first sight this may seem a paradoxical role for a television channel which, for its economic survival, depends on the producer rather than on the State. But perhaps it isn't. Perhaps an item like this serves, above everything else, the media's own interests. It demonstrates their independence from the advertiser and so enhances their credibility as a source of news. It shows the State as just another agency that needs to be packaged and 'sold' to the public by the experts who know how to do so, the professional media communicators. And it shows also that the consumer movement can be dealt with in a way that does not threaten the assumptions of advertisers, that can leave intact a picture of consumers as people needing to be looked after rather than able to look after themselves, as targets for mass campaigns rather than as people able to organise themselves, as safe only in the hands of the experts who know just what the public needs.

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