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# Performance Journalism: A Three-Template Model of Television News

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## Abstract

Journalists and their editorial managers are increasingly beholden to standards of performance built into industrial performance templates imported from outside what used to be regarded as the journalistic 'field'. This paper distinguishes three sets of criteria for journalistic 'performance': ethical (P1), commercial (P2) and theatrical (P3). These are elaborated in turn with respect to their industrial origins, their underlying conceptions of the public interest, their political implications and their productive consequences. The three-template model extends Franklin's (2003) critique of McJournalism by: a) providing a fuller account of the (P2) McDonaldization of television news, b) more precisely demarcating backstage (P2) and frontstage (P3) elements of journalistic performance, and c) elaborating a new P3 news template with reference to Bryman's (2004) work on Disneyization. The paper concludes with a New Zealand case study highlighting tensions between P2 and P3 modes of performance and audience outcomes.

## Keywords

television news, McDonaldization, Disneyization, infotainment

The external fragmentation of television news across channels, platforms, program formats, and market niches has been related both to changes within and to shifts away from the conventional broadcast news package. Within television news packages a shift from information giving toward storytelling and attraction modes of communication has been observed, including a growing willingness to select stories on

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dramaturgical criteria and embellish them for emotional effect (Ekstrom 2000). More visually oriented news packages have become increasingly self-absorbed, with journalism itself as “the thesis around which the story is constructed” featuring dramatic roles for heroic journalists and victimized or villainous participants. Meanwhile, by a process characterized as “internal fragmentation,” the traditional news package is being crowded out by other news forms, either within the bulletin or as rivals to it. Building on earlier work by Carpignano et al. (1990), Ben-Porath (2007) traces a trend away from tightly edited monological news packages toward looser, less authoritative, more conversational modes of presentation and narrative—forms previously found in entertainment-friendly genres such as talk, breakfast, and celebrity news shows. These more dialogical news forms center on question asking and human interaction rather than information giving and monologue. Researchers have noted the concomitant development of journalistic norms embracing “a contradictory mix of elitism and populism” mingling antagonism to elected officials with conformity to audience tastes (Djerf-Pierre 2000: 255). Journalistic objectivity, impartiality, and authority are seen to be declining as boundary riding between journalistic and nonjournalistic forms of address increases.

These related tendencies—toward journalistic self-absorption and celebrification on one hand and toward more variegated and populist modes of news presentation on the other—reflect growing pressures for contemporary journalism to meet three overlapping (but conflicting) goals: to serve democracy, to cut costs, and to maximize audiences (Corner and Pels 2003: 5). Journalists and their editorial managers are now beholden to standards of performance built into industrial performance templates imported from outside what used to be regarded as the journalistic “field.” To the extent that these imported templates successfully colonize new, more commodified cultures of journalism, they convey implicit threats to journalist autonomy and integrity. And as the new styles of journalistic performance win acceptance and are internalized, older conceptions of the public interest are stretched to accommodate them.<sup>1</sup>

To elucidate the multifaceted and progressive character of this process, this article defines three sets of criteria for journalistic “performance”: ethical (P1), commercial (P2), and theatrical (P3). These are elaborated in turn with respect to their industrial origins, their underlying conceptions of the public interest, their political implications, and their productive consequences. The model extends Franklin’s (2003) critique of McJournalism by (1) providing a fuller account of the (P2) McDonaldization of television news, (2) more precisely demarcating backstage (P2) and frontstage (P3) elements of journalistic performance, and (3) elaborating a new P3 template with reference to Bryman’s (2004) work on Disneyization. The three-template model is then used to pose new theoretical questions about the tensions between P1 journalism and its P2–P3 encrustations, about potential conflicts between P2 and P3 modes of behavior, and about which P3 characteristics might be more or less compatible with P1. The article concludes with a New Zealand case study highlighting tensions between P2 and P3 modes of performance and harmful audience effects.

## PI: Ethical Performance

*Ethical performance* is commonly assessed against the standard liberal democratic functions of normative journalism stemming from its long-standing trustee role in the service of citizens. The citizenship template is distinctively altruistic in its focus on (1) long-term benefits to society, rather than short-term benefits to individuals, (2) needs and (inclusive) rights rather than wants and (exclusive) choices, (3) collective goals—democracy, learning, participation, engagement—rather than individual benefits, and (4) substantive message content over format and distribution (Needham 2003: 5; also see Gans 1979: 43). More specifically, it is usually taken to entail a trusted third party role in communicating and contextualizing information about the actions of those who have control over citizens' lives and in enabling deliberative engagement—horizontal as well as vertical—between policy elites and citizens.

Liberal democracy is distinguished from majoritarian (or plebiscitary) populism by its recognition that complex societies cannot operate on the basis of interpersonal communications between friends and acquaintances and its concomitant suspicion of tabloid “people versus the power bloc” simplicities. The public interest does not form spontaneously but must be shaped both by central representative institutions such as parliament, the courts, and competitive elections and by public discussion in less official forums, such as social gatherings, interest groups, political parties, labor unions, and the mass media.<sup>2</sup>

“Public” discussion is therefore actualized through intermediary institutions, ideally governed by a discourse ethic. Whether elected or not, power holders are expected to expose themselves to contrary viewpoints. Even mass opinion, when untested by vigorous public deliberation, is considered fickle and unreliable, regardless of whether it commands majority support. The overriding goal is to create a form of government subject to influence from below by ensuring adequate public deliberation and erecting a system of countervailing checks and balances to hold the powerful to account (Holmes 1995).

The mass media's fiduciary role requires it to respect the conventions of debate: the right to be heard, to reply, and to seek other opinions. It calls for umpires or “trusted third parties” capable of suppressing their own personal opinions in determining which questions are political or technical, and in seeking a balance between the time and space given to the various positions involved. It entails the cooperative involvement of commentators, editors, presenters, policy specialists, and investigative journalists to expand common knowledge. Finally, it requires the media to address issues that might be of less than immediate interest to their own consumers but that are of profound interest to citizens qua citizens.

In short, as Onora O'Neill insists, a free press is not an unconditional good: “It is good because and insofar as it helps the public to explore and test opinions and to judge for themselves whom and what to believe. . . . Good public debate must not only be accessible to but also assessable by its audiences [original emphasis]” (O'Neill 2002: 95). As we shall see, however, there are long-standing tendencies in Western

journalism for these altruistic P1 goals to be displaced by more commercial P2 and entertainment-oriented P3 criteria, pressures that have grown in the wake of digital media convergence.

## **P2: Commercial Performance**

*Commercial performance* is chiefly concerned with organizational survival by means of the cost-efficient delivery of commodities to lucrative demographic groups. The commercial template is crudely utilitarian to the extent that it envisages self-regarding individuals who (1) form preferences without regard for others, (2) act through a series of instrumental, temporary, bilateral relationships, (3) rely on competition and complaint to produce accountability, and (4) exert their power through aggregate signaling (Needham 2003: 5). This approach values backstage management and management skills over policy and professional skills and promotes assembly-line production practices, cost-effectiveness, market research, and quantifiable performance targets. From the commercial viewpoint, broadcasting is just like any other delivery system with inputs and outputs, where quantity is cheaper and easier to defend than quality and where risk avoidance maximizes proven topics, treatments, and forms.

The industrial template adopted by many media managers to maximize backstage efficiencies reaches its fullest expression in the commercial fast-food industry. “McDonaldization” is Ritzer’s term for the process by which the operating principles of the McDonald’s hamburger chain permeate other sectors of society (Ritzer 1993). McDonaldization draws on four Weberian principles of instrumental rationality: efficiency, control, predictability, and calculability. When applied to journalism (as happened, for instance, with Western television news programs in the 1980s and 1990s) these typically entail (Franklin 2003) the following:

1. Efficiency: Newsroom downsizing via FTE budgeting and outsourcing to weed out less “productive” public affairs-oriented staff, to promote news workers and managers sympathetic to cost-containment and “consumer sovereignty” and willing to supplant expensive fact-based or investigatory journalism with more opinionated and less expensive news forms
2. Control: Reformulation of the news agenda on commercial marketing principles with information bundling and bulletin branding to reflect shared preferences and attract lucrative demographic groups
3. Predictability: The formatting, packaging, and segmenting of news on a standardized, grid-like template both to harmonize the viewer experience and to provide a stable target for market research
4. Calculability: The use of audience ratings and focus groups to monitor news work performance and provide a substitute for editorial judgment

Some real democratic benefits of “consumer sovereignty” have been claimed by contributors to the cultural studies/creative industries literature, but free-to-air commercial

broadcasters are primarily concerned to deliver audiences to advertisers. Journalism is a means to this higher end in an enterprise where, far from being “sovereign,” the consuming public is an almost incidental beneficiary: with citizen resources being acquired as a by-product of entertainment viewing (Ehrlich 1996; Prior 2007: 275–81). The myth of “consumer sovereignty” depends on the utilitarian notion that people know what they want rather than being cumulatively conditioned by what is made available. Ratings and focus groups reflect branded choices from a preestablished menu rather than requiring genuine democratic deliberation. Their individualist ethos licenses delegate theories of representation as opposed to the more community-oriented and elaborately institutionalized trustee roles embedded in the P1 template.

Influenced by the Chicago school of sociology, early news consultants urged their clients that “the news organization’s first priority [was] dissuading viewers from changing channels . . . [and] that no public service program could serve one American public because one American public did not exist” (Allen 2005: 377). Such advice promoted a marketing focus on audience maximization and profitable demographics at the expense of the wider community or the public interest. The “middle majority” of viewers was deterred by “excessive talk of government and civic affairs” and more concerned about whether “the world was safe” and “what the weathercaster had to say” (Allen 2005: 371). It preferred coverage of weather, crime, human interest, and problem-solving, often consumption-oriented, “news you can use.” Subsequently, modern business accounting methods, such as computerized *FTE* cost tracking and *MBO* performance incentives diverted editors away from news toward personnel and budgetary management and tied their remuneration to corporate profit at the expense of journalistic concerns (Overholster 2001).<sup>3</sup> Local television newsrooms became “factories” with an assembly-line approach to news work, making it more inflexible, evaluating output in productivity terms, and restricting the personal investment of news workers in the product (Bantz et al. 1980). In this way marketing and management accounting were yoked in tandem to *equate the public interest with corporate self-interest* and to curtail editorial autonomy.

This has political and ideological consequences. McDonaldization sidelines core viewers, mostly older males, in favor of more marginal and fickle viewers, mostly young and female (Hamilton 2004: 72). Democratic goals—giving unpopular minority voices a hearing, or achieving balanced debate in the face of mainstream indifference—come to be regarded as too costly in terms of research resources, disruption of program times, loss of surface sheen in presentation, loss of advertising revenue, and the like. Letting the market prevail is a recipe for more entertainment-oriented, human interest storytelling, avoidance of topics that divide people (e.g., politics and public affairs), and the proliferation of tabloid crime coverage, often with a conservative law and order focus.<sup>4</sup>

Since news itself is ephemeral, measuring audience responses to individual items or single bulletins is impractical. For planning and control purposes, quantification requires a more predictable and thus “useable” bulletin (Mulgan 1991: 175). To create this, commercial news formats are standardized or “packaged.” The packaging is

predicated both on the advertisers' need to maximize audiences around commercial breaks and on the associated requirement for channel branding (Turow 1991: 127–28). It is not just advertisers and cost accountants who seek predictability, for viewers also require reliable product delivery—reassurance that the bulletin will deliver roughly the same kind of fare night after night.<sup>5</sup> Channel proliferation renders the need for predictability and reassurance, and for channel and program branding, even more compelling (Hamilton 2004: 215).

Once again, this characteristic of the P2 template has predictable structural consequences. Along with the assembly-line approach to news work, packaging is a form of standardization that increases bulletin rigidity and restricts its sociopolitical range. To increase the probability of viewer satisfaction most of the time, viewpoint diversity loses out to shared lowest common denominator preferences, and “hard” news is diluted by “information bundling” and genre hybridity (Hamilton 2004: 71). McJournalism builds a faster-paced, more entertaining, and more accessible bulletin and accommodates more advertising and promotional material within the news hole. Meanwhile, news concision—what Kathleen Hall Jamieson calls “biteability”—routinely excludes viewpoints that are radically new, disturbing, unexpected, or otherwise problematic. The latter tend to be supplanted by “closed” narratives playing on notions of “normality” and “commonsense” often drawing on familiar entertainment genres: horror/mystery films, detective dramas, fashion commercials, music television clips, soap operas, and so on.

Increasingly commodified and beholden to advertisers and multinational shareholders, McJournalism loses its ostensible P1 place in the democratic infrastructure of trustworthy role-players and institutions. News and current affairs consumers are increasingly urged to treat social problems as nonsystematic and resolvable by good-faith individual initiative, and advertisers face little challenge to their view of individual concerns as soluble by appropriate product consumption. Commercially oriented media managers are reluctant to undertake aggressive exposes of the inadequacies or dangers of their advertisers' products, of wrongdoing by major sponsors, or of aspects of the sociopolitical world on which their backers depend (Baker 2002; Hamilton 2004; McManus 1994). The crowning paradox of McJournalism is that it tends to create what it most fears. In the Downsian spatial (economic) model of media content, the urge for convergence toward the center leaves commercially peripheral viewers whose preferences are routinely ignored, weakening their normal willingness to stay put rather than surf. Moreover, because P1 concerns about news substance are market externalities (Baker 2002), it repels those viewers both more likely to support high-quality journalism and less amenable to P2 or P3 enticements.

### **P3: Theatrical Performance**

In an age of commercialized leisure where exposure to homogenized and standardized forms of entertainment (television, movies, video games, etc.) raises the expectation “that we will be entertained even when entertainment is not the main focus of the

activity,” the performative features of frontstage service delivery gain salience (Bryman 2004: 16). Journalism’s frontstage involves the more or less persuasive theatrical display of journalistic roles and related aspects of public address and accessibility: costuming, script delivery, pictorial versus textual emphasis, bulletin format and packaging, and the development of skill sets for celebrification, personalization, entertainment, and parasocial ingratiation. Increasingly it includes melodramatic role-playing (tough, demotic, cool, etc.) “to initiate controversy, to generate publicity, and to be seen as glamorous” as a way of building audiences (Bromley 2005: 314). Because of its primary emphasis on backstage operations, Franklin’s (2003) McDonaldized journalism underplays these more aesthetic and embodied modes of journalistic performance. The leisure industry template adopted by commercial media managers to improve frontstage presentation comes from the theme park and shopping mall industries where hybrid consumption choices are carefully cultivated to offer customers reasons for staying longer and buying more. For commercial television news the three main barriers to “staying longer” are serious news content, frequent commercial breaks, and channel proliferation. The theme park approach attempts to defeat these barriers with strategic techniques of frontstage service delivery. “Disneyization” is Bryman’s term for the widespread adoption of four theme park practices—*theming*, *hybrid consumption*, *merchandizing*, and *performative labor* (Bryman 2004).

On the presumption that that a consumer’s enjoyment or dislike of any service only partly reflects its objective quality, and that news is a product with low marginal utility, Disneyization recasts it as a relationship rather than a utility. Channel proliferation further encourages this approach as “[t]he personalities of those who present the information become shortcuts for viewers to find their news niche” (Hamilton 2004: 215). With respect to television news, Disneyized service delivery involves the following:

1. Personalized *theming* of news personnel as friendly and approachable “families” or teams and strengthening of parasocial relationships between celebrity anchors and audiences to deter channel zapping
2. Bulletin *merchandizing* and branding with anchor and channel promos, theme music, and corporate logos on news jackets to distinguish it from rival bulletins and increase impulse buying from channel surfers
3. *Hybridizing* of bulletins as magazine-like, something-for-everyone “infotainment” with exciting video footage and populist news content and restructuring of the bulletin as an emotional roller coaster to retain viewers around commercial breaks
4. Emphasis on *performative* elements of news presentation, such as
  - Scripted banter between presenters to cue sociability
  - Demotic role-playing between news team members to connote friendliness, ordinariness, and personal sincerity

- Self-conscious performances by “on-location” correspondents to convey professional self-assurance and insider status
- Use of phone-in polls, Web sites and vox populi interviews to simulate interactivity

Relationship marketing overhauls news presentation to highlight the emotional benefits of viewing. Faced with rival bulletins homogenized by P2 makeovers (i.e., McDonaldization), Disneyization seeks to redifferentiate them by means of performative techniques of customer service, specifically by employing codes of “emotional” and “aesthetic labor.” “Emotional labor” is the sincere display of positive emotions “to make the recipient . . . feel good about the worker and the organization for which he or she works” and thus, presumably, make them keen to stay longer and return more often (Bryman 2004: 58, 104–7). “Aesthetic labor” is the associated recruitment of service staff with “embodied capacities and attributes” conveying the right “look” or “sound” to inculcate the desired image of the company and of the service it offers (Bryman 2004: 123). Hence the elevation of attractive, fashionably dressed, female presenters in occupations, such as television, where personal appearance and “caring” skills are prized. Hence also attempts to reinforce news anchors’ public service and caring credentials by master-of-ceremony appearances at concerts, telethons, and charity events.

With respect to television news, a common differentiation strategy is “coanchorage,” a performative technique designed to make the bulletin more visually interesting with quick-cutting camera shots between two or more newsreaders. Having another reader on the set creates new possibilities for varying pace in the delivery of the individual news items, for breaking single stories into layers, and for achieving mood changes on adjacent items.

Intrinsic to coanchorage is the pseudo-spontaneous banter between the two (typically older male and younger female) anchors and between them and other members of the presentation family. This serves both to cue sociable interactivity—“work (and therefore viewing) as fun”—and to differentiate the bulletin from its less sociable rival(s). It also restores a semblance of journalistic purpose and authority. Autocue readings alternate between anchors according to a ping-pong role-swapping formula where each stresses the importance of what the other is saying by appearing to listen intently to it. In this way, they mutually reinforce each other’s authority without appearing to claim it for themselves while offering alternative targets for male–female viewer identification. Creating a pseudo-family expands the range of recognitions on offer and further valorizes the expression of emotion.

Siding parasocially with the viewer entails the demotic “media ritual” of ordinariness by which celebrity lowers its gaze (Couldry 2003: 103). Lowering the authority of the on-screen presenters renders them “more like us” and thus less aloof and more viewer-friendly. Celebrification of the news team also loads an “attention trap” by harnessing the logic of “the centripetal gaze” whereby public attention is drawn from the margins of society to its center (Lanham 2006: 52). Although Bryman

(2004: 9) seeks to avoid common negative connotations of Disneyization as a sociological concept, any application of the concept to news is inescapably normative.<sup>6</sup> Like McDonaldization, Disneyization stretches P1 news values in the process of commodification.

Such political effects are accomplished in a number of ways. Rather than a hierarchical bulletin running from the most serious news items at the beginning to more light-hearted and entertaining fare at the end, the multipresenter format intersperses light-hearted and serious items all through the bulletin to maximize viewer interest. The more pyramidal shape of the sole-anchor bulletin, with the most important stories first and the least important last, can now be relaxed or discarded altogether. Since item order no longer serves as the primary cue to newsworthiness, it can be adjusted to keep up viewer interest throughout the bulletin, particularly around ad breaks. In the absence of clear differentiation in substantive news values, the old hierarchy is partially restored by sports and weather presenters who alert viewers to a change of “footing” in the second half of the bulletin, where more relaxed rules and standards apply. Weather and sports segments also provide branding opportunities to build imagined communities of region and nation identified through shared physical environments and adversities, sporting heroes and rivals, and cultural icons. The overall shape of the bulletin is thus adjusted to straddle the tabloid news borders of private–public, ordinary–extraordinary, and entertainment–information.

Significant shifts in editorial focus are licensed by this strategy. Prominence is a tacit editorial judgment, and the removal of hierarchy creates opportunities for disavowal of editorial responsibility. The corollary is an assertion that everything in the bulletin is of equal importance. It is no coincidence, therefore, that the coanchorage format lends itself to softer, human-interest styles of reportage where, as Bird notes, “in a climate that validates personal experience over logic and reasoned argument, it becomes equally valid to pay attention to any and all personal views, no matter how uninformed, bigoted, or irrational” (Bird 2000: 225). Here the “Goffmanesque” notion of performance through which the public world is mediated to the private one becomes a fully fledged belief system that acknowledges the difference between “image” and “reality” but gives equal validity to each and treats everything—advertising, public relations, entertainment, politics, journalism, etc.—as a strategic “game” involving the other-directed posturing of public figures (Wagg 1992: 258–59).

The new criterion of placement, overriding conventional journalistic judgments of news value, is essentially an emotional one: whether the story moves viewers by making them happy or sad, whether it captures their attention through the next commercial break. Parasocial interaction attracts and keeps viewership not by improving the quality of journalism but by getting viewers to feel as if they are revisiting old friends. The real sources of expertise and authoritative opinion are removed from news discourse to enhance its surface sheen, and the P1 concern for citizens and the wider *public interest is reduced to whatever will play with the consuming viewer.*

To the extent that the editorial role is confined to whatever will play, journalism is just another “smiling profession” almost indistinguishable from advertising (Turner

2004: 131). The news package is redesigned to make us feel good about ourselves and to reassure us that we are valued and liked. Disneyization is essentially a form of mood management, offering a temporary loss of self-consciousness rather than a critical confrontation with reality. Similar impulses animate soft news content, for as narratives designed for audience attraction shift toward tabloid extremes, boundaries between hard and soft news, fiction and nonfiction, appearance and reality fade away:

Fiction and non-fiction occur not as separate treatments of meaningful contents, but as packaging devices within a continuum of effects; i.e., the sign-posts of each are attached indiscriminately to varying content. The effect on the meaning of the content of any particular moment of the presentation is not to produce appropriately fictive or non-fictive stances in the audience, but rather to package the particular moment with the technique most capable of crystallizing that moment as something of value. (Sholle 1993: 62)

The serious practice of journalism is supplemented and then replaced by its simulacrum. The “use-value” of the news product becomes the mere “appearance of use-value” (Sholle 1993: 60–61), taking the form of mini-dramas where

- Door-stopping journalists play out the role of Hollywood detectives but turn up no new information
- Politicians and other authority figures are regularly derided by journalists as self-interested game players whose boring and irrelevant antics represent an unwarranted intrusion on the private lives of ordinary people
- “On-location” reporters are coached to adopt the active-voiced mannerisms of the expert, using glib colloquialisms to convey the commodified semblance of expertise without its substance (Atkinson 1994: 19)
- Current affairs shows become pseudo-argumentative studio encounters employing the “double tactic” of demanding rational argumentation but at the same time preventing it (Hess-Lüttich 2007: 1369)

For all its egalitarian posturing, therefore, P3-type news designed to focus the centripetal gaze implicitly invokes a winner-take-all society, and its cynical view of the political world as performative game playing and mood management is not incompatible with free market philosophies. In this respect, it mimics P2 posturing on consumer sovereignty. In each case, the public interest on offer is discernibly narrower than that insinuated by easily digestible news content and the captivating looks of celebrity presenters.

Table 1 summarizes the main features of the three-template model of television news in terms of industrial origins, conceptions of the public interest, primary goals, and journalistic implications. As with any such ideal-type schema, this summary necessarily simplifies the three modes of journalist performance and inflates the differences among them, omitting overlaps and incongruities.

**Table 1.** Three Modes of Performance

	Industrial origin	Conception of public interest	Primary goal	Journalistic implications
P1	Public service broadcasting via liberal democratic theory	Wider public interest: public as <i>equal citizen</i>	To serve democracy, inform citizenry, and support good public debate	Priority given to public affairs coverage and to “scientific” expertise and inquiry, with “objective” or neutral reportage
P2	Managerialism via fast-food industry (McDonaldization)	Corporate self-interest: public as prized <i>consumer demographic</i>	Cost cutting to maximize productive efficiencies in selling audiences to advertisers	Focus on popular entertainment, crime, and “news you can use”; growing advertorial content, channel branding, and cross-promotion
P3	Leisure industry via theme parks and shopping malls (Disneyization)	Personal self-interest: public as <i>mass spectator</i>	To attract and retain audiences via parasocial ingratiation and the centripetal gaze	Populist celebration of journalist as news participant or commentator; dramatic pursuit of story as story itself

## Overlaps and Incongruities

It is tempting to conclude that, out of these three sets of criteria for journalistic performance, only P1 represents genuine journalism and that P2 and P3 are interlopers hiding their nefarious and essentially unjournalistic purposes behind the virtuous cloak of P1. Only P1, we might surmise, recognizes a wider conception of the public interest beyond either narrowly commercial interests or that which merely interests the public, only P1 is citizen oriented rather than preoccupied with lucrative consumer demographics, only P1 takes its deliberative responsibilities seriously, only P1 grapples with the institutional complexities of liberal democracy in a postindustrial mass society. But while this line of reasoning has considerable force, it is unsatisfactory for a number of reasons.

First, even if P1 still represents a virtuous ideal, it is not at all clear that its criteria have ever accurately described the everyday practice of journalism in any age, let alone the current one. Second, some P2 and P3 attributes have been familiar accompaniments of popular journalism since its earliest times and are, if anything, historical precursors to P1 journalism, which itself developed at least partly in response to commercial pressures.<sup>7</sup> Third, we cannot overlook the daunting contemporary obstacles to

which P2 and P3 respond: the fragmenting news audience is an acute problem that needs to be addressed for thoroughly sound P1 reasons among others. Fourth, insistence on P1 as having the only valid criteria for journalism may deliver the opposite of what is intended by removing any residual sense of public obligation from those who now occupy important (albeit unacknowledged) mediating positions in our polity. Finally, there is some, as yet inconclusive, evidence that the personal impact and drama implicit in P2 and P3 forms of soft news address can teach at least some previously marginalized audiences more about public affairs than they could have learned from hard news (Baum 2002; Prior 2007: 271–75).<sup>8</sup>

In short, the matter of journalistic performance is complex, with overlaps and incongruities evident in both historical and current practice. The foregoing analysis identifies P2 and P3 as more or less permanent features of contemporary journalistic role-play and provides a range of historical, normative, and behavioral means of distinguishing between them. It goes further, however, by recognizing that these modes of performance are capable of being done well or badly in their own terms rather than simply being temporary encrustations on P1 too trivial to merit endogenous inspection. By examining each component of the hybrid news bulletin in terms of contrasting industrial templates, we emphasize the extent to which these separate components embody opposing philosophies and disparate journalistic practices. While the overlap between P2 and P3 is more extensive than between both of them and P1, they are less congenial bedfellows than Franklin's *McJournalism* thesis might imply, and the areas of overlap traversing all three modes of performance are vanishingly small.

The more explicitly normative and political features of the three templates are further elaborated in Table 2, where it becomes clear that their core motivations—democratic engagement, commercial exploitation, and personal popularity—are potentially incongruent. The basis on which they form relationships with and appeal to their audiences are linked here to contrasting trustee, delegate, and aesthetic theories of political representation, each of which might plausibly be defended separately but which together make for very strange, at least potentially antagonistic, bedfellows.

Relationships between these templates are superficially complementary in that each claims to repair deficiencies in another. Thus, P1 can present itself as a bulwark against the individualist and commercialist impulses of both P2 and P3, while P2 can claim to make P1 more efficient, and P3 to make P2 more appealing, but there are some troublesome aspects to these ostensible complementarities. For instance, both Ritzer and Franklin identify internal contradictions (“irrationalities”) arising from the P2 preoccupation with instrumental rationality. Clearly, P2 managerial techniques can achieve substantial commercial rewards by building and streamlining audiences and boosting production volumes while reducing costs, but the fast-food metaphor implies that P2 journalism is also, in some important respects, a devalued product. Just as Weber's “iron cage” of *zweckrationalität* (instrumental rationality) enshrined “specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart” (Weber 1974: 182), so McDonaldization gives rise to efficient (i.e., productive and profitable) but overly mechanized and

**Table 2.** Three Political Voices

	Communicative intention	Mode of address	Audience appeal	Mode of representation
P1	Offers information that is both accessible to and assessable by citizens; encourages deliberative engagement between mainstream and minority viewpoints	More formal, serious, and monological address that elevates expert or principled points of view; permits political critique but potentially elitist	A thirst for knowledge and willingness to engage in the democratic process of self-government	Trustee mode: journalist as trustee; fiduciary obligation to serve <i>needs</i> of citizens, including minorities
P2	Offers entertaining storytelling that is easily accessible to consumers; favors mainstream, universalist, human interest viewpoints while avoiding divisive issues, e.g., politics and religion	A faster-paced and more morselized address favoring visual storytelling, news concision, and modes of ordinary experience	A desire for entertainment and stimulation as well as reassurance and escape	Delegate mode: journalist as delegate seeking to satisfy commodity audience <i>wants</i>
P3	Offers aesthetically attractive spectacle as well as shocking or extraordinary events to attract mass audience; celebrates private fun over public or political purposes	Offers a more dyadic relationship with viewer involving matey or jovial address with demotic rituals and poetic idioms	The lust to gaze, allure of aesthetically pleasing pictures, and craving for psychosocial intimacy	Aesthetic mode: journalist as personalized embodiment of majoritarian populist <i>moods</i> with an urge to entertain

dehumanized enterprises where “quantity and standardization replace quality and variety as indicators of value” (Franklin 2003: 2).

By offering a range of activities in a hybrid consumption setting, P3 techniques are designed to add useful distinguishing elements of “variety and difference.” But since P3’s “stay longer” appeal is inextricably linked to “a post-Fordist world of variety and choice in which consumers [as distinct from citizens] reign supreme” (Bryman 2004: 5), neither template really disturbs the other’s essentially commercial character, and the Goffmanesque politics of performance furnish no extra deterrent to free market thinking. Instead of recognizing viewer disaffection with declining news quality as an agency problem residing in backstage journalism, the response of news managers has been to apply Disney theme park management techniques to frontstage news presentation. In effect, a second leisure industry template is grafted onto the first in a crude attempt to moderate (or conceal) its commercial deficiencies. But since neither template addresses the core P1 issues of journalistic quality, the well-documented contradictions and tensions between commercial priorities and P1 journalism remain unappeased. The core news audience gains no offsetting advantage for the real or perceived decline in journalistic quality and associated advertiser-driven manipulations.

Another possibility implicit in the three-template model is that the interface between P2 and P3 modes of operation might be just as problematic as between P1–P2 because, while McDonaldization and Disneyization both spring from leisure industry templates and share a broadly individualist, profit-making ethos, they also address very different, perhaps incompatible (pre- and post-Fordist) strands of consumer preference. If mismanaged, as the following New Zealand case demonstrates, their underlying tensions can trigger commercial failure.

## When Commerce and Theatre Collide

### *Historical Context*

For twelve years following New Zealand's broadcasting deregulation in 1989–90, Television New Zealand (TVNZ) functioned as a profit-driven state-owned enterprise, returning dividends to the government while accepting minimal public service obligations.<sup>9</sup> For all intents and purposes, *One Network News* (ONN), New Zealand's highest rated prime-time "public" television news bulletin, was a purely commercial operation, indistinguishable in most respects from its private, CanWest-owned rival, *3 News*.

The consequences of deregulation and increasing commercialism in a small and inelastic market were predictable (Atkinson 1994; Comrie 1996; Cook 2002). Facing the prospect of head-to-head competition with a new third channel, in 1988 TVNZ hired a team of U.S. news consultants to improve the bulletin's visual storytelling potentialities and minimize viewer drop-off around commercial breaks (extended accounts of the consultancy process can be found in Atkinson 1994 and Comrie 1996). Rather than any abrupt or clean adoption of commercial populism after deregulation, consultants worked independently on different aspects of news production (bulletin design, on-screen presentation, audience research, and news writing) that, while partly overlapping, were subject to different rates of change. Each production facet was governed by slightly different organizational imperatives and technological developments, and each carried with it a different set of conditions for succeeding learning processes to grapple with (see, e.g., Cook 2002).<sup>10</sup> Frontstage P3 operations yielded more readily to alteration than the more organizational P2 operations or the more deeply embedded cultural norms associated with P1 journalism. The outcome of deregulation was therefore a multilayered organizational learning process involving outward bulletin presentation and packaging first, then modes of presenter address, then topical focus, then pictorial narrative, and finally the propositional quality of the spoken text.

Though neither presented in these terms nor implemented as smoothly as our analytical schema of successive template installations might imply, the American consultants introduced TVNZ news staff to the core tenets of P2 McDonaldization and P3 Disneyization:

- Bulletin packaging, morselization, and standardization
- Ratings and focus group monitoring of performance

- Market-oriented reformulation of the news agenda
- Grooming and celebrification of on-screen personnel
- Coanchorage and parasocial role-playing
- Bulletin restructuring as hybridized “infotainment” with calibrated emotional appeal

Thus, a series of interlinked and increasingly subtle patterns of learned news production practice culminated—perhaps without practitioners or viewers’ being fully aware of it—in a fundamental transformation of journalistic discourse on ONN. Rather than the state-owned (TV1) diverging from its commercial rival (TV3), they converged. On both channels the journalist-centered discourse became progressively more conversational and opinionated—less propositional but more judgmental—and more preoccupied with the places and people shown on-screen. For most of the first decade following deregulation, these practices gained commercial vindication. Commanding nearly two-thirds of the available audience by the late 1990s, the state-owned news bulletin appeared to enjoy unassailable supremacy over its main rival. In fact, however, it was riding for a fall.

### *The Hawkesby Case*

In 1999 John Hawkesby, the most expensive news anchor ever employed on New Zealand television, was unceremoniously dumped from a six-year contract with TVNZ after barely a month on the job. Recruited from TV3 to serve as Judy Bailey’s coanchor on its main news bulletin ONN, his superiors thought they were reviving a national news presentation “dream team” (Revington 1999b: 17).<sup>11</sup> Even if his installation was not guaranteed to boost their own ratings—already extraordinarily high—TVNZ managers convinced themselves that hiring him from the rival bulletin would inflict damage on TV3 (Revington 1999b: 17).<sup>12</sup> They were wrong. When Hawkesby paired up with Bailey on January 18, 1999, ONN shed a massive 13 percent from its usual 65 percent share while *3 News* soared from 20 to 28 percent.<sup>13</sup> TVNZ was forced into an embarrassing volte-face. One’s ratings stayed down until Hawkesby was sacked and did not fully recover until his stolid but reliable predecessor, Richard Long, was reinstated.<sup>14</sup>

The impact of this change of newsreader was undoubtedly magnified by the small size of New Zealand (not much larger than a midsized U.S. city) and by the country’s densely packed media marketplace where the state-owned TVNZ, as the overwhelmingly dominant player, was bitterly resented by its major commercial rivals (especially in print and talk-back radio) who took any opportunity to scandalize TVNZ’s perceived ruthlessness in using “unfair” competitive advantages, the private transgressions of its celebrity presenters, its internal culture of extravagance (i.e., high presenter salaries), and its failure to live up to the BBC-style public service ideals (swamped by its dominating commercial remit). TVNZ’s highly public contortions within the straitjacket of its contradictory public–private remit were

matters of such intense public fascination that they sometimes spilled over into the debating chamber of the New Zealand Parliament. In such a hot-house media climate, domestic political fallout from the Hawkesby affair was bound to be far-reaching. In a later High Court assessment of Hawkesby's claim for salary compensation, the arbitrator, Sir David Tompkins, QC, rejected TVNZ's plea that Hawkesby's on-screen performance had been grossly incompetent, attributing the ratings' decline to "public hostility and adverse media reaction to the removal of [his predecessor] Richard Long."<sup>15</sup> In retrospect, however, it is possible to see the seeds of the Hawkesby ratings debacle in earlier events: broadcasting deregulation and the hybrid templates of news performance installed by TVNZ's American news consultants. For rival media, politicians, and viewers were not reacting to anything particularly new or subtle. Signs that something was amiss within TVNZ had long been apparent, and Hawkesby's arrival provided the trigger for pent up parasocial unrest among viewers (Atkinson 2000: 17–26).

A decade of consultant training and marketing by TVNZ had cultivated the impression of family solidarity among ONN presenters and ingratiated them with viewers. At the very least, this kind of relationship marketing increased the otherwise predictable risks of disrupting a "winning news team." TVNZ's own research indicates that some bulletin loyalists had bought into the myth of parasocial friendship and saw the abrupt switch of anchors as violation of an implicit contract. The company hired a firm to conduct focus group research to discover why ONN viewers were suddenly decamping (Research International 1999).<sup>16</sup> Its report confirmed presenter change as a major catalyst for change, but not the sole reason for it. Switchers had both long- and short-term dissatisfactions, with the immediate changeover deepening long-term misgivings. These long-standing issues mirrored the core features of bulletin performance specified in the three-template model:

- P1: Concerns about declining quality in ONN content and coverage
- P2: Perceptions that TVNZ was ratings driven, self-serving, and focused on the bottom line
- P3: Dissatisfactions with cult of the presenter

The most common concerns centered on the substantive P1 content of ONN. But since even an expert observer would have been hard pressed to differentiate the converged bulletins on these grounds, such concerns were not strong enough to induce channel switching. Indeed, P1 concerns were most salient among male ONN loyalists who chose to stay and complain rather than switch. Despite their long-standing worries about declining P1 news quality, the hard news junkies remained loyal. What tipped the balance from loyalty to exit for many male switchers was a combination of P1 and P2 concerns. Male switchers saw the Long–Hawkesby change as P2 ratings driven, dishonest, and essentially unjournalistic. Some also assailed ONN on P3 grounds as older, more complacent, and less energetic than its rival.

Whether switching or not, women were more likely to feel emotional or parasocial P3 attachment to news presenters and more inclined to think of the bulletin as security blanket from which they could gain comfort and stability: "I feel like I'm missing out on something if I don't see the news." For such viewers, presenter change produced uncertainty: "I feel isolated—which is frightening." They also sensed signs of disquiet within the reconstituted news duo, Bailey having been relegated to junior partnership as against the equality she enjoyed with Long, and Hawkesby being too domineering, too untrustworthy, or too self-serving for "now doing what he left the other station (TV3) for—working with a woman." Both female switchers and loyalists had this emotional response, but the latter expressed more compassion for Hawkesby: "He hasn't been given a chance to settle in" (Research International 1999).

Thus, reanalysis from a three-template perspective places the contours of a dual audience in sharper relief: one cluster largely female, parasocially engaged and intent on P3 concerns, the other largely male, more P1 content directed and disillusioned by what it regards as P2 and P3 distractions from the core business of television journalism. This duality has obvious parallels with Patterson's "hard" and "soft" news audiences (Patterson 2000). The pattern is reinforced by the independent testimony of contemporary newspaper letter writers, talk-back radio callers, and TVNZ's own phone logs. With Long's strong journalistic background and Hawkesby's lack of it, the switch between them could not plausibly be justified on P1 grounds (Revington 1999a: 24).<sup>17</sup> The (mainly older male) core of hard news viewers focused on this connection, stoutly declaring their immunity from parasocial blandishment and deploring the perceived decline in journalistic substance brought about by "management." As one NZ Listener letter writer put it,<sup>18</sup>

I don't care whether John Hawkesby presents the news for TV1 or TV3; I don't care whether Richard Long does it on weekdays or weekends. What does concern me is that on One Network News (which is the habitual choice in our household, whoever is fronting it) many of the lead stories are often recycled [from] the morning newspaper. . . . If nothing newsworthy has happened in New Zealand, why not give us something from the world where something has happened? . . . If the "management team" is not prepared to do that, don't have a news program at all. (Rankin 1999: 9)

Viewers also sensed an implicit hypocrisy in an increasingly lightweight bulletin's P2 emphasis on packaging and self-promotion:

Who is TV1's hierarchy trying to kid with their highly-touted "full hour of news" from 6 pm to 7 pm?<sup>19</sup> There is no change in the format—about 38 minutes of news, including headlines, sport, actual news, what's coming, finance, close-up and the weather. The remaining 22 minutes cover the promos and the ads. (Asher 1999: 98)

These P1 deficiencies were directly attributed to “the TV bosses and the way they play the ratings game without thought to the consequences to their viewing public, or their own staff” (TV Guide 1999: 98)

But while the softer (largely female) news audience pointed out the same miscreants, the substance of their complaints shifted from P1 to P3 issues. In the weeks and months preceding the Long–Hawkesby switch, media speculation about its imminence inspired parasocially engaged loyalists to “vent their anger on TVNZ’s phone logs, describing [Richard] Long as a capable, experienced news presenter, a professional icon, the victim of appalling treatment.” Returning after a six-month absence, Long was greeted with fan mail that referred to “Uncle Richard” and “Aunty Judy” and gushed, “Welcome back into our humble home.”<sup>20</sup> The blatant contradiction between TVNZ’s parasocial warmth and its callous treatment of Long was gently parodied by a female letter writer:

I suspect there are many people like myself who found the TV One “family” Christmas advertisements to be ironical, as the channel was in the process of dispensing with the services of one of the “family” who has done a perfectly adequate job and is liked and respected. I refer, of course, to Richard Long. On what do those in authority base their decisions? (Senior 1999: 7)

To the extent that commercial forms of audience address are concurrently ingratiating and denigrating, they open themselves up—particularly in times of waning cultural credibility and trust—to attributions of self-contradiction and hypocrisy (Thompson 2000). The P2 drive for quick fix—fed by concerns about audience fickleness in hypercompetitive markets—coexists uneasily with the P3 desire among viewers for predictability and reassurance. Distrust of ruthless P2 managerialism was further heightened here by the ritual P1 outrage of media professionals at the maltreatment of a fellow journalist as well as by affronted P3 parasocial loyalties. P3 celebration of the news family fanned the blaze by attracting the centripetal gaze of public attention; a gaze that could then be redirected for self-serving TVNZ bashing by commercial rivals and populist politicians.

### *Emotional Disorders*

Since P3 is a form of mood management, its pitfalls are essentially psychological and emotional. With the benefit of hindsight, it is evident that the psychological aspects of Hawkesby’s installation were mismanaged in the following ways:

1. *The displaced father*: A glaring oversight was the failure to ensure that Richard Long—after eleven years as Bailey’s coanchor—was sufficiently compensated for his demotion to accept it publicly with good grace. Instead, the deposed newsreader was allowed to present himself publicly as the injured

party, ill used by TVNZ, and this in a climate of public opinion that, after years of corporate downsizing, was hostile to staff layoffs.<sup>21</sup>

2. *Cultural tensions*: Another problem, given the TVNZ newsroom's strong journalistic culture and distrust of interlopers, was the failure to address intra-staff suspicions. These tensions were exacerbated by the fact that the P3 skills valued by commercial news packagers—particularly those associated with Hawkesby's entertainment background—were less valued by P1-oriented news workers. TVNZ insiders derided Hawkesby as an entertainer rather than a journalist, comparing him invidiously with Long who had earned his spurs as a past member of the elite Parliamentary Press Gallery.
3. *The prodigal son*: In the hot-house climate of head-to-head competition with TV3, and with Hawkesby's previous switch to the rival channel, his eventual wooing back with a salary package even more extravagant than rumor had speculated raised hackles among existing staff in an organization that put a heavy emphasis on corporate loyalty. In effect, Hawkesby was the returning prodigal, a perception corroborated by news leaks indicating that he had been "cold-shouldered" by TVNZ staffers.<sup>22</sup> His movements back and forth between two sides of a competitive divide could be construed as a double betrayal.
4. *Jilting Carol*: The circumstances of Hawkesby's departure from TV3, with its apparent last-minute "jilting" of the popular Carol Hirschfield, was another source of hostile comment compounded by the overt inconsistency of Hawkesby's belated acceptance of the dual presentation format he had previously spurned.<sup>23</sup>
5. *Parasocial divorce*: The contemporaneous parasocial divorce of Simon Dallow and Alison Mau, the young husband and wife coanchorage team on TVNZ's late night news program *Tonight*, was blamed by letter writers and talk-back callers on Hawkesby. Wichtel poked gentle fun at this: "Ally and Simon are cruelly dispatched to opposite ends of the news day. . . . They did their final scene together on Tonight: 'I must say it's been nice working with you,' said Ally. 'Me too,' mumbled Simon, giving his papers a last, sad shuffle" (Wichtel 1999: 70).
6. *Daddy-daughter show*: Talk-back radio gossip even assayed a connection with Hawkesby's daughter, Kate, also a TVNZ newsreader, warning Judy Bailey to "watch her back" because ONN threatened to turn into a "daddy-daughter show." In the context of a news bulletin wedded to family values, the rumor was more than remotely plausible.
7. *The power of one*: Habituated by six years as a sole anchor to a newsreading style of cultivated gravitas rather than viewer-friendliness, Hawkesby—for all his experience—was likely to have teething problems on the P2-oriented One News set, with its tightly organized and unfamiliar array of robotic camera movements, new graphics technology, ping-pong role-swapping, and the like. His adjustment difficulties were compounded by being asked to work with a

production team accustomed to regard him as a rival. His abrupt introduction, without adequate P3 rehearsal, occurred under the critical gaze of Richard Long loyalists. A longer apprenticeship, perhaps reading the weekend bulletin or alternating for a period with Long, might have both eased his return to coanchorage and given him more time to earn newsroom acceptance.

8. *The cool mother*: Finally, there was the omission of any on-screen acknowledgment either of Long's departure just before Christmas 1998 or of Hawkesby's arrival early in the New Year. The uncharacteristic lack of public fanfare about the breakup of the lengthy Bailey–Long partnership occurred because TVNZ was legally muzzled. That restriction, however, did not apply to Hawkesby's return. The lack of any verbal welcome from Judy Bailey, supposedly an old friend, was taken as lack of enthusiasm for the change. In light of the calculated warmth of news family relationships, such cool detachment was jarring.

Not only did P2 intrusions on ONN raise P1 viewer concerns about the “dumbing down” of news content, P3-style parasociality lent salience to the populist news ideology of support for the underdog. Both of these concerns were powerfully evoked in Richard Long's replacement by John Hawkesby. In deposing Long, TVNZ violated two of its most prominent ethical codes: serious journalism and support for the underdog. In posing as both serious and friendly, the hybrid news bulletin exposed itself as neither.

It is hard to avoid the conclusion (arrived at by the New Zealand High Court arbitrator) that TVNZ was hoist on its own petard—the glossy marketing package that served up viewer-friendly celebrities, then declared them redundant without proper notice. The simmering, long-term dissatisfactions of hard news viewers coalesced with howls of outrage from their more parasocially engaged soft news counterparts. These internal contradictions were maximized in a small, undifferentiated market with hybrid “qual-pop” news bulletins and with no room for differentiation into targeted upmarket and downmarket audience niches. Such an unusual confluence of forces helps to explain how the Hawkesby affair united both sides of the dual audience in revolt and triggered a costly ratings plunge.

## Concluding Remarks

When the underlying assumptions of three news templates are separately analyzed, as they are here, it is evident that the exemplars from which they derive their internal logic—democratic, utilitarian, and aesthetic—create diverging cultural imperatives within the modern television news bulletin. When harnessed together, they are philosophically contradictory and psychologically fragile. Rather than an isolated incident or confined to a small market, moreover, the Hawkesby affair can be seen as an instance of a much more general problem inherent in global media markets. As converging media and entertainment conglomerates seek to stream branded products

across multiple platforms, they are prompted to treat content “in a disembodied, almost Platonic form . . . as innately liquid and multipurposable” (Murray 2005: 417, 419). Faced with the “carpetbagger’s dilemma” of how to resolve inherent conflicts between disparate cultures (Atkinson 1994), they find problems “in gelling media properties operating in diverse markets and frequently exhibiting markedly different business practices and assumptions” (Murray 2005: 428). The pseudo-diversity of branded media content is much less extensive than it might otherwise be because it has to survive a risky and unpredictable production process where “*only a handful* [emphasis added] of content properties will achieve the status of cross-platform phenomena” (Murray 2005: 421, 431).

The three-template model of television news is not only culturally unstable and commercially risky but damaging to the public knowledge project. The Downsian spatial model of news audience behavior that underlies P2 managerialism, also informs Baum’s (2002) defense of “soft” news as a form of “incidental byproduct learning” about foreign affairs. Baum argues that “soft” news watchers are enticed into watching—and thus inadvertently educated—by the entertainment (nonnews) ingredients of hybrid “soft” news shows. But the evidence that “soft” news either attracts (P2) or informs (P1) reluctant news viewers is questionable. Indeed Prior (2007: 276–79) argues that the postbroadcast flight to entertainment hampers “incidental by-product learning” by removing news and entertainment from the common schedule they used to inhabit in the “low choice” network television environment. News “switchers” can now avoid news and public affairs altogether in favor of pure entertainment, while news junkies are forced to tolerate infotainment so as not to miss any news. Far from incidental learners, many of those who now watch “soft” news are learners by preference who gain the bulk of their information elsewhere. The sequential scheduling of serious and entertainment programming that remains standard within public service media systems appears to nourish public knowledge better than commercial systems which mix them together in hybrid “infotainment” formats (Curran et al. 2009). If, as Prior argues, the flight from news by entertainment fans is greater than any slowing of news departure through hybridized forms of infotainment, then further intermingling along P3 lines is unlikely to improve either commercial (P2) or public knowledge (P1) outcomes.

The three-template model also raises questions about the P1–P3 interface within the hybridizing formats of television current affairs as well as news. Ben-Porath (2007) notes that the new “dialogical” styles of news performance lack the redeeming features of monological journalism as a filter of, challenge to, and contextualization for elite claims. Chat news is prone to “ventriloquize” rather than empower counterelite voices and may be open to elite co-optation.<sup>24</sup> And it is no more informative than the monological formats it displaces. There is no evidence, for instance, that politics is better understood when presented as live cross-talk between reporters than through a canned news report containing little visually relevant material (Snoeijs et al. 2002).

Finally, the P1–P3 interface is not just a matter of aesthetics displacing or disrupting substance but of the new modes of performance bearing antidemocratic

political messages of their own. Recent experimental research by Mutz (2007) suggests that viewers of mediated political debates conducted in an uncivil “in your face” mode are less able to “hear the other side” whereas viewers of more civilized interviews or debates are more reluctant to attribute “evil” or undesirable motives to opponents and more open to other perspectives. These tendencies and drawbacks are by no means limited to U.S. television, as recent New Zealand research demonstrates. Not only have cynical “in-your-face” journalistic interventions proliferated in New Zealand television news and current affairs (Atkinson 2004a, 2004b, 2005, 2009), but an identifiable subset of these interventions have been found to impair the reasoning quality of political discourse by prioritizing simplification over complexity, derision and mockery over understanding and engagement, and spectacle and entertainment over informing citizens or educating the public (Stevenson 2010). This work also locates potentially fruitful avenues of future inquiry into the relationship between P3 aesthetics and program format. Stevenson (2010) reports that disruptive modes of journalistic intervention and ostentatious self-display are more damaging when performed by a single presenter within a one-on-one interview format than in multiguest or multipresenter formats. The short-term and potentially problematic benefits from adding a P3 layer to an already hybrid television news format may well be gained at the expense of democratic citizenship and the public knowledge project, but we have only begun to explore the myriad ways in which this toll can be levied.

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### **Notes**

1. Crude structural determinism is not intended here. Organizational structures are articulated through models of broadcasting practice embodied in discursive frames. The ways in which organizational actors interpret such frames circumscribe work practices within a range of possible articulations, without necessarily prescribing a single set. Born, for instance, adopts Callon’s (1998) notion of “performativity” to signify that broadcasting subpractices, such as television journalism and news anchoring, are modes of social agency capable of being performed well or badly (Born 2003: 773–99).
2. “Public interest” can be defined as “those interests which people have in common qua members of the public” where the latter is “an indefinable number of non-assignable individuals”—a collectivity that does not necessarily encompass the whole citizenry and may differ from one situation to another, depending on the context in which the question is

- raised. The term is commonly used in contradistinction both to “that which merely interests the public” and to the “private interests of assignable individuals” (Barry 1965: 190–92).
3. An FTE is a full-time equivalent staff member, and MBO stands for management by objectives, a technique for setting goals and attaching rewards to their achievement, invented in the 1950s by management guru Peter Drucker.
  4. Hamilton is often cited as providing evidence that market competition makes network news more liberal minded, but Pew survey data contain no direct measure of media content. As a proxy for program ideology, Hamilton relies on average ideology ratings reported by audience members. On that basis, daytime talk shows, such as those of Rosie O’Donnell and Oprah, evening shows such as *Cops* and *America’s Most Wanted*, and National Public Radio are rated, somewhat improbably, as ideologically adjacent. Pew data reflect the popularity of crime news across all media audiences regardless of ideology. News outlets with the least audience interest in crime—magazines such as *Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper’s*, and *The New Yorker*—also attract the most liberal readers, whereas viewers of specialist crime shows such as *Cops* and *America’s Most Wanted* are differentiated by gender rather than ideology. See Hamilton (2004: 79–111).
  5. The displacement of serious investigatory journalism by celebrity commentary follows a similar logic since opinion columns fill an unvarying news hole at a fixed cost, whereas investigations have unpredictable space and cost consequences.
  6. Bryman (2004: 13) sees Disneyization and McDonaldization as parallel rather than competitive processes. He defines Disneyization as “a set of principles that address a consumerist world in which McDonaldization has wrought homogeneity and in its place projects an ambience of choice, difference, and frequently the spectacular. Both . . . are concerned with consumption, but whereas McDonaldization is rooted in rationalization and its associations with Fordism, scientific management and bureaucracy, Disneyization’s affinities are with a post-Fordist world of variety and consumer choice.”
  7. Any blanket claim that normative journalism is largely a product of commercial forces is too crude. For while the attraction of nineteenth-century journalism to neutral or “objective” modes of address was commercially useful in helping to build mass circulation, the early “modern” newspapers such as Pulitzer’s *New York World* favored populist and majoritarian forms of mediation, as distinct from more robustly liberal democratic (or even civic republican) ones. Genuinely “civic” journalism arises more as a reaction against commercial pressures than as a submissive response to them.
  8. Baum (2002: 106; 2007: 115) concedes that the quality and diversity of information apprehended through “the relatively narrow lens of the entertainment-oriented soft news media” (Baum 2002: 106) might not lead to better citizens, or better policies. Prior (2007: 276–79) counters Baum’s thesis by showing that opportunities for “incidental by-product learning” have actually declined in the “post-broadcast” environment.
  9. In 2003, TVNZ was converted from a state-owned enterprise into a crown-owned company, an arrangement that imposed an obligation to operate with financial efficiency but reduced pressure to return a dividend to the government. NZOA continued to withhold funding from news and current affairs under the new arrangement. With the installation of a new public service charter, however, an additional direct bulk grant (NZ\$) for charter

- fulfillment was made: \$10.7 million in 2003 and a further \$15 million over the following two years.
10. Cook (2002) charted this distinctive learning pattern in a longitudinal content analysis of One Network News election coverage over twelve years (six elections), and his groundbreaking research corroborated that of Comrie (1996), whose interviews with TVNZ journalists indicated strong staff resistance to some consultant advice.
  11. Earlier Hawkesby and Bailey had been together for six years as copresenters of TVNZ's highly rated northern regional current affairs show, *Top Half*. Head of TV1, Shaun Brown, described the Hawkesby–Bailey combination as “the best presenting team that you could find anywhere in the country, and I suspect [it] would stand alongside the best in the world” (see Revington 1999b: 17).
  12. In a confidential document titled “Great New Zealand Television,” which was part of his successful application to become TVNZ general manager in 1997, Neil Roberts called for the state-owned company to use its superior size and market position to “punish TV3” where it was “most appropriate, and least public.” He wrote, “If we’re going to be obsessed with TV3, be obsessed with their talent. Every time they seem to be developing a really significant talent, on or off the screen, buy them.” Identifying Hawkesby as one whose departure “would hurt TV3 where it counts,” Roberts advocated “a preemptive strike against key TV3 staff” (see Revington 1999b: 17).
  13. Audience share is the number of people viewing a program as a proportion of the total audience viewing other channels at the same time.
  14. In the ensuing court arbitration, Hawkesby was awarded NZ\$6 million (plus interest) in lost earnings. TVNZ also paid TV3 an out-of-court settlement (reputedly around NZ\$1 million) for inducing Hawkesby to break his contract.
  15. Arnold Pickmere, “The Long Factor: Why Hawkesby Just Didn’t Rate,” *NZ Herald*, February 8, 2000, A9. Public and newsroom hostility to the replacement of Long so depressed Hawkesby that medical treatment and temporary leave from work were prescribed. The arbitrator concluded that while this illness impaired Hawkesby’s off-screen performance, no significant impact on on-screen performance or bulletin ratings had been established.
  16. The report was produced as evidence at the Hawkesby–TVNZ arbitration hearing but then withheld by TVNZ on the grounds of commercial confidentiality. Initial attempts by the author to have it made public under the Official Information Act were rebuffed by the New Zealand Ombudsman on the basis of arbitral confidentiality. Its release was finally approved by TVNZ CEO Ian Fraser in November 2005.
  17. Rival TV3 news chief Mark Jennings commented, “I don’t think Long is a fantastic newsreader. He’s fairly bland. That’s why they put Hawkesby in there” (Revington 1999a: 24).
  18. Also see Joseph Chai, “Letter to the Editor,” *New Zealand Herald*, February 8, 2000, A10.
  19. The bulletin was expanded to a full commercial hour in 1995.
  20. *Sunday Star-Times*, March 7, 1999, A3.
  21. Long took professional advice from, inter alia, an Auckland employment lawyer, John Timmins, and an experienced broadcasting executive, Robert Boyd-Bell, about how best to present his employment case publicly.

22. See, e.g., Donna Chisholm, "Furious Hawkesby May Sue TVNZ," *Weekend Herald*, February 28, 1999, A3; Keith Perry, "Morale Hits the Pits at TVNZ," *Weekend Herald*, February 12–13, 2000, A19.
23. Linda Herrick, "TV's Dream Team Became a Nightmare," *Weekend Herald*, February 28, 1999, A3. One viewer wrote, "John Hawkesby may well have built up a bond of trust with the viewers over 30 years, as Paul Holmes claims, but when he walked out on TV3 on the eve of the launch of their new format, he instantly lost a large part of that trust." D. Stock, "Letter to the Editor," *New Zealand Herald*, February 8, 2000, A10.
24. What Turner (1999: 74) calls "the ethically driven journalism-as-a-pillar-of-democracy" (P1) argument can also be used to excuse predatory and self-interested modes of television news operation that victimize the powerless for commercial gain, but postmodern hybrids are not self-evidently less prone to this kind of abuse.

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