Paper Cuts:
Media Bias, the Iraq War and the Politics of Rupert Murdoch

Mitchell John Hobbs (B.A. Hons)
Statement of Originality

The thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

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Some of the data and analyses presented in this thesis have been published in the following journals and conference proceedings:


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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my grandmother:

Joyce Samuelson
1926-2007
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Synopsis

In Western democracies, media systems have proven essential to the functioning of modern government, overcoming time and space to connect vast and, at times, disparate populations in virtual agoras, disseminating the information required by an ‘informed citizenry’ to execute their democratic responsibilities. At their optimal functioning, the media take on two interrelated roles: (1) providing a mass forum, or ‘public sphere’, for the exchange of ideas, thereby dialectically facilitating the rule of reason; and (2) acting as ‘watchdogs’, or the ‘fourth estate’ of democracy, vigilantly guarding the interests of the general public from the potential abuses of those individuals or institutions with social or political power. Yet the media need not perform either of these social roles. The power of the news media lies in their ability to impart information, to construct representations that reflect events or issues. As such, the media are capable of constructing misrepresentations, distorting the ‘news’ to suit a particular ideological or political agenda. Thus as well as facilitating democratic processes the media can subvert them, distorting how people see and engage with the world through ‘biased’ reporting.

Although ‘media bias’ is an issue often discussed by politicians, for many media scholars the concept is problematic, seemingly premised on a simplistic notion of ‘truth’, and, therefore, too easily challenged and dismissed as being merely a matter of one’s ideological perspective. Consequently, much of the research into the nature of media power has shied away from the concept and its potential implications for understanding the exchange of social dialogue and modern democratic government. This aversion to the questions and problems posed by media bias has resulted in more than simple academic
lacunae. As this thesis will illustrate, the pernicious repercussions posed by media bias can include the manufacturing of public support for a war justified by dubious evidence and motivated by a belligerent ideological agenda. Accordingly, this thesis seeks to salvage the concept of media bias, defining it as ‘unbalanced representations’ that favour a particular ideological interpretation of an event or issue. It argues that for some news stories analytical judgements of media bias can be made by exposing certain features of the text, such as the ‘ideological frames’ used in the communication of meaning. Rather than simplistically seeking to expose the unproblematic ‘truth’ of a news event, such an empirical investigation considers whether ‘more truthful’ — or less biased — journalistic accounts were possible. Moreover, such an investigation conceptually situates media bias within a systematic understanding of socio-political structures, institutional elites and interpretative processes of communication — as part of a broader ‘Triadic Model of Mass Communication’.

Taking media proprietor Rupert Murdoch and his company, News Corporation, as its central focus, this thesis investigates whether major media conglomerates can imperil the democratic functioning of the state should they misrepresent a particular event or issue. The case study that informs this investigation is the 2003 Iraq War, a conflict commonly seen to have been supported by the Murdoch news media. Based on quantitative and qualitative textual analysis of two ‘agenda setting’ newspapers in the month prior to the outbreak of war, the empirical findings confirm that Murdoch’s political views were manifest in at least some of his Australian news media. Indeed, the empirical findings suggest that his influential broadsheet newspaper The Australian failed to fulfil its ‘fourth
estate responsibility’ to provide critical insight into the underlying impetus for 2003 Iraq War. This finding is indicative of an ideological pattern within other parts of News Corporation at this time, and lends further support to the argument that Murdoch played a role (however indirect) in facilitating the invasion of Iraq. Consequently, this thesis contends that principles of ‘diversity’ — in relation to both media ownership and the creation and exchange of discourse — need to be re-instilled into the regulatory structure and operational practices of both public and commercial media. It concludes by offering a conceptual model — the Public Access Model of Media Organisation — that highlights the media’s potentially enriching social position and function: a re-imagining of a more democratic and open media-constituted public sphere.
Chapter 1

Public Sphere (Inc.)
Chapter 1  Public Sphere (Inc.)

*The ruling ideas of each age have ever been the ideas of its ruling class.*

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels


*Only in the light of the public sphere did that which existed become revealed, did everything become visible to all.*

Jürgen Habermas

*The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1992:4).

**Introduction: Understanding the Media in the Information Age**

Analysing the processes by which the media interpret and represent the physical and social world should be a key function of sociology and the broader social sciences. Not only are the ubiquitous cultural products of the media central to daily lived experience, infusing both culture and consciousness with their symbolic content, the news media perform vital social functions within a democratic system of government, disseminating the information required by citizens to make informed and rational decisions. Indeed, the media institutions, delivery systems and products of advanced industrial societies are commonly seen to be performing two important social roles: (1) providing virtual forums for the exchange of information and the dialectical facilitation of knowledge; and (2) creating institutional guardians that protect the public from the potential abuses of socio-political elites. Yet the media need not act according to these ideal conceptions. In fact,
they can act as agents of misinformation, helping to bring about tragic political events and social conditions. The power of the news media lies in their ability to represent events and issues, interpreting and communicating the world beyond that of immediate experience. As such, the media are capable of constructing misrepresentations, distorting the ‘news’ to suit a particular ideological or political agenda. Thus, by constructing biased representations, the media have the power to distorting how people see, and therefore engage, with the world; undermining, rather than aiding, democratic governance and the rule of informed reason (Street, 2001).

Understanding the operations and practices of the modern mass media is, then, of fundamental importance. Such a task requires the comprehension of a complicated socio-cultural ‘network’, born from human expression, values and beliefs, yet defined by legislation, technology and economics (Castells, 2000; McNair, 1998; Schudson, 2003; Stevenson, 2004; Thompson, 1995). Although the cultural products and effects of this media/cultural system are observable, the ever-shifting dimensions of media institutions inevitably hinders the achievement of a definitive conceptual picture of their operations and effects (Castells, 2000). This is not to say that understanding the mass media and their social effects is an impossible or futile undertaking. Rather, it is to note that amidst this network of interconnected flows of information, cultural artefacts and economic capital, there are only a few areas of theoretical and analytical stability from which a systematic critique can be mounted against the symbolic technological systems and institutions that comprise the transnational and national media of today. Indeed, if the social sciences are to understand not only the function and power of the media, then it is
necessary to focus on the ‘institutional hubs’, or those major corporations, that structure and characterise this socio-cultural network. In other words, by periodically re-situating media corporations and their operations at the heart of a sociological critique of the media and its social effects, the processes by which such corporations help to create, define and influence the culture and politics of the contemporary world become discernable (Smart, 2000).

This thesis is an investigation of the power of a major media conglomerate to undermine the knowledge facilitating capabilities of large parts of the news media, thereby militating against the democratic functioning of modern states. In order to understand the socio-political role of the contemporary media, it is necessary to consider the institutional apparatuses of media institutions (Althusser, 1971), as well as the ‘qualities’ of media texts (Hall, 1997). To this end, this thesis attempts a paradigmatic synthesis of cultural and social approaches to analysing the media, building a multi-disciplinary, socio-cultural critique that seeks both a close engagement with ‘the particular’, in the form of media texts, and a broader engagement with institutional structures (Silverstone, 1994:995). As such, this thesis is a work of ‘critical political economy’, in part focussed on the ‘interplay between the symbolic and economic dimensions of public communication’ (Murdock and Golding, 2005:60). Yet, it aims to go beyond the standard political economic critique of the media, in order to grapple with the epistemological problems and political repercussions of media bias. Its central, research guiding, questions are: how can media bias be defined and identified? Moreover, how can media bias be prevented?
The Focus and the Objectives of the Thesis

In exploring questions of media power and political bias, this thesis takes a multi-layered approach, and is informed by two principal case studies that run through the dissertation at various levels. At the micro level (the level of the particular), it explores what is arguably one of the most controversial events of the first decade of the new millennium: the decision by the United States to lead a multinational taskforce (to which Australia was a significant contributor) in the invasion and occupation of Iraq. Focussing on two of Australia’s most respected and important broadsheet newspapers, Murdoch’s *The Australian* and Fairfax Media’s the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the case study of the 2003 Iraq War employs quantitative and qualitative forms of textual analysis in order to expose the arguments and evidence put forward by politicians and political commentators in the decisive weeks leading to the invasion in March, 2003. In particular, the focus here is on the textual manifestation of bias in *The Australian*, with the results tested by comparison with the *Sydney Morning Herald*. This case study seeks to expose how different stories of the same event become manifest, while evaluating the ‘truthfulness’ of different media representations. This inductive approach to understanding both the textual manifestation of ideology, as well as the mass media’s impact on the decisions and actions of the bureaucratic polity, is strengthened by the broader focus of the thesis. As is made clear through the analyses in Chapters 4 and 5, the story of the Iraq/WMD crisis, and Australia’s recruitment to the so-called ‘coalition of the willing’, cannot be fully understood unless one examines the support given by Rupert Murdoch and his global media conglomerate, *News Corporation*, to the neoconservatives and their political
agenda of ‘regime change’. Collectively these chapters aim to re-contextualise the war, its antecedents and its consequences.

The 2003 Iraq War does, then, feature in the thesis as a case study within a case study, with the Murdoch news media providing the ‘institutional hub’ through which to consider the operations and effects of the ‘informational networks’ of contemporary media (Castells, 2000). The focus on News Corporation was not an unprecedented decision. As Chairman, Chief Executive Officer, and dominant proprietor of one of the world’s largest media conglomerates (see Bagdikian, 2004), Rupert Murdoch is said to ‘personif[y] the modern corporate entrepreneur’ (Freedman, 1996:223). Having built his company from a single daily newspaper (the relatively obscure Adelaide News) into the publishing and broadcasting network spanning ‘nine different media on six continents’ (Herman and McChesney, 1997:72), Murdoch’s News Corporation is said to reach ‘close to 75 per cent of the world’s population’ (Barr, 2000:45), providing ‘the archetype for the twenty-first century global media’ (Herman and McChesney, 1997:70). Indeed, the ‘media mogul’ is envied by much of the entrepreneurial world, commonly seen as the epitome of business acumen, as a type of ‘celebrity CEO’ (Khurana, 2002). Such admiration is well founded, with News Corporation’s revenues for 2008 — prior to the onset of the global financial crisis of late 2008/early 2009 — totalling $(US)32,996 million (News Corporation Annual Report 2008:57). This commercial success has made Murdoch something more than a market leader, with executives from some of the world’s largest media corporations having stated that they study the actions of News Corporation with keen interest, motivated by both ‘respect and fear’ (Herman and McChesney, 1997:71).
Rupert Murdoch is not, of course, merely famous for building one of the world’s most financially successful media conglomerates, but is also something of a minor celebrity for those scholars engaged in media and cultural studies. Indeed, over the last 50 years, many media researchers have followed Murdoch’s reported business dealings and political intrigues, with the operations of *News Corporation* seen to have caused numerous social, economic and political ‘effects’ in a number of different nations, from India and the United Kingdom to Australia and the United States (case studies explored in Chapter 2). Such ‘Murdoch influences’ have even led to the expansion of the socio-cultural lexicon with the creation of the neologism ‘Murdochization’. Like the terms ‘McDonaldization’ (coined by George Ritzer, 1993) and ‘Disneyization’ (see Bryman, 2004; Ritzer and Liska, 1997), Murdochization does not necessarily refer directly to the actions of Rupert Murdoch, or to the cultural products of his media conglomerate, but rather to a particular process of institutional change typified by the operations of its namesake (see for instance Sonwalkar, 2002; Thussu, 1998; Thussu, 2007). It is, according to Daya Thussu (1998:7), a phenomenon characterised by the convergence of global media technologies and ‘US inspired media formats, products and discourse’, and is manifest in the form of market-driven journalism, with an emphasis on ‘infotainment’. Likewise, Prasun Sonwalkar (2002) argues that Murdochization can be seen as the process responsible for the corrosion of the traditional ‘fourth estate’ function of newspapers, an institutional change seeing commercial necessities taking precedence over social obligations to protect the public’s interests. That Sonwalkar (2002) has chosen to label this trend ‘Murdochization’ further highlights the global significance of *News Corporation’s modus operandi*, and the
somewhat emblematic status of Rupert Murdoch, as his research is based on newspapers in India, a market in which the ‘the last tycoon’ (as Murdoch was dubbed by *Time* magazine in 2007 — see Pooley, 2007) has no direct presence.

Murdoch’s *News Corporation* is, then, worthy of study for two fundamental reasons. First, as an immensely successful ‘market leader’, the actions and products of *News Corporation* are often copied by other companies in a rush to maintain profitable levels of viewers, readers and advertisers (Majoribanks, 2000b). Although such commercial operations are not always of great sociological significance, industry-wide imitations of *News Corporation*’s strategies and products can have detrimental consequences for the diversity of dialogue within a nation’s media-constituted ‘public sphere’ (an argument discussed in greater detail below), leading to the standardising of ‘voices’ discernable within the mainstream news media (as was the case in the United States with Murdoch’s Fox News and its domestic competitors — see Calabrese, 2005; Greenwald, 2004; Kellner, 2005). Second, Rupert Murdoch has shown that he is interested in far more than financial gain (see, for instance, Manne, 2005a; McKnight, 2003; 2005; 2009; Neil, 1996), and that he will, in fact, use his media as political tools for causes that are, so to speak, ‘dear to his heart’ (provided that such ideological support will not jeopardise his company’s commercial viability). Moreover, Murdoch has shown no hesitation in using his media assets to support specific politicians and political parties that, on the surface at least, seem to match his ontological disposition (as will be discussed in Chapter 2), which, in a general sense, has been described as both radically conservative and ‘strongly pro-free enterprise’ (*The Guardian*, 27 September 1995:6). Although his ideological
beliefs can be tempered by commercial self-interest (see Curtin, 2005; Arsenault and Castells, 2008), Murdoch’s power and enthusiasm for politics makes him a colossus in the virtual, networked space of the public sphere, and has given the media proprietor undue influence in the democratic workings of government in Australia, Britain and the United States (see Lucy and Mickler, 2006; Manne, 2005a; McKnight, 2005; Page, 2003; Shawcross, 1993).

By situating *News Corporation* and its proprietor in an analysis of the news media, ideology and bias, this thesis not only examines the workings of the increasingly global media industries, but explores the intertwined relationships between media companies and government (Curran, 2000). Such research is of particular importance for Australia, as News Limited (a subsidiary of the global *News Corporation*) now controls close to 70 per cent of the nation’s daily metropolitan newspaper circulation (Manne, 2005a). From a broader international perspective, such research is valuable for exploring the potential political consequences arising from an increasingly prevalent feature of media industries the world over: namely, the rise of media oligopolies and their effect on genuine social dialogue (Bagdikian, 2004; Herman and McChesney, 1997). Hence, this thesis seeks answers to the central question of media power: who is shaping the ‘ruling ideas’ of increasingly interconnected societies? Is *News Corporation* an information network for the global dissemination of Murdoch’s political beliefs, or is there a reasonable level of ideological diversity and oppositional discourse within its news media? Investigating *News Corporation*’s capacity for ideological diversity allows for critical reflections on the nature of media power, the effects of media bias and the health of democracy (topics
discussed in Chapter 3 and Chapter 6). Yet, before it is possible to consider more fully the history, politics and social impact of Murdoch’s *News Corporation* (the focus of Chapter 2), it is necessary to consider whether the news media continue to constitute what has been defined as the ‘public sphere’.

**Reflections on the Public Sphere and the Mass Media**

The concept of the public sphere, despite considerable criticism and much revision, still provides one of the most influential paradigms for understanding both the present functions of the mass media, and the institutions’ emancipatory potential. The concept — which is essentially a metaphorical category comprised primarily of the media but also includes other forums such as parliaments, universities, schools, churches and libraries (Herman and McChesney, 1997:3) — is most readily associated with the work of German sociologist Jürgen Habermas (Outhwaite, 2003). In essence, Habermas (1992; 1997) believes that a ‘bourgeois public sphere’ emerged in 18th century Europe, coinciding with the development of capitalism and the modern nation-state. According to Habermas (1992), the emergent public sphere (or, more accurately, interconnected public spheres) had a profound influence on the development of egalitarian societies across large parts of Europe by providing forums for citizens to debate public affairs in a dispassionate and rational dialogue; although admittedly large sections of the population were excluded from such discussions because of their gender, ethnicity or socio-economic status. Despite this limited participation, Europe’s expanding network of public spheres was of fundamental importance to the democratisation of the West, promoting rights and liberties (that would come to be enshrined by law), as well as the rule of reason in areas
of government, thereby continuing the project of rational emancipation promised by the Enlightenment. As Kenneth Tucker (1998:171) notes:

Constituted by independent property owners, the bourgeois public sphere guaranteed rights of speech, press, assembly, and privacy while providing the context (in principle) for the democratic and rational discussion of issues of general interest. Through newspapers, a large-scale, critical public grew which contributed to the formation of public opinion and promoted discussion based on principled argument. This in turn encouraged a more professional criticism in the public sphere, where law was interpreted as the expression of reason.

For Habermas, newspapers were the ‘pre-eminent institution’ of the public sphere (Schultz, 2002:102), serving a valuable function in the communication of ideas, and the functioning of democratic government. This is, in effect, an endorsement of the view long held by journalists, that the news media are the ‘fourth estate’ of democracy, an institutional apparatus that works to protect the interests of the general public by exposing the abuses of those individuals with socio-political power (see Schultz, 1998). Yet, where journalists continue to believe in the civic virtues of their profession, Habermas (1992) saw this idealised form of communication as having been largely lost to the (then contemporary) world of the 20th century because of the commodification of

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1 In a modern system of parliamentary democracy, the other estates are the executive (the Prime Minister and Cabinet), the legislature (federal and state parliaments), and the judiciary (the courts and the police) (see Schultz, 1998). This modern formulation is not to be confused with the ‘Estates of the Realm’, which, in reference to parts of Europe in the Middle Ages, refers to the nobility, the clergy and the commoners.
culture and the corporate organisation of public life: a regressive process that Habermas labelled ‘refeudalization’.

Given that Habermas first published *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* more than 40 years ago, it is not surprising that some of the book’s arguments have been labelled outdated (see Calhoun, 1997). As Craig Calhoun (1997:5) notes, the book has been criticised by Marxists for its focus on the development of a bourgeois public sphere, as opposed to a proletarian one, and for its simplification of the intricate workings of the mass media. Likewise, Nancy Fraser (1997) has exposed what she sees as several key weaknesses in Habermas’ early formulations, such as the concept’s failure to include discussions regarding ‘private interests’ — important as public issues (as demonstrated by the politics of gender) — and for the concept’s over simplification of ‘publics’ (an assumption that different groups would simply ‘bracket away’ their differences in order to engage in debate in a reasonable and unprejudiced manner). Yet, despite being the subject of vigorous debate (Calhoun, 1997; McKee, 2005), Habermas’ early work is still instructive, and provides an ideal model for the media’s socio-political role (McNair, 2000; Schudson, 1995). Furthermore, since the book’s publication in the 1960s, Habermas (1997) has revised his concepts, claiming that the public sphere should not be conceived of as private individuals coming together as a single public, but rather ‘as a network for communicating information and points of view’, extending from the private world of everyday experience to political systems and institutions (Habermas quoted in Curran, 2000:135). Importantly, Habermas’ revised concept of the public sphere(s) is characterised by ‘key activists’ in the form of professionals and public interest groups,
who identify and interpret social problems, before proffering solutions (Curran, 2000). As James Curran (2000:136) notes: ‘[these key activists] are the sensors of society who detect neglected issues, rise potentially above self interest, and generate countervailing influence on behalf of the disadvantaged’. Habermas believes that these key activists, when aided by the press and ‘broadcast mediation’, can apply sustained pressure on political administrations in order to facilitate social change (Curran, 2000:136).

Using Habermas’ (1997) revised conception of the public sphere, it is possible to discern the concept’s importance both in relation to understanding the social and political role of the contemporary media, as well as the functioning of democratic government in what has been dubbed the ‘Information Age’ (Castells, 2000). In essence, the public sphere can ideally be seen as performing two necessary functions for the genuine rule of democracy. First, it acts as a type of proxy for the vast majority of citizens who will never meet each other during their lifetime (see Herman and McChesney, 1997:2-4). It exposes individuals to views, opinions, beliefs and, indeed, people from a number of different social contexts, and can thereby serve to promote tolerance and the acceptance of difference — as well as the reverse. Without this dialogue within the public sphere, and the positive advocacy of Habermas’ (1997) ‘key activists’, communication in society can be visualised as a one-way process from the geo-political centres of administrative power to the periphery of private citizens. Likewise, in the absence of the public sphere the exchange of ideas between citizens would be limited to ‘word-of-mouth’, rendering democracy — which, in an ideal sense, requires an ‘informed populace making political decisions’ — impossible (Herman and McChesney, 1997:3). Second, since the 18th
century and the widespread adoption of the core tenets of the Enlightenment, reason has become humanity’s new ‘guiding light’. Through the exchange of ideas in the emergent public sphere, the values of the Enlightenment became embedded in Western culture, with society effectively reorganised around universal rights to ‘equality’, ‘justice’, ‘freedom’ and ‘comfort’ (see McKee, 2005). Without a properly functioning public sphere, the dialectical process of logical exchange which facilitated the articulation of these tenets — and on which ‘knowledge’ and ‘truth’ depends — is stymied. In its absence, the rule of reason and rational debate are, according to Habermas, removed as overall governing principles, leaving society vulnerable to the manipulations and rhetoric of despots.

From this account, it can be argued that many, if not all, the nations of the modern industrial world have never had fully functioning public spheres, with the recent history of the 20th century replete with examples of inequality, political manipulations and ‘rational’ atrocities — including genocide. Yet the above description of the power and function of the public sphere illustrates the continuing relevance of the concept, both in relation to understanding an essential mechanism of democratic government and as an ideal model for the operation of the mass media (McNair, 2000; Schudson, 1995). For many in the social sciences, the liberal functioning of the public sphere is a ‘benchmark’, similar to a Weberian (1978:23-26) ‘ideal type’ (an abstract construct rarely found in an empirically pure form), by which the health of civil society can be assessed. Indeed, by far the most common appearance of the concept is in literature lamenting the decline of civic culture (Postman, 1986; Putnam, 1995), and thus an end to the Enlightenment
project of participatory governance, equality and freedom. For example, Carl Boggs (2000) holds a position broadly representative of this argument, contending that the corrosion of the public sphere function of the mass media by trivial entertainment and pointless spectacle is producing an apathetic, depoliticised American public, severely undermining genuine democratic government in the United States. Likewise, Edward Herman (1998:133) emphasises the corruption of the public sphere by market forces, stating that:

The public sphere is shrinking globally under the impact of a triumphant market system, which is putting more and more public space to profitable use, as defined by the advertising community … But democracy depends on an informed public, and thus a vibrant public sphere, to function properly. The main drift of the global market system and media therefore poses the serious threat that we are allowing democracy to be subverted and, in Neil Postman’s words, ‘entertaining [sic] ourselves to death’.

However, lamentations regarding the decline of public spheres in the world’s democracies have been disputed by some scholars, some of whom believe that contemporary content/cultural developments within the mass media (such as audience fragmentation and the growth of niche media) are opening up multiple, interlocking public spheres that incorporate the opinions and values of many groups that have

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2 The extent to which the media are engendering an apathetic, apolitical population needs to be re-examined, or at least qualified, in light of the mass turnout of voters for 2008 US Presidential Election, where 61.5 per cent of eligible Americans voted (the ‘modern-day record’ was set in 1960, with a total of 67 per cent — CNN International 2008).
traditionally been denied access to the media due to their socially marginalised positions (Lumby, 1999). For example, Alan McKee (2005:17) believes that all five major themes common to popular and academic concerns about the public sphere can be largely dismissed if one takes a ‘postmodern relativist’ approach to the topic. Adopting this approach, McKee sees the first of these themes as ‘trivialisation’, noting that much of the public sphere has been characterised by its would-be-reformers as trivial and superficial, with cultural texts such as glossy magazines (and their content of celebrity gossip, grooming and personal relationships) vilified as a primary example of the ‘serious’ being marginalised by the mundane. McKee (2005) believes that such criticisms fail to remember that the ‘personal is political’, noting that many feminists fought hard in the 1970s to have such issues discussed in the mainstream media. The second major theme characterising laments about the condition of the public sphere is that of ‘commercialisation’. McKee (2005) sees this theme as stemming from the argument that the media use ‘trash’ and ‘tabloidised’ material (the gratuitous use of sex and violence) in chasing the largest audience share, essentially ‘dumbing down’ their content to meet the infotainment needs of uneducated consumers — an accusation often aimed at Rupert Murdoch’s media (see, for instance, Pasadeos and Renfro, 1997). Yet, for McKee, this is in fact a positive effect of the market as it renders large elements of the media accessible to the public, with the content of popular ‘tabloid trash’ often exploring valuable themes and issues, such as those pertaining to sexual or racial equality.

The third theme in McKee’s (2005) objection to what he sees as an outdated ‘modernist’ critique of the public sphere is concerned with the alleged detrimental effects of
‘spectacle’ (see Debord, 1983; 1998; Kellner, 2003b; 2005). Here, the central argument is that substance and quality within the media-constituted public sphere are being replaced by mere ‘attention grabbing’ spectacle, with important issues being reduced to thirty-second ‘sound-bites’ suitable for the ‘family-friendly’ evening news (Kellner, 2003b). Such thinking, McKee (2005) contends, privileges a Western model of ideal communication (which values rational argument above all other forms of dialogue) at the expense of emotive modes of communication favoured by many other cultures. For instance, African-American musical forms fail to fit the logical and rational model of communication favoured by the concept of the public sphere, yet they have been effective in communicating messages of equality, social justice and civil rights (see McKee, 2005:131-139). The fourth of McKee’s themes is concerned with the plethora of media and mediated cultural content found in the contemporary social world. In essence, this argument suggests that niche media (aimed at particular communities and subcultures) are fragmenting the audience for the more serious news media, and thus undermining their hitherto centrality to public debate and understanding. Echoing Habermas’ (1997) later revisions of the concept, McKee contends that multiple public spheres do not necessarily undermine news discourses or the concept of a central public sphere, as smaller ‘niche areas’ of the media provide an opportunity to establish opinions and views before their eventual transmission to more politically influential spheres (or what has been labelled the ‘political public sphere’ — Schudson, 1995; McNair, 2000).

The final theme that McKee (2005) sees as characterising debates on the public sphere is the role of apathy in the de-politicisation of politics. This argument follows a similar path
to that taken by those discussed above (such as Boggs, 2000; Herman, 1998), asserting that contemporary mass culture has rendered the public sphere devoid of a politically aware and active citizenry. Overexposure to themes of corruption and of natural and human-initiated disasters have, according to this argument, desensitised the population, with apathy seen as replacing concerns for the welfare of others and for the natural world. In countering this position, McKee (2005:182-203) explores some of the protest movements of the last ten years, noting that the recent mass rallies held in opposition to the invasion of Iraq, and at the regular meetings of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), are of a size not seen (at least in Australia and the United States) since the Vietnam War. He also notes the dramatic rise in the formal membership of environmental protection groups such as Greenpeace demonstrates a form of political activism. Accordingly, McKee contends that, although people may remain apathetic regarding the traditional political system of their particular nation-state (as is perhaps best demonstrated by the generally low level of public participation in elections in the US and the UK, where, unlike Australia, voting is not compulsory), this is per se insufficient evidence to make claims of de-politicisation (although arguably McKee is being equally selective in his use of evidence here). Indeed, for McKee, never before have so many citizens been so actively involved in political issues and systems, a development that he attributes to the new dimensions and operations of the media.

By using examples of what can be considered micro-political empowerment to undermine arguments of an ailing public sphere, McKee (2005) offers a more optimistic account of a collection of institutions commonly considered to be in a state of terminal
decline (at best) or, indeed, as a force for hegemonic (ideological) control (Gramsci, 1971 — an idea returned to in Chapter 3). McKee’s self-proclaimed ‘postmodern’ re-imagining of the public sphere sees the media as a necessary component of a democratic country’s communication system, a place where public opinion can still be formed despite vast populations and extensive social and cultural diversity. It can, therefore, be viewed as a collection of institutions central to democratic governance, where the media provide space for individuals (and for communities) to present their opinions and values, through which it is hoped people further understandings of themselves, and of each other. Such views are shared by Poole (1989), who notes in reference to the Australian media landscape:

However specific the interests represented, however self-contained its constituency, and however different its conception of the world, almost every social movement will need to establish a presence in the public sphere. Conversely, the existence of a space which is accessible to all, in which matters of general interest are freely and fairly debated and in which dissident voices are heard, is necessary for the existence of an informed citizenry and any worthwhile practice of democracy.

In other words, democracy requires an open public sphere where all individuals can have some form of participation, and where fourth estate institutions and their ‘key activists’ highlight the voices and issues of minority communities and cultures.
However, despite McKee’s (2005) postmodern re-imagining of the public sphere exposing some of the positive social uses of the modern media, his overall argument remains largely fixed at the level of individual politics, at the micro politics of identity and equality. Indeed, McKee fails adequately to consider the political economic dimensions of the public sphere and its consequences for diversity of expression and the genuine exchange of mass communication. As Rupert Murdoch’s purchase in July 2005 of the social networking website MySpace.com illustrates, citizens (or consumers) can come together in the virtual agora created by the mass media, engaging in the politics of ‘the self’ and even that of large-scale social movements (Boyd and Ellison, 2008:217). And yet participation is not the same as control. News Corporation ultimately determines the rules governing the MySpace.com environment, profits from it users (by selling them to advertisers), and can exercise censorship when and where an executive of the company deems it appropriate. This is not, of course, an isolated example, with many new media technologies, products and companies — those often celebrated by the more utopian advocates of the internet’s liberating potential — subsumed and incorporated within the folds of established media conglomerates. In other words, digital technologies, multi-channels and the internet may all be giving rise to a ‘numerical diversity’ of new products and platforms, but in relation to ‘source diversity’ the establish media conglomerates continue to maintain oligopolistic control (Winseck, 2008).

This is not to say that ‘new players’ or ‘stakeholders’ cannot emerge in media markets, or that the ‘virtual self’ is dependent solely on the goodwill of media executives (Agger, 2004). It is, rather, to make the point that the success of new companies and media
platforms renders them vulnerable to corporate ‘takeovers’ by bigger conglomerates, which may or may not change the nature of the company or the software, furthering the industry-wide trend towards a ‘media monopoly’ (see Bagdikian, 2004). As such, in Western democracies such as Australia the new technologies often seen as the key socio-political networking elements of the public sphere either remain on what can be called the ‘virtual political periphery’, or like MySpace.com become part of the media establishment (according to Murdoch, ‘160 million’ people engage with the expanding ‘Internet portfolio’ of News Corporation, of which MySpace is the centrepiece — News Corporation Annual Report 2007:5-6). Such industry trends raise again questions of ownership and access, for despite the diversity of voices and perspectives available in the ‘chatrooms’, ‘blogs’ and ‘social networking sites’ of the new media (which seem to best epitomise the ideal networked public spheres of the ‘Information Age’ — Castells, 2000), it is the ‘old media’, such as the press and the broadcast media, that remain of fundamental importance to democracy. This is not to deny the democratic potential of ‘citizen journalists’, bloggers and other producers of new media content (see Allan 2006 and 2009; Deuze, 2007; Bruns, 2008). Yet, it is the well-resourced news organisation that remains of fundamental importance as both ‘fourth estate guardians’ of investigative journalism and the mass disseminators of factually based information (McNair, 2000)

Questions of access are, then, of even more relevance when considering the role played by ‘old media’ — in particular, the press, radio and television — in constituting the public sphere. In contrast to the new media technologies that promote a public sphere ideal of multi-directional interaction and content creation, the technology and delivery
systems of the (old) mass media largely amount to a one-way medium for information, occupied by a professional class of skilled practitioners (albeit with notable exceptions in the form of ‘talkback radio’ and ‘letters to the editor’). As such, when considering issues of access to the mass media, one is considering the propensity of journalists and other media professionals to represent fairly the views and voices of the wider community. Here, it is perhaps necessary to raise a further distinction between the media of a particular society, highlighting the different capabilities and functions of commercial and public media. Private media conglomerates and state-funded public broadcasters provide varying levels of public dialogue and programme diversity, with the latter dedicated to principles of cultural enrichment and education (Poole, 1989), while the former possesses a commercial disposition towards creating content for the largest and most lucrative market demographic. The commercial media are not, of course, devoid of quality journalism or culturally enriching programming, yet they are nevertheless vulnerable to ‘market failure’, in that the financial costs associated with investigative journalism or the production of local programming might militate against its creation. There is, in effect, a clash of ethos between commercial and state-funded media, with the two sectors having different goals and priorities. As Michael Tracey (1998:18) pithily states, ‘[i]n a public system, television producers acquire money to make programmes. In a commercial system they make programmes to acquire money’.

Accordingly, although public service media such as the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (the ABC) and the British Broadcasting Corporation (the BBC) are not without their faults or critics, they are to a certain extent designed to be immune from the
pressures of the market (or, indeed, those of a proprietor), and are (ideally) better able to function according to the principles of a culturally enriching and socially liberating public sphere (see, for instance, Curran, 2005; Poole, 1989; Schiller, 1989; Tracey, 1998; Turner, 2005). Yet, despite their social and cultural value, in recent years many of the world’s public service broadcasters have experienced the ‘downsizing’ effects of neoliberalism — the ‘economic rationalisation’ of budgets and programming (Craig, 2000; Dempster, 2005; Tracey, 1998; Turner, 2005). In some cases, such as that of Australia’s multicultural Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), public service media have been forced to adopt a hybridised commercial funding model, thereby further incorporating market principles and priorities within the operational logic of the institution. This ideological challenge to public service media has been taking place while major conglomerates, such as News Corporation, have been achieving unprecedented levels of growth and audience penetration, due in large part to the relaxation of rules governing media ownership and the prevention of industry monopolies (see Winseck, 2008:34).

Moreover, this ideological challenge to public service media was recently escalated, when on the 28 August 2009 James Murdoch (who is Rupert Murdoch’s son and Chairman and CEO of News Corporation in Europe and Asia) publicly attack the BBC for ‘daring’ to further its news services on the internet (an area where News Corporation is yet to establish a commercially successful model — see Knox, 2009). While James Murdoch is right to be concerned about the financial challenges facing ‘old media’ in the age of ‘new media’ (and their implications for democracy), his hyperbolic speech was aimed at curtailing the operations of a ‘competitor’ widely known for its excellent
programmes and critical news services (Knox, 2009). This public denunciation of the BBC is part of wider and ongoing campaign made by parts of News Corporation against ‘state-owned’ media, with The Australian having ‘editorialised that it wants the ABC reduced to the (marginalised) status of PBS in the US, whose funding is supplemented by corporate sponsorships and pledge-plea telethons’ (Dempster, 2005:925-926). Whereas, at present, the funding for the BBC, and the Australian variant, the ABC, is seemingly secure, future right-of-centre governments might, in fact, seek to court the favour of the Murdochs by limiting the operations of public services media. In other words, in an epoch dominated by neo-liberalism, the implication posed by expanding media conglomerates, and their ideologically motivated attacks against public service rivals, is the further contraction of credibly news sources: in essence, the further privatisation of the public sphere.

To what extent democracy, or the ‘rule of reason’ in the Habermasian sense, may be adversely affected by the rise of major transnational commercial media operations and corporations, remains contingent on empirical inquiry, and returns the discussion once again to the raison d’être of this thesis. As media corporations such as News Corporation are increasingly occupying space within national and international public spheres, it is important to understand their propensity for political and ideological diversity, as well as their capacity for factual and unbiased journalism. If democracy is to be guarded against the potential abuses of media power, then it is necessary to revisit and explore the problem of media bias. Although for some academics the concept of ‘bias’ is problematic (seemingly premised on an unproblematic notion of ‘truth’ — see Starkey, 2007), this
thesis argues that analytical judgements of media bias can be made by exposing the ‘ideological frames’ of the text and by assessing the factual details of the story (as will be demonstrated below). Rather than simply seeking to expose ‘the truth’ of a news event, this empirical approach considers whether ‘more truthful’, or less-biased, journalistic accounts are possible. In seeking to understand and identify media bias (and thus the nature of media power), the central research question of this thesis asks: are the Murdoch media biased when covering stories of significant interest to the company’s proprietor? This question necessitates: a revisitation of theories of media power, as well as the operationalisation of an analytical concept of bias (the focus of Chapter 3); a detailed empirical case study of a news story known to be of particular interest to Murdoch, such as the 2003 Iraq War (the focus of Chapters 4 and 5); as well as an exploration of the structure, history and socio-political significance of News Corporation (the subject of Chapter 2). Having completed this investigation it will be possible to reflect on the dimensions of a public sphere best suited to the rule of reason and the facilitation of democratic government (Chapter 6). It is to these tasks that the thesis now turns.
Chapter 2

The Spectre of Murdoch
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The charismatic hero does not derive his authority from the ordinances and statutes, as if it were an official 'competence', nor from the customary usage or feudal fealty, as with patrimonial power: rather, he acquires it and retains it only by proving his powers in real life. He must perform miracles if he wants to be a prophet, acts of heroism if he wants to be a leader in war. Above all, however, his divine mission must 'prove' itself in that those who entrust themselves to him must prosper.

Max Weber


In his influential work on 'economy and society', Max Weber laid out a powerful and complex vision of the social world and the primary forces that determine the social actions of the individuals who, collectively, constitute it; a critique that instructively accounts for Rupert Murdoch’s social significance. Reflecting on the histories of modern civilisation, Weber identified three ‘ideal types’ of ‘legitimate authority’ (or domination), ‘pure concepts’ which say much about the nature of modernity, its structures, and the social order that influences human behaviour. The first of these concepts is that of ‘rational/legal authority’, and refers to the ‘patterns of normative rules and the right of those elevated to authority under such rules to issue commands’ (Weber, 1968:46). Rational/legal authority is best demonstrated in modern societies by one’s rational acceptance of the authority of certain apparatuses of the state, such as that of the judiciary or the parliament (or indeed the news media), and their officers, be they police officers,
court officials, public servants or politicians. For Weber, rational/legal authority — as typified in the legislative and policing practices of modern democracies — is made possible by the social ‘division of labour’ and the rise of ‘bureaucratisation’ (brought about by the Enlightenment’s spirit of reason and rationalisation), with the ‘specialisation of occupational function’ not limited to that found in the ‘economic sphere’ (Giddens, 1975:158). Capitalism’s power of rational organisation is, therefore, not confined to industry (as posited in orthodox Marxism or Fordism), but is a pattern found in many social structures and institutions, with modern corporations (much like the bureaucratic polity of the state) characterised by a technocratic division of labour (see Weber, 1970:214).

The second Weberian, ideal-typical concept of domination is that of ‘traditional authority’, where ‘obedience is owed to the person of the chief who occupies the traditionally sanctioned position of authority and who is (within its sphere) bound by tradition’ (Weber, 1968:46). Traditional authority is, therefore, based on common customs, beliefs and traditions, and is perhaps best demonstrated by the authority held by a monarch, a ‘village elder’, or, in a more modest form, that of a parent. Unlike the purposively ‘impersonal’ nature of rational-legal authority, traditional authority is ‘a matter of personal loyalty within the area of accustomed obligations’ (Weber, 1968:46). In contrast, Weber’s third concept of authority/domination is perhaps his most famous, and refers to that ‘unstable’, and at times ‘irrational’, power that has historically been ascribed to certain individuals, some of whom have been agents of profound historic change: namely, ‘charismatic authority’. Unlike individuals whose power depends on the
‘rationalised authority’ of the bureaucracy or the ‘traditional authority’ epitomised in doctrines such as the ‘divine right of kings’ (Weber, 1978:228), the charismatic individual is:

… endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader. In primitive circumstances this particular kind of deference is paid to prophets, to people with a reputation for therapeutic or legal wisdom, to leaders in the hunt, and heroes in war. It is very often thought of as resting on magical powers. How the quality in question would be ultimately judged from an ethical, aesthetic, or other such point of view is naturally entirely indifferent for the purposes of definition. What alone is important is how the individual is actually regarded by those subject to charismatic authority, by his [sic] ‘followers’ or ‘disciples’. (Weber, 1968:48)

Although clearly not a religious prophet or a battlefield hero, Rupert Murdoch (perhaps the world’s most recognised and powerful businessman) typifies this social force³. This chapter seeks to understand the influence and power of the ‘media mogul’ as it relates both to those who work for his global media conglomerate, and to those who live in countries where News Corporation possesses significant news media holdings (particularly in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States — see Appendix D

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³ It was, of course, Max Weber who first suggested that even within the highly rationalised and bureaucratic economic sphere of commerce, there remains the potential for charismatic domination (see Weber, 1970:233-234).
for a detailed list of News Corporation’s current assets and divisions). It explores the dimensions, history, influence and significance of News Corporation in order to provide the information that underpins the subsequent chapters of this thesis. Fundamentally, this chapter endeavours to contextualise the media effects attributed to Rupert Murdoch and his company, in order to explore better his social and political power.

**Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation**

In addition to the ‘bureaucratic stability and efficiency’ emanating from his Board of Directors and the organisational/managerial structure⁴ of the corporation he controls (see Weber, 1970:221-235), Rupert Murdoch is imbued with charisma, that problematic, unquantifiable power and energy that has helped to catapult him onto the world stage and his media into the lives of billions around the globe (as is documented by his many biographers — see, in particular, Shawcross, 1993; Dover, 2008). The ‘proof’ of Murdoch’s charismatic authority, the ‘substance’ of his charisma (see Weber, 1978:227), can be attributed to his business acumen, tireless work ethic, and (almost magical) ability to continuously expand his ‘corporate empire’, despite hostile regulators (who generally succumb to his charm) and corporate adversaries (who are generally outmanoeuvred by Murdoch’s seemingly uncanny — although not infallible — business sense). While the 2008/2009 Global Financial Crisis has recently challenged the profitability of the company, News Corporation’s diverse holdings ensure that it is well placed to weather

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⁴ While all executive staff will leave a corporation with the fullness of time, Murdoch’s position at the operational heart of News Corporation has never significantly altered. As Chairman, Chief Executive Officer and dominant shareholder, his power and control over the company’s vast media holdings is enforced through the managerial actions of ‘key lieutenants’ (handpicked by the CEO), who must regularly report to Murdoch on the operations and developments within their various organisational divisions (see Shawcross, 1993; Neil, 1996; Dover, 2008).
the current economic climate (News Corporation Annual Report, 2009). Indeed, despite a recent downturn, *News Corporation*’s revenue figures demonstrate Murdoch’s ability to continuously expand his corporation, constructing what was merely prophesised in Marshall McLuhan’s (1989) vision of a ‘global village’: a truly global information network, with robust financial foundations (see Figure 1.1 below).

**Figure 1.1 News Corporation: Revenues, 1994 to 2009**

Murdoch is, then, the first (and perhaps the last⁵) truly global ‘media baron’, while *News Corporation* is the most globalised of the world’s transnational media conglomerates, reaching more homes than any of its competitors (Arsenault and Castells, 2008:494).

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⁵ Given the unleashed organisational power of rationality and the stability of bureaucratic forms of administration, it can be speculated that the ‘media baron’, and/or the dynastically controlled media company, may become an anachronism, replaced by the professional Executive and the Board of Directors, who answer to shareholders rather than to a media mogul (*News Corporation*’s two major Australian competitors, and former dynastic companies, *Fairfax Media* and *Publish Broadcasting Limited*, represent this long-term structural trend).
*News Corporation* is not, of course, the only transnational media conglomerate with extensive international holdings and investments. Indeed, in what Daya Thussu (2006) has labelled the ‘global media bazaar’, *News Corporation* must compete with local media (or what could be called ‘glocalised’ media content — see Ritzer, 2003; Thuss, 2007) and that of other transnational corporations (or TNCs), particularly against those TNCs which (along with *News Corporation*) make up the ‘the big five’ companies that control much of the world’s media and cultural trade: namely, *Time Warner*, *Disney*, *Sony*, *Bertelsmann*, and *Viacom* (see Bagdikian, 2004). Yet, where for the last decade other media corporations have been attempting to expand their operations on new commercial frontiers — benefiting from new telecommunication platforms (such as new satellite technologies and the development of digital binary code) and trade liberalisation and deregulation (see Herman and McChesney, 1997) — *News Corporation* is already a well established ‘player’ in the global media marketplace. Indeed, Murdoch first launched his international expansion from his base in Adelaide, South Australia, back in 1969, purchasing the British newspapers the *News of the World* and, shortly thereafter, *The Sun*. In other words, although *News Corporation* is not the only conglomerate to have benefited from new technologies and the global spread of capitalism, ‘[Murdoch] more than any other figure … has been the visionary of a global corporate media empire’ (McChesney cited in Thussu, 2006:86). Or, as rival media tycoon John Malone once stated, ‘vertical integration’ — the accumulation of different assets in the chain of production — is ‘all about trying to catch Rupert’ (Herman and McChesney, 1997:71).
The sheer size of *News Corporation*’s global media network is a source of considerable pride for the company’s principal architect, the 78-year-old Murdoch, and is consistently celebrated in the company’s Annual Reports. As the 2008 Annual Report boasts:

> Across the globe, we capture imaginations and open minds to new ideas and new outlooks: new ways of perceiving the world around us. In more than 100 countries and 30 languages, across six continents, through film, television, cable, satellite, newspapers, magazines, books and digital media, the 64,000 passionate individuals who make up the world’s most international media company are dedicated to: Entertaining with a passion; Informing with a purpose; Connecting the world; Challenging with a mission. (News Corporation Annual Report, 2008:1-11)

Despite being written by a publicist for the consumption of shareholders (and prospective shareholders), such statements on the company’s scope and mission are not merely public relations rhetoric. *News Corporation*’s vertically integrated structure offers excellent opportunities for cross-promotion and ‘content streaming’, with content recycled across ‘the gamut of company-controlled entertainment platforms’ (Murray, 2005:416). As Figure 1.2 below shows, Murdoch ostensibly splits the organisational structure and holdings of *News Corporation* into eight separate divisions, according to criteria of ‘media type’ rather than geopolitical location. While such a segmented organisational arrangement reflects both *News Corporation*’s international identity and ‘synergistic’ strength, it also belies the complexity of the company’s diverse holdings, assets and
ownership structures (which includes ‘1445 subsidiaries in over 50 countries’ — Arsenault and Castells, 2008:496). As is noted by Amelia Arsenault and Manuel Castells (2008:496), such complexity is a key strength of the company, allowing ‘great latitude of action, particularly in the realm of tax remittance’.

Although Appendix D of this thesis provides a detailed list of News Corporation’s global holdings, it is appropriate here to explore briefly some of the company’s primary media assets, operations and products. News Corporation’s first segment, Filmed Entertainment, includes assets such as: Twentieth Century Fox (which during the 2008 financial year produced the ‘blockbuster’ film *The Simpson Movie*: making US$527 million at the box office); Blue Sky Studios (of which the recent success story was the animated film *Horton Hears a Who*, grossing US$296 million); Fox Searchlight Pictures (which brought the world *Juno*, and News Corporation another US$230 million in revenue); Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment (which during 2008 released, or re-released, 800 film and television titles worldwide, on DVD, Blu-ray, or pay-per-view services); and, Twentieth Century Fox Television (which produces popular television shows, such as *Family Guy, American Dad, Prison Break, My Name is Earl, The Unit*, and *How I Met*...
Your Mother). As can be seen in Figure 1.3 below, the Filmed Entertainment division of News Corporation is, at present, the company’s most financially successful division.

News Corporation’s next organisational segment, Television, includes major assets such as: the FOX Broadcasting Company (or the ‘FOX network’), MyNetworkTV⁶, and STAR (or ‘Satellite Television for Asian Region’). Since its creation by Murdoch in the 1980s, FOX has continued to grow, contradicting the conventional wisdom of the US television industry that there was only room for three free-to-air television networks (see Kimmel, 2004). With its 216 affiliated television stations across the United States, FOX today is ‘ranked first’ by ‘primetime audiences’ (at least amongst the 18-49 year-old demographic), disseminating many popular programmes, such as House, American Idol, and FOX Sports (the latter of which broadcasts the Major League Baseball All-Star Game, the World Series, the BCS National Championship Game, the NFC Championship Game, and the Daytona 500). Meanwhile, in Asia (and now with a presence in the UK, continental Europe, and North America) News Corporation’s STAR television broadcasts across ‘53 countries’, offering a total of ‘63 channels in ten languages’ (News Corporation Annual Report, 2008:36). Although suffering a financially turbulent start, STAR is now a successful and expanding asset within News Corporation (Dover, 2008; Thussu, 2007). Furthermore, with its reach of approximately 300 million viewers, STAR offers hitherto unseen fusions of global and local culture, and provides instructive case studies vis-à-vis the rise of the global media conglomerates and their socio-political consequences (see Curtin, 2005; Thussu, 2007).

⁶ Commencing operations in the United States in 2006, MyNetworkTV is a sister network to FOX, yet is separately operated (Wikipedia, 29-11-2008).
The next division of *News Corporation*, Cable Network Programming, is an increasingly profitable segment of the company, and includes assets such as: FOX News Channel (made famous because of its partisan journalism — Greenwald, 2004); FOX Business Network; Fox Cable Networks (including: FX, the Fox Movie Channel, the Fox Regional Sports Networks, the Fox Soccer Channel, SPEED, FUEL TV, FSN, Fox Reality, and Fox College Sports); and, Fox International Channels (which had nearly US$ one billion in revenues last financial year, reaching ‘more than 260 million subscribers in 29 languages in Europe, Latin America, Asia and Africa’ — News Corporation Annual Report, 2008:38). Once considered the future technological backbone of *News Corporation*’s global media network, the next major division of the company, Direct Broadcast Satellite Television, has recently been divested of its holdings in the (US-
focused) DirectTV\(^7\), which was once hailed as the ‘missing piece’ in *News Corporation*’s global satellite network (Chenoweth, 2001:340-341). Yet, despite this ostensible shift away from satellite television, this division of the company continues to be both a profitable and an expanding part of *News Corporation*’s asset portfolio, including notable subsidiaries: Sky Italia (a pay-TV platform with more than 170 channels and 4.6 million subscribers); a 39 per cent controlling stake in BritishSkyBroadcasting (better known as ‘BSkyB’); a 25 per cent stake in FOXTEL (Australia); and a 44 per cent stake in Sky Network Television (an increasingly influential news source in Australia — see Young, 2009).

‘Magazines and Inserts’ is a division of the company that lacks the profile of much of the rest of the corporation, yet it remains a lucrative sector. This division consists of the profitable News America Marketing Group, and the unprofitable, but politically influential, publication the *Weekly Standard* — which has been considered the ‘bible’ of neoconservative thought and an important ‘agenda-setting force’ on the administration of former US President George W. Bush (see Halper and Clarke, 2004; McKnight, 2005).

The second print division, ‘Newspapers and Information Services’, comprises a significant part of *News Corporation*’s global operations. Indeed, as has been noted by many media scholars and Murdoch biographers (see, for instance, Chenoweth, 2001; Cryle, 2007; Evans, 1983; Griffen-Foley, 2002; Leapman, 1984; Marjoribanks, 2000b; Munster, 1985; Page, 2003; Shawcross, 1993; Wolff, 2008a), newspapers have provided

\(^7\) Over the objections of many shareholders, Murdoch swapped *News Corporation*’s 38.4 per cent stake in DirectTV with the 16.3 per cent of News Corp voting stock strategically acquired by rival media mogul John Malone (Head of *Liberty Corporation*) in 2004 when *News Corporation* reincorporated in the United States (see Arsenault and Castells, 2008:493).
the financial bedrock on which the company’s dramatic growth and integrated-structure have been built. In Australia, News Corporation’s subsidiary, News Limited, owns the only national broadsheet newspaper, The Australian (founded by Murdoch in 1964), the popular and widely read tabloids the Daily Telegraph (Sydney) and the Herald Sun (Melbourne) (each with readership figures in excess of one million readers per day — Manne, 2005a:84), as well as nearly 150 additional newspapers. In Britain, Murdoch owns the Sunday tabloid the News of the World (his first UK newspaper), The Sun (Britain’s most popular, and perhaps most infamous, tabloid; producing ‘journalism based on [the] three Ss: sex, soccer, and scandal’ — Thussu, 2006:87), and the ‘serious-toned’ newspapers, The Times and The Sunday Times. In the United States, Murdoch owns the New York Post (which under his ownership has moved to the political Right, and is said to be subsidised by other ventures of the corporation — Arsenault and Castells, 2008:504) and, through his recent acquisition of the Dow Jones group, the Wall Street Journal (which he is using as the basis for his new business news channel, the Fox Business Network (see Dunn, 2007; Pooley, 2007; Schejter and Davidson, 2008; Wolff, 2008a).

The second last organisational division of News Corporation, Book Publishing, continues to be a significant and prestigious component of the company. In essence, this division is comprised of the English-language publishing house HarperCollins, with News Corporation owning the book publisher’s operations in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the United States and Europe (while the company also controls a 40 per cent stake in

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8 In 2004, The Times followed the example of rival newspaper The Independent in moving from a broadsheet format to the ‘commuter friendly’ (tabloid size) ‘compact’ publication.
HarperCollins India). As will be explored in more detail later in this chapter, HarperCollins has featured in several Murdoch-related controversies, which have at times sullied the publishing group’s respectability. For instance, in 1994 HarperCollins was at the centre of a political scandal in the United States after it was revealed that it had promised an advanced payment of US$4.5 million (an unusually large sum) to secure the publishing rights to a proposed book by Republican politician Newt Gingrich (who was at the time incoming Speaker of the US House of Representatives, and thus soon to be in a position to help Murdoch with his then problems with the US Federal Communications Commission (FFC) — see Kimmel, 2004:186-188). Furthermore, and perhaps more famously, HarperCollins’ editorial independence was jeopardised and brought into disrepute when Murdoch cancelled the publication of an autobiography by the former (and the last) British Governor of Hong Kong, Chris Patten (see Dover, 2008:141-156), in what was seen as an attempt to pacify the communist leadership of China (thereby avoiding further damage to his already struggling operations in the authoritarian nation).

The final division of *News Corporation*, the miscellaneous collection of assets aptly grouped under the title ‘Other’, is comprised primarily of the company’s interests in new media and sports competitions (sport is, of course, one of the key ingredients in Murdoch’s successful formula of media expansion — see Rowe, 2000). After a cautious start in new media investments — due to Murdoch’s initial scepticism concerning the financial viability of the internet, followed by the global share market plunge in the value of ‘technology stocks’ in the late 1990s (otherwise known as the ‘Dot.com crash’) — *News Corporation* has recently made significant investments in new media, which the
company primarily groups under the banner of one subsidiary, Fox Interactive Media (FIM). According to the Annual Report for 2008, FIM consists of many of the internet’s ‘most popular websites’ and had a collective reach of ‘186 million’ viewers for the period of June 2008. Key assets here are: MySpace.com⁹ (one of the world’s most popular social networking sites); Photobucket (the ‘leading photo and video sharing site’ in the United States); FOX Sports Interactive (a popular source of online sports videos); and the IGN Network (a leading distribution platform for videogames). In relation to the other assets of this division, News Corporation owns significant holdings in: hulu (a free online video archive of content from News Corporation — a joint venture with NBC Universal); Jamba/FOX Mobile Entertainment (otherwise known as Jamster — distributing games and mobile phone ringtones in more than 25 countries); NDS (a leading technology provider for pay-TV distribution systems); the National Rugby League in Australia (a 50 per cent interest); Rugby Union (a significant holding in both the Australian and New Zealand competitions); and News Digital Media (which is comprised of the Australian websites, CareerOne.com.au, Carsguide.com.au, Moshtix.com.au and Truelocal.com.au). Although the total revenues from these diverse ventures are to date rather limited, assets in this organisational division offer many opportunities for ‘content synergies’, with MySpace.com, for example, incorporating corporate web-windows, such as Moshtix.com.au (a site that sells tickets to leading music festivals and performances across Australia), into its operating format, thus helping to monetise MySpace.com, while garnering revenue from the generally elusive ‘independent youth’ consumer group.

⁹ Bought by Murdoch in July 2005 for US$580 million, the management of MySpace.com has since been delegated to Murdoch’s third wife, Wendi Deng, in what has been labelled a test of her business acumen by her husband (see Dover, 2008:285; Ellis, 2007).
The Power of News Corporation’s Organisational Synergies

From this brief exposition of News Corporation’s structure, several ‘organisational patterns’ are evident that help to explain the company’s success as a large and durable commercial institution. As the diversity of News Corporation’s key assets and holdings demonstrate, ‘vertical integration’ — controlling all the links in the ‘media supply chain’, from content production, to content packaging, to final distribution — is fuelling News Corporation’s ever-expanding world-wide growth, while also generating cross-promotional opportunities made possible by the company’s ‘horizontal integration’ (controlling different media formats and sectors). Unlike other transnational conglomerates (such as Time-Warner), News Corporation has created many genuine operational synergies (of which the above MySpace/Moshtix example is merely the most recent instance) that help to overcome the risks that militate against the globalisation of major commercial institutions. According to Terry Flew and Callum Gilmour (2003:7), media expansion strategies, which in the age of monopoly capitalism are fundamentally about concentration and conglomeration (Bagdikian, 2004; Herman and McChesney, 1997), fall into approximately five interrelated categories:

1. *Horizontal expansion*, through takeovers, mergers and acquisition of competitors within the industry in which they are dominant, or the development of new products and services within that industry;

2. *Vertical expansion*, or takeovers, mergers and acquisitions of related production and distribution interests within the industry supply chain, or the development of new enterprises in these related areas;
3. *Diagonal expansion*, or *conglomeration*, which involves expansion into complementary activities, either through mergers and acquisitions or the development of new enterprises, that enable productive synergies to be developed;

4. *Diversification*, or the expansion into non-media activities (or, correspondingly, non-media companies expanding into media industries);

5. *Globalisation*, or the expansion of production or distribution into other national or regional markets.

Although this typology of media expansion is rather broad, with significant conceptual overlap between some of these categories, what is important is the suggestion that media corporations that choose to adopt such strategies of growth and diversification — in a careful manner (in the sense of creating genuine content and supply synergies) — garner significant institutional stability and power (the latter is in reference to a large corporation’s ability to influence their ‘external environment’).

Indeed, the benefits that come from strategies of expansion through concentration and conglomerations are many. Flew and Gilmour (2003:8-9) identify seven such advantages of corporate expansionism: (1) the realisation of ‘economies of scale’ (through increased market share by the recycling and reproduction of media products and services); (2) the realisation of ‘economies of scope’ (through the use of different media platforms and content to cater for diverse audience tastes); (3) the increased bargaining power that comes with achieving a certain conglomerate ‘critical mass’ (with larger companies in a
better position to negotiate favourable trading agreements with advertisers, suppliers and distributors); (4) increased latitude for ‘cost reduction’ (as vertically integrated corporations reduce transaction costs and save valuable time through producing and distributing their original and recycled cultural products); (5) increased latitude for ‘risk reduction’ (by mitigating the inherent risks of the creative industries — namely, identifying and offering that which will be ‘popular’ — by possessing the necessary resources to research the tastes and consumption habits of different cultural markets, while maintaining interests in diverse media forms and content, thus ‘covering all bases’); (6) the creation of greater pathways of access to the media supply chain (in the sense of controlling the forces linking content production to content packaging and distribution); (7) the realisation of ‘economic rents’ through the cross-promotion of media content into new cultural forms and products (such as merchandise and the creation of other ‘spin-off’ products: from books to theme parks).

Out of these potential benefits of conglomeration and concentration, News Corporation’s success is, then, fundamentally based on three organisational features. In the first instance, News Corporation possesses the organisational ability to ‘content stream’ and ‘cross-promote’, recycling programmes across multiple platforms (Murray, 2005). The company is, therefore, in a better position to recover costs on expensive cultural productions (such as a ‘Hollywood blockbuster’ film or an expensive television series) through their global sale and redistribution. In the second instance, News Corporation often forms local corporate partnerships in strategic geopolitical locales (particularly in relation to the company’s operations in Asia and South America) that can negate a
competitor’s operations or potentially competitive activities (at least for the duration of the partnership), while yielding valuable local insights, infrastructure and financial allies (see Appendix D for details on News Corporation’s joint ventures). In the third instance, News Corporation’s segmented structure allows greater operational autonomy for the different divisions, thus encouraging better performance from managers. This is not to say that Murdoch does not possess a firm control over his company (more so than any other media company, News Corporation is closely identified with its architect and founder — see Herman and McChesney, 1997:70). Rather, divisional and area managers are given the latitude to demonstrate their own business acumen (according to Weber’s point regarding bureaucratic ‘division of labour’), provided that they do not contradict the actions or the commands of the Chief Executive Officer. Thus a manager of an organisational segment operating in, say, South East Asia will foreseeably have an intimate and nuanced understanding of local politics and customs. Such an executive will play a roll greater than that of a mere ‘transnational salesman’, and will be in a position to ensure that News Corporation’s global products are sufficiently localised to have mass appeal — thereby becoming one of what George Ritzer (2003) calls ‘glocalised’ cultural forms — while also conforming to local regulations regarding potentially offensive or subversive content (Dover, 2008). Thus, although ‘bigger is not necessarily better’ — there are many examples of failed corporate mergers in the pursuit of what proved to be spurious synergies (see Flew and Gilmour, 2003) — News Corporation’s geographically broad distribution and diverse media holdings attest to the economic power and benefits of global expansion through integration, market concentration, and conglomeration.
However, the company’s corporate structure can tell only part of the story of News Corporation’s commercially successful modus operandi. Although ‘vertical integration’ and complementary ‘horizontal integration’ (the creation of content and distribution synergies) have been Murdoch’s objective, the manner by which he has expanded News Corporation is far from orthodox. Perhaps more than even his much mythologised business acumen (his ability to identify undervalued and underperforming assets ripe for the Murdoch entrepreneurial formula), it is his reported talent for negotiating potential hostile regulatory environments, by dealing directly with governments and politicians, that has been seen as one of his key sources of fame. Such relationships have led to Murdoch being thought of as a type of kingmaker, or as an ‘old-fashioned media baron’, who will trade the political support of his news media for a regulatory/financial quid pro quo. Indeed, according to Arsenault and Castells (2008:508):

Rupert Murdoch holds power in the global network society through his ability to connect the programming goals of media, business and political networks in the service of NewsCorp’s expansion. Each one of these networks is programmed around a specific set of goals: conquering audiences; making profits and enhancing market valuation; and accessing political decision-making capacity. Murdoch is, above all, a businessman. He builds NewsCorp’s competitive advantage by maintaining tight control over the terms of its connection with other media and corporate actors and by leveraging his (real and/or perceived) ability to influence audiences around the world in order to gain political favors.
Thus in the terms of Castells’ network theory, Murdoch is located at the intersection of many of the points that comprise the social, cultural, and political networks of News Corporation and its broader sphere of influence. As a ‘switcher’ — someone who holds significant power due to their structural position at the intersection of political and corporate networks (Arsenault and Castells, 2008:491) — Murdoch can support many diverse ideological causes, yet fundamentally acts in a manner to ‘maximize his efficacy’ as Chairman and CEO of the world’s most global media conglomerate (Arsenault and Castells, 2008:508-509). However, as will become clear in the next section of this chapter, to reduce Murdoch’s actions to those of any other businessman — albeit an important one with interlocking networks — is significantly to understate his social and political power. As David McKnight (2005:59) has noted:

[Within News Corporation] [t]he imprimatur for converting journalism into right-wing advocacy comes ultimately from the top. Most Murdoch critics see the CEO of News Corporation as merely a man of crude power, interested only in profits. This significantly underestimates him and the ideas he sponsors.

Accordingly, the following section of this chapter explores the rise of News Corporation. It is not concerned with a detailed account of Murdoch’s many business dealings and corporate intrigues (which are well documented in the ever-proliferating Murdoch biographies — see Chenoweth, 2001; Dover, 2008; Leapman, 1984; Munster, 1985; Page, 2003; Shawcross, 1993; Wolff, 2008a), but offers an account of the company’s
expansion that focuses on Murdoch’s ideological proclivities, and his relationships with politics and politicians.

**The Rise of News Corporation and the Modus Operandi of Rupert Murdoch**

Before exploring Murdoch’s aggressive business exploits and his relationship with politics it is necessary to offer some insights into his historical and social context, and thereby highlight the ‘formative experiences’ that have driven him to become arguably the world’s most successful and powerful media proprietor. Murdoch was born in 1931 into one of Australia’s most politically influential families. His father, Keith Murdoch (who would become Sir Keith Murdoch in 1934), had risen from an ‘impoverished, penny-a-line reporter…[to] a kingmaker and confidant of political leaders in Britain and Australia’ (Chenoweth, 2001:25), building one of Australia’s most powerful media conglomerates, the Herald and Weekly Times group (of which he was Chairman rather than the sole proprietor). Keith Murdoch’s meritocratic rise was due in part to a politically influential letter he wrote as a World War I war correspondent concerning the failings of the British-led military campaign at Gallipoli (Turkey) — a series of battles which killed many thousands of Australians and collectively provide a foundation myth of the Australian nation. Keith Murdoch’s experiences during World War I made him, according to one biographer, ‘the best known byline in Australia’ (see Page, 2003:56). Becoming something of a folk-hero, Keith Murdoch was commonly known as the journalist who ‘got our boys out of Gallipoli’ (Shawcross, 1993:31). As respected
Murdoch biographer William Shawcross (1993:31) has noted, ‘Rupert grew up knowing that his father was an authentic Australian hero’.10

Rupert Murdoch’s home environment was, then, far from typical, with Murdoch raised in an environment in which powerful political figures (including Prime Ministers) often visited his father (Page, 2003:58). Yet on the 5 October 1952, Sir Keith Murdoch, ‘the most successful and powerful journalist Australia had seen’ (Chenoweth, 2001:25), suffered a massive heart attack and died. Shortly before his death, Sir Keith Murdoch had learnt of a plot, a corporate coup d’etat, that would see him removed from the company he had helped to build, and would jeopardise his family’s financial security. Although there are conflicting accounts of this event, popular versions of this story highlight the role played by many ‘former friends’ of the Murdoch family in conspiring to regain control of Sir Keith’s investments, including his shares in Queensland Newspapers, immediately after his demise (see Chenoweth, 2001:25-27). Irrespective of the exact details of this dramatic period of Australian media history, the end result of Keith Murdoch’s legendary, and highly mythologised, career was the bequeathing of a controlling stake in a single daily newspaper, the Adelaide News, to his only son Rupert. Accordingly, many Murdoch biographers and media historians have speculated that much of Murdoch’s relentless energy and aggressive drive, especially during the early years of his career, has been inspired by two things: a desire to escape his father’s lengthy

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10 Keith Murdoch’s role in the Great War has not been without criticism. Bruce Page (2003:30-58) argues that he deliberately misrepresented some of the ‘British command failings’ at Gallipoli for his own advantage, and would later participate in a conspiracy to undermine the leadership of Major General John Monash (who, as leader of the Australian Corps on the Western Front, won widespread acclaim as a respected military commander and tactician).
shadow; and a need to revenge wrongs wrought by Keith Murdoch’s former associates on the family.

From such ‘relatively humble’ beginnings, Murdoch built the foundations of his future media empire, aggressively expanding his company across Australia’s different newspaper markets. In 1954 Murdoch’s News Limited took over Western Australia Press, owner of Perth’s *Sunday Times*, as well as a chain of regional publications. In early 1960, he decided to force his way into Australia’s largest newspaper market, taking over Sydney’s Cumberland chain of suburban newspapers; a move which was followed shortly after by the purchase of the popular afternoon publication, the tabloid *Daily Mirror* (Griffen-Foley, 2002:96). In relation to politics, Murdoch was by now being considered a person of some significance by Australia’s political establishment, demonstrating the same interest as his father for politics and intrigue. It is during this period that he sought out his first political alliances, eventually identifying Jack McEwen, then Leader of the conservative Country Party (the minor partner in a coalition with Robert Menzies’ Liberal Party — see Page, 2003:112), as a politician with Prime Ministerial potential. According to Bruce Page (2003:113):

It was a restless, impressionable time for Murdoch — not only because other newspaper bosses seemed to enjoy political rights thus far denied to him. … [Ultimately] News Ltd’s papers gave enthusiastic coverage to McEwen in the 1963 federal elections, but did so without visible effect. Obedient as the *News* and
Mirror were, they carried no punch. For progress to occur, something quite different was required.

Having failed, at least to his satisfaction, to make an impact on Australia’s political landscape, Murdoch decided he needed a publication with greater respectability and influence. Thus in 1964 Murdoch launched Australia’s first national daily newspaper, The Australian, basing the publication of the broadsheet in the nation’s capital\(^{11}\) (Cryle, 2007). In founding The Australian Murdoch did not want to produce merely a crude instrument of propaganda, but a serious and ambitious ‘newspaper that [his] father would have been proud of’ (Chenoweth, 2001:32). Although Murdoch’s first quality newspaper would struggle financially for the next twenty years of its operation, The Australian afforded Murdoch the ‘door-opening’ political acceptance that he greatly desired (McKnight, 2003:348), and remains today ‘arguably his most significant contribution to the Australian media’ (Griffen-Foley, 2002:96-97).

Buoyed by the ‘overall’ financial success of his newspapers and his growing influence on the Australian political establishment, Murdoch eventually sought to diversify his company’s investments. Six years prior to the foundation of The Australian, Murdoch had made his first foray into the then new medium of television, being awarded a broadcasting licence for Channel 9 in Adelaide. By 1963, having been denied a television broadcasting licence in Sydney, Murdoch purchased 320,000 shares in Television Wollongong (an operation centred on a major industrial city to the south of Sydney).

\(^{11}\) In 1967 The Australian relocated its primary production operations from Canberra to Sydney, yet would maintain its focus on federal politics and the affairs of the broader Commonwealth (Cryle, 2007:58).
Threatening to use his new broadcasting ability to go after the ‘two million’ Sydney viewers within range of his signal, Murdoch used his newly acquired asset as a means of joining the ‘negotiating table’, eventually entering into a cooperative broadcasting partnership with rival media mogul Frank Packer\textsuperscript{12} (Page, 2003:109-111), setting a somewhat anti-competitive, monopolistic trend, which in later years was to characterise many media sectors around the globe (where companies are as likely to enter into a cooperative partnership as they are to challenge directly each others’ market position).

Murdoch had by now begun to look beyond Australia for the opportunity of the international expansion of his growing company, purchasing in 1963 a 28 per cent share in a Hong Kong-based magazine publisher, Asia Magazines, before in 1964 securing what was then regarded as another ‘business coup’, the purchase of the \textit{Dominion} newspaper, in Wellington, New Zealand (Shawcross, 1993:114).

After a period of consolidation from the middle years of the 1960s — as well as a divorce to his first wife Patricia Booker and marriage to his second wife Anna Torv in 1967 — by the end of the 1960s Murdoch was once again ready to expand his company. In 1968, he flew to the United Kingdom, seeking entry into the competitive British newspaper market of ‘Fleet Street’. Identifying his first target, Murdoch outwitted and outmanoeuvred his competitors to secure a controlling stake in the Sunday daily, the \textit{News of the World} (which had at the time a circulation of more than six million — see Chenoweth, 2001:33). The ‘underperforming’ afternoon tabloid \textit{The Sun} was Murdoch’s next target, initially costing only £50,000, with the total cost of the newspaper to be £500,000

\textsuperscript{12} Murdoch would later sell his Australian broadcasting holdings in order to comply with cross-media ownership legislation introduced by the Hawke/Keating government in 1986/1987, which required media companies, in broad terms, to specialise in a particular medium, be it newspapers, television, or radio.
(provided that the struggling newspaper did not first slip into insolvency). Within two years of the takeover, Murdoch’s *Sun* was making over £500,000 a month, and by 1973 had tripled its circulation figure to over three million readers per day (largely thanks to ‘cheeky headlines, sensational news and scandal, cash promotions and pictures of topless women on page three’ — Chenoweth 2001:33).

The early 1970s saw Murdoch adding further titles to his rapidly expanding *News Corporation*, with Sir Frank Packer selling his long prized Sydney tabloids, the *Daily* and *Sunday Telegraph*, to his rival in 1972 (Griffen-Foley, 2002:97). On the international front, in 1973 Murdoch established a beachhead in the North American media market, purchasing, and then merging, the San Antonio *Express* and its afternoon stable-mate, the *News*, thus creating the San Antonio *Express-News* (a profitable publication which Murdoch eventually sold in 1994 — Marjoribanks, 2000:165). The early 1970s saw Murdoch take a greater role in the democratic processes of the government of Australia. Bored by what he perceived to be the stale conservatism of the Liberal/Country Party coalition (which had been in power for more than twenty years), Murdoch was by 1972 willing to support a new political party, ready once again ‘to try his hand’ at ‘king-making’ now that he had more publications, and so more ‘media muscle’. In Australia, at the time, many of the country’s major newspapers had a history of supporting right-wing political parties (with the notable exception of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, which moved first Left in 1961 and then to the ideological centre in 1965 — see Griffen-Foley, 2002:97). Breaking with his father’s tradition of supporting the political/ideological Right, Murdoch decided to champion the campaign of the Labor Party’s Prime

Having helped Whitlam win the 1972 election, Murdoch’s brief re-conversion to the Left — ideological ground that he had not visited since his youthful and ‘rebellious’ days as a masters student at Oxford (Shawcross 1993:67) — came to a rapid and acrimonious end. 

Like the details surrounding the circumstance of Murdoch’s inheritance, there are conflicting accounts as to why he turned against the Whitlam government. One story contends that Murdoch, after having backed Whitlam in 1972, then asked to be appointed Australia’s High Commissioner in London (Page, 2003:161-162). Another story involves Whitlam failing to deliver to Murdoch a lucrative business deal involving mining contracts (Murdoch denies that this was his motivation — Shawcross, 1993:168-173).

However, the more likely cause for the souring of the Murdoch/Whitlam relationship lies in the former’s more usual ideological disposition and the latter’s move further to the ideological Left (see Shawcross, 1993). After twenty years of conservative government, Australia was taken down a radically new left-wing path by Whitlam’s Labor Government, launching many bold policy reforms such as: (1) completing the full withdrawal of Australia’s military forces from the Vietnam War; (2) the final eradication of the nation’s European-biased immigration policy (otherwise known as the ‘White Australia Policy’); (3) taking new steps towards reconciliation with the Aboriginal population (including ‘land-rights’ reforms); (4) establishment of a universal healthcare system, Medibank (later to become Medicare); (5) abolition of fees for tertiary education;
(6) creation of a foreign policy agenda far more independent than Australia’s usual unwavering pro-USA stance. Although Murdoch was not necessarily against all of Whitlam’s policy reforms — for instance, he agreed with Whitlam’s attitudes towards Australia becoming a Republic — by 1975 he was once again ready to ‘change trains’, alarmed by what he perceived to be the increasing left-wing radicalism of the government that he had helped to install (see Page, 2003:163-196).

Thus 1975 is a year of historic importance for Australia, with Murdoch using his newspapers to encourage the Leader of the Opposition Malcolm Fraser (then to be Australia’s next Prime Minister) and the Governor-General Sir John Kerr (then technically Australia’s Head of State, as the official representative of the British Monarch), into an unprecedented constitutional confrontation with Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, that resulted in the dismissal of the Whitlam Government and the calling of a general election. Although, in his own words, Murdoch had ‘torn down’ the Whitlam Government (Page, 2003:163), the extent to which his newspapers helped to determine voter intention is, of course, a matter of debate (as will be explored elsewhere in this thesis, media bias and media effects are not simple products of a causal relationship). What is clear, however, is that many journalists at The Australian went on strike in protest against the editorial interference coming directly from Murdoch. At the subsequent federal election on 13 December 1975, Whitlam and Labor suffered a large electoral defeat amidst allegations of anti-Whitlam media bias and a CIA-backed ‘dirty tricks’ campaign (see Shawcross, 1993:168-173). After losing the election, Whitlam launched legal proceedings against News Limited, seeking to sue Murdoch for his
newspapers’ detrimental coverage, but eventually reached an out-of-court settlement. Regardless of any financial restitution, this episode in Australian politics had demonstrated that Murdoch was capable of participating in both king-making and king-deposing.

Although opposing the Whitlam Government in 1975 satisfied Murdoch’s ideological impulses, it was not a profitable business strategy. After the election, *The Australian* went into a decade-long period of decline as readers deserted his flagship newspaper in favour of more ‘reputable’ news sources (Shawcross, 1993). However, as *The Australian* readership figures fell, Murdoch’s tabloids continued to reap healthy profits, providing the necessary capital to further his expansionist ambitions. Murdoch has, of course, employed a number of different, often risky, business strategies, yet his central entrepreneurial formula, responsible for much of News Corporation’s early wealth and rapid expansion, involved the purchase of ‘underperforming’ newspapers that were revamped with ‘sex, scandal and sensationalism’ (see Pasadeos and Renfro, 1997). Although perhaps the greatest ‘success story’ from this strategy was the stark circulation and profit increases of *The Sun*, this technique was also employed to rejuvenate America’s oldest continuously published daily, the *New York Post*, after Murdoch purchased the struggling tabloid in 1976 (see in particular Mahler, 2005). Murdoch did not employ this tactic in a universal sense, as such a business formula would have been detrimental to the ‘serious’ reputation of a broadsheet newspaper such as *The Australian* (and, later, *The Times*). Yet it was, nevertheless, a distinguishing feature of the corporation’s tabloid newspapers in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States,
and has given rise to ‘memorable headlines’ such as ‘Uncle Tortures Tots with Hot Fork’ and ‘Nude Principal Dead in Motel’ (Pasadeos and Renfro, 1997:34).

In the United Kingdom of the 1970s, Murdoch’s tabloid strategy led to him being dubbed the ‘Dirty Digger’ by elements of the British media (Chenoweth, 2001:32); a pejorative label that would further entrench his hostility to what he regarded as a snobbish and hypocritical English class system. As an energetic embodiment of Max Weber’s (2001) ‘spirit of capitalism’, Murdoch was by the mid-to-late 1970s showing hostility towards ‘privilege’ in all its forms, or what he regarded as ‘undeserved wealth’. As a champion of the meritocracy — albeit, one with inherited wealth and prestige — Murdoch’s disapproval was not solely reserved for the aristocrats of the United Kingdom. It was equally directed towards those that he saw as the undeserving beneficiaries of the welfare state. Indeed, by the latter half of the 1970s, Murdoch wholeheartedly embraced the tenets of neo-liberalism, with The Australian becoming an agenda-setting champion of this socio-economic ideology (McKnight, 2003). During this period, Murdoch also demonstrated that he would continue to use his news media to support politicians with which he shared similar socio-political beliefs, with his newly acquired New York Post strongly supporting Edward Koch in the 1977 mayoral race for New York City (the key motivator here was Koch’s promise to Murdoch that he would fight the power of labour unions if he was elected — see Cassidy, 2006). Similarly, when in the United Kingdom, Murdoch became increasingly frustrated by what he regarded as a stagnating British

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13 According to Jonathan Mahler (2005:7): ‘[Edward] Koch stood out easily as the most conservative [mayoral candidate]. He was the best Murdoch could do. The Post, Murdoch told Koch, was going to endorse him; the paper actually did much more than that, running editorial on its front page and generating so much pro-Koch copy in the ensuing weeks that more than 50 Post reporters and editors signed a petition complaining about their tabloid’s biased coverage. Murdoch invited them to quit; twelve did’.
economy (plagued by inflation), allegedly due to the inefficiencies of ‘big government’ and the power of trade unions — which in his UK operations were extracting large financial settlements that significantly reduced his profit margins (Shawcross, 1993:210). He was, however, soon to identify a close ideological ally, when in May 1979 Margaret Thatcher (who would come to be known as the ‘Iron Lady’) was elected prime minister and the person to lead Britain’s dawning neo-liberal (or ‘Thatcherite’) transformation.

As Timothy Marjoribanks (2000a:28) has documented, after the electoral victory of Thatcher’s Conservative Party, Britain underwent a neo-liberal policy transformation. At the heart of ‘Thatcherism’ was the neo-liberal assertion that ‘the individual must be able to operate without constraint in the free market’ (Marjoribanks, 2000a:23), without the interference of the state or labour unions (both of which were seen as artificial inhibitors of the ‘entrepreneurial spirit’). The implications of this philosophy were that the state should abandon the regulation of the affairs of business, while ‘rolling back’ the functions of the welfare state and the industrial powers of the labour unions. In theory, such reforms would ‘motivate’ the individual to exercise their creative potential and ‘entrepreneurial abilities’ (Wedderburn, cited in Marjoribanks, 2000a:28). To this end, the 1980s saw Thatcher identify the unions as a primary cause of Britain’s economic and social problems, with the ‘Iron Lady’ enacting policies intended to reduce their influence and political power (Marjoribanks, 2000a:31)

Having found an ideological ally in Thatcher, Murdoch’s mass-circulation Sun shifted from its traditional Left-leaning stance towards the conservatives. Murdoch’s support
would be rewarded in 1981, when Prime Minister Thatcher allegedly helped Murdoch to secure the ‘establishment newspapers’ *The Times* and the *Sunday Times* (for which Murdoch paid a mere £12 million) by not having his takeovers referred to the Monopolies Commission (Shawcross, 1993:232). It is during this period of the early 1980s that *News Corporation* begins to emerge as a transnational information network for the cross-pollination of ideas between Australia, Britain and the United States (McKnight, 2003; 2009). For instance, having aligned himself with the ‘Republican revival’ in the United States14, Murdoch’s UK newspapers carried contributions by influential American conservatives such as those by neo-liberal economist, and *Sunday Times* columnist, Irwin Stelzer — who was once described as Murdoch’s personal emissary to the British political establishment (Cassidy, 2006:68). As David McKnight (2003; 2009) has documented, it is under Murdoch’s direction that *The Sun*, *The Times* and the *Sunday Times* became strong supporters of Thatcherism, thereby helping to normalise neo-liberal ideas for the British context. Murdoch biographer William Shawcross (1993:210) pithily describes this relationship:

Throughout the 1980s, Murdoch and Thatcher had a symbiotic relationship in which the one consistently and almost constantly encouraged and reinforced the other. The Thatcherite revolution and the Murdoch revolution strode hand in hand across the decade.

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14 In 1981, at a dinner honouring Murdoch’s ‘work on behalf of Ronald Reagan’s election to his first term [as President of the United States], Representative Jack Kemp, a Buffalo Republican, said, “Rupert used the editorial page and every other page necessary to elect Ronald Reagan President”’ (Jones, 1984:4). The Murdoch press is reported to have stayed supportive of the Reagan administration throughout the 1980s. Indeed, Andrew Neil (1996:172), the former editor of the *Sunday Times*, remarked in his memoirs that: ‘There were occasions when the *Sunday Times* reflected very little of what its owner thought; but it did so enough of the time for us not to fall out. I was able regularly to criticize Margaret Thatcher, even though he adored her. Criticizing Ronald Reagan was a more risky business: Reagan was Rupert’s first love’.

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The strength and spirit of this relationship is perhaps most clearly discernible in Murdoch’s dispute with the British print unions in 1986. As Marjoribanks (2000a; 2000b) notes, ‘the Wapping dispute’ effectively broke the negotiating power of the British print unions, with Murdoch’s UK subsidiary, News International, dismissing nearly 5500 employees after moving the company’s newspaper production operations to a new, computerised facility, purpose-built at Wapping (which was developed in secret away from the traditional home of the British press — Fleet Street). Britain’s Conservative government played an important role in the outcome of the dispute, having strengthened common laws that greatly restricted the powers of unions to establish pickets and secondary boycotts (Marjoribanks, 2000b:578-579). Indeed, Prime Minister Thatcher was reported to be ‘delighted’ with Murdoch’s organisational restructure, viewing the Wapping conflict ‘as an all-out offensive in the Third Industrial Revolution … [which would] cut union power in the interest of liberating more competitive technologies’ (Shawcross, 1993:345-353). Murdoch’s eventual triumph over the unions at the ‘battle for Wapping’ — which at its height was characterised by violent clashes between thousands of striking workers and police — forever changed the modus operandi of the British press, with other newspapers ‘downsizing’ their workforces and adopting similar production reforms (Marjoribanks, 2000b). According to William Shawcross (1993:357-358), Murdoch could proudly claim that he had ‘liberated all of Fleet Street’ from the union ‘noose’: the ‘profits that derived from [his victory at Wapping] would flow like blood through the arteries of [News Corporation]’.
As the 1980s progressed, Murdoch’s attention fluctuated between Britain, Australia and the United States, as he perpetually searched for the next opportunity for corporate expansion. Although his strategies were not always successful, he did succeed in adding first the *Boston Herald* (part of *News Corporation* from 1982-1994) and then the *Chicago Sun-Times* (1983 to 1986) to his growing subsidiary, News America Publishing. Yet perhaps Murdoch’s most notable purchase of the mid-1980s — a transaction that would eventually elevate him to the distinction of being the most powerful media mogul in the United States — was his takeover of the film studios of Twentieth Century Fox and, shortly thereafter, the television stations belonging to businessman John Kluge and Metromedia (see Chenoweth, 2001; Kimmel, 2004). Forging a powerful broadcasting synergy by combining content-producing facilities with a delivery system, Murdoch did the seemingly impossible by establishing a fourth US television network: Fox. In doing so, he sidestepped the United States’ foreign ownership restrictions — by becoming an American citizen — and managed to convince the US Federal Communications Commission that he deserved a waiver *vis-à-vis* cross-media ownership laws (so that he could continue to own both the *New York Post* and the *Boston Herald*\(^\text{15}\)).

The following year (late 1986), in an attempt to free *News Corporation* from its growing problems with debt, Murdoch launched a takeover bid for Australia’s Herald and Weekly

\(^{15}\)This complicated series of business transactions did not, however, unfold quite as Murdoch had hoped. In 1987, high profile Democrat Senator for Massachusetts, Edward Kennedy, ‘engineered a legislative manoeuvre’ that forced a ‘furious Murdoch’ to sell his ‘beloved’ *New York Post* in order to comply with market specific rules regarding cross-media ownership (see Becker, 2007). This was widely seen as a case of regulatory revenge for the manner in which Murdoch’s newspapers portrayed the liberal politician — the *Boston Herald*, for instance, often referred to Kennedy as ‘fat boy’ (Becker, 2007:5, 9). Although Murdoch would later be granted regulatory permission to buy back the struggling *Post*, and would forge a reasonably amicable relationship with ‘Ted’ Kennedy, this episode undoubtedly forced him to reconsider the potential hazards posed by being overtly partisan.
Times group. In what was one of the most successful series of corporate manoeuvres of his career, Murdoch secured not only the Herald and Weekly Times, the company his father had helped to build, but in 1987 he also acquired the Adelaide *Advertiser* and regained family control (via ‘Cruden Investments’) of Queensland Newspapers (Shawcross, 1993:366-368). According to Murdoch biographer Neil Chenoweth (2001:66), after the takeovers made possible by the Hawke/Keating media reforms:

Murdoch would end up with 70 per cent of Australia’s newspapers, but the thing to remember is that this was not a media play. It was Murdoch’s grand revenge on Sir Keith’s company. But even more than this, the financial heart of the deal was a debt restructuring exercise. Murdoch had taken over a country’s media industry to help his gearing levels.

Murdoch’s mid-1980s business deals in the US and Australia did, then, force *News Corporation* to undertake a brief period of debt consolidation, with Murdoch selling his Australian television and radio stations in February 1987 for AUS$820 million¹⁶ (see Shawcross, 1993:368). While the economic downturn of 1987 further contributed to *News Corporation*’s burgeoning debt, in late 1987 Murdoch managed, nonetheless, to find the resources to buy Hong Kong’s most profitable daily newspaper, the English-language *South China Morning Post* (thereby signalling his renewed interest in Asian markets — Dover, 2008:6). Furthermore, despite his mounting debt, Murdoch continued

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¹⁶ Murdoch was, in fact, forced to divest himself of his Australian television and radio interests in order to comply with the new Hawke/Keating media laws regarding cross-media ownership, as well as older regulations regarding the ownership of protected assets by foreign nationals (Murdoch was, by now, a US citizen).
to seek to diversify his company in order to profit from new technologies and media structures. His next major venture was the launch of the Sky Television satellite service in February 1989. The establishment of Sky Television is reported to be one of Murdoch’s ‘proudest’ achievements, a venture that he described as ‘busting the broadcasting cartel’ maintained by the BBC and Britain’s so-called ‘aristocratic’ cultural establishment (Shawcross, 1993:511-512).

With the technological development of Direct Broadcast Satellites (DBS), Murdoch identified satellite television as the most important media of the dawning Information Age. Determined to establish DBS television services in the UK, in 1986 Murdoch lodged an application for a broadcasting licence with the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA). Yet, when the IBA overlooked News Corporation’s application and, instead, awarded a broadcasting licence to the telecommunications consortium British Satellite Broadcasting, Murdoch decided to raise the necessary capital to launch his own independent service on ‘Astra’, a pan-European satellite operated from Luxembourg. In doing so, Murdoch ‘sidestep’ the regulatory authority of the British government, and placed Sky’s programming — which would include the newly established Sky News channel — into direct competition with that from British Satellite Broadcasting. The ensuing ‘battle for market supremacy’ nearly sent both corporations bankrupt, with News Corporation narrowly avoiding financial ruin in late 1990 (Shawcross, 1993). Indeed, News Corporation’s dire financial situation in 1991 — which was, in fact, due to the coalescing of company-wide debt problems and a poor global economic climate — forced Murdoch to negotiate a merger between his satellite services and those of his
rivals at British Satellite Broadcasting (see Shawcross, 1993). Although Murdoch was forced to the negotiating table, the terms of the merger clearly favoured *News Corporation* (reflecting the company’s market successes over those of its rival). Indeed, Murdoch gained control of the resulting television entity, BSkyB, and viewed this ‘victory’ as being more significant than his ‘accomplishments’ at Wapping (Shawcross, 1993:510). Given time, his assessment of his ‘victory’ would be proven correct, as the merger ‘would eventually provide the basis for one of the most profitable broadcasting operations in the world’ (Dover, 2008:6-7; see also Young, 2009).

Staving off the now growing demands of his creditors, Murdoch continued to restlessly and relentlessly drive the expansion of *News Corporation* through into the 1990s. Like an ever-evolving organism, new divisions and operations were added to the company’s increasingly global information network, as *News Corporation* penetrated new commercial frontiers in Europe, Asia and South America (with the company now largely developing the structure explored earlier in this chapter). Murdoch’s formula of ‘sex and sensationalism’ was to prove of relevance beyond his tabloids, becoming a key ingredient in the success of the entertainment programmes on his new Fox Network (Kimmel, 2004), and would also help to drive the uptake of STAR television, after Murdoch’s takeover of the Asian-based satellite broadcaster in 1993 (Dover, 2008). During this period, sport also became increasingly important, as Murdoch used ‘fan loyalty’ and the siphoning of premium sport content from free-to-air television to drive the uptake of his expanding pay TV services (see Andrews, 2003; McKay and Rowe, 1997; Rowe, 2000; Scherer, Falcous and Jackson, 2008). As the 1990s progressed, the ageing Murdoch
continued to demonstrate his irrepressible energy. Indeed, rather than slowing down, he
seemed as vigorous as ever, taking Wendi Deng as his new wife (his third) in June 1999,
and shortly thereafter adding two more children to the Murdoch family (bringing the total
number of his direct descendents to six).

Murdoch also continued to demonstrate that he was interested in far more than
commerce. As will be discussed in much more depth in Chapter 4, Murdoch’s interest in
US politics would see him align with the intellectual mandarins known as the
neoconservatives (who had developed a radical new form of conservative politics),
foundling, in support of their political agenda, a loss-incurring (yet influential) magazine,
the *Weekly Standard*. This new publication would complement the neoconservative
position of the *New York Post*, who under the editorial influence of Eric Breindel continued to identify and support conservative causes and politicians, playing an
important, yet largely unreported role in the election of Rudolph Giuliani (Mayor of New
partisan (anti-President Bill Clinton/anti-Democrat) 24-hour cable news channel, Fox
News, installing a former adviser to the Republican Party, Roger Ailes, at its helm. As
will be discussed later, the combative and sensationalistic style of ‘journalism’ at Fox
News would insure its success in the ratings system, thereby influencing other US news

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17 As is documented by Craig Horowitz (1999), Eric Breindel was appointed to the *New York Post* in 1986,
thanks to the lobbying of his friend, and Murdoch confidant, Norman Podhoretz (a neoconservative
ideologue and public intellectual whose articles were widely disseminated across the US by Murdoch’s
News America Syndicate; which was sold to the Hearst Corporation in December 1986). After Eric
Breindel died in 1998, Murdoch established the Eric Breindel Journalism Awards, which provides an
annual prize of SUS10,000 for excellence in the field of opinion journalism (Horowitz, 1999). To date the
recipients of this award have all been conservative commentators, such as Jeff Jacoby (1999), Tom
Henninger (2004), Claudia Rosett (2005), Mark Steyn (2006), Max Boot (2007), Bret Stephens (2008), and
Charles Kruthammer (2009).
programmes and networks to adopt a similar style and tone (a phenomenon that has been dubbed the ‘Fox Effect’ — see Greenwald, 2004).

Elsewhere in the world, Murdoch’s support for Centre-Left political parties seemingly contradicted his ‘radical conservative’ political views, suggesting a type of political pragmatism. For instance, in the United Kingdom, after Margaret Thatcher was ejected by the Tories and exited politics, Murdoch eventually decided to back New Labour (a move that historically has much in common with his decision to back Gough Whitlam after a long period of conservative rule). At the time, Murdoch was reported to be unimpressed with Thatcher’s political heir, John Major (Prime Minister from 1990-1997), whose macro-economic policies and cross-media ownership laws he regarded as having hindered News Corporation’s expansion in the United Kingdom (The Guardian, 27 September, 1995:6). In contrast, Tony Blair, after having first met with Murdoch in September 1994, was viewed as a ‘refreshing change’ who would see that Britain’s cross-media ownership laws would not be so ‘onerous’ under a Labour government (Cassidy, 2006:68). Andrew Neil, former editor of the Sunday Times under Murdoch from 1983-1994, once remarked: ‘Blair’s attitude was quite clear. If the Murdoch press gave [Blair’s New Labour] a fair hearing, it would be left intact’ (Becker, 2007:1).

In 1995, their relationship was further cemented when Blair ‘travelled nine thousands miles’ to give a keynote speech at a News Corporation retreat on Hayman Island, Australia (Cassidy, 2006:68). Here, Blair is reported to have described Murdoch as a ‘radical modernizer’, as Margaret Thatcher’s ‘natural heir’ (Cassidy, 2006:68). Such
words impressed Murdoch, who informed his employees that he had found his new Prime Ministerial candidate (see Campbell, 2007). Consequently, The Sun and the News of the World swung behind New Labour in the 1997 election, championing the rise of Blair’s Labour government (The Times and the Sunday Times continued with their endorsement of the Tories). After the election, the front page of The Sun would assert ‘It’s The Sun Wot Won It’ (as it had previously proclaimed for John Major). Murdoch relationship with Blair was to continue throughout the 1990s and into the new millennium, with the CEO of News Corporation becoming a ‘frequent visitor to Downing Street’ (Cassidy, 2006; The Guardian, 19 July 2007; Campbell, 2007). Indeed, before he exited politics in June 2007, Prime Minister Tony Bair addressed a second News Corporation conference in 2006, where he stated: ‘[Rupert], when I first met you, I wasn’t sure I liked you, but I feared you. Now that my days of fighting elections are over, I don’t actually fear you, but I do like you’ (Cassidy, 2006).

In Asia, Murdoch’s expanding business interests led to a number of disreputable business decisions in what was seen as an obvious attempt at ‘courting’ China’s communist leadership — who were suspicious of Murdoch’s politics after a speech he gave in 1993 proclaiming that satellite technology would bring about the end of the world’s totalitarian regimes (see Dover, 2008). For instance, in April 1994 Murdoch dumped the BBC news service from his STAR TV satellite network — the ‘Chinese hierarchy had been deeply offended by a BBC documentary on Chairman Mao Zedong, which touched in part on the leader’s rather unusual sexual predilections’ (Dover, 2008:28-29). The following year, Murdoch’s book publishing subsidiary, HarperCollins (which was created by a merger
between ‘Harper & Row’ and ‘William Collins & Sons’ in 1990), found itself the object of considerable criticism for reportedly paying close to $US1 million for the rights of the English language edition of Deng Xiaoping’s (former Paramount Leader of China) biography. Written by his daughter, the book was criticised for being ‘barely literate propaganda’, and labelled a ‘blatant attempt to buy favour in China’ (Dover, 2008:32). Moreover, this was not the only scandal to tarnish the reputation of HarperCollins. For instance, in February 1998, in attempt to avoid offending the Chinese government, Murdoch famously cancelled the memoirs of Chris Patten (last British Governor of Hong Kong, 1992-1997 — see Dover, 2008:141-156)\(^\text{18}\).

Such moves did, of course, further contribute to Murdoch’s international reputation for political expediency, as it was clear that he was willing to compromise his political and social views in order to further News Corporation’s global expansion, particularly in

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\(^{18}\) These incidents are not the only indication that HarperCollins might at times be politicised according to the desires or values of the CEO of News Corporation. For instance, in 1994 newly elected Republican Speaker of the House of Representatives, Newt Gingrich, was offered an advance of $US4.5 million for his book To Renew America (Kurtz, 1995; Margasak, 1995). Following the public controversy that emerged after it was revealed that Murdoch had met with Gingrich to discuss his regulatory problems with the FFC, the prominent Republican forfeited the $4.5 million advance in favour of a more modest sum ($US 1 million, plus some entitlements from future royalties). Murdoch and Gingrich were later cleared by the House Ethics Committee of any conflict of interest — with both parties maintaining that the book deal was never discussed at their meeting on 28 November 1994. However, although Murdoch may have been unaware that his company was paying a significant figure to publish a book by a prominent conservative politician, his personal and widely known political disposition may have directly contributed to its publication. As a senior executive of HarperCollins once remarked: Murdoch is ‘less hands-on than people assume... It’s not done in a direct way where he issues instructions. [Rather,] it’s a bunch of people running around trying to please him’ (Becker, 2007). Such a statement suggests a structural/institutional disposition towards conservative political publications within HarperCollins. A look at some of the more recent political memoirs and manifestos published by HarperCollins lends further weight to this theory; for instance, George W. Bush’s A Charge to Keep (first published in 1999, paid $US 75,000), Republican Senator Trent Lott’s Herding Cats (first published in 2005, paid $250,00), Republican Senator Arlen Specter’s Passion For Truth (first published in 2000, paid $24,506), Republican Senator Kay Bailey Hutchinson’s American Heroines (2005, paid $141,666), Republican Senator Chuck Hagel’s American: The Next Chapter (sum unknown), right-wing member of the US Supreme Court, Clarence Thomas’ My Grandfather’s Son: A Memoir (paid $1 million), Margaret Thatcher’s Statecraft (first published in 2002, paid $5.4 million), John Major’s John Major (published in 1999, sum unknown), and others (for further details see The New York Times, 2007).
Asia’s ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ authoritarian states (such as China and Singapore). However, as the 1990s drew to a close, Murdoch continued to be viewed as a potential ‘king-maker’, particularly in Western democracies where governments are vulnerable to public opinion (especially during an election year), and remained actively involved in US politics. Indeed, at the start of the new millennium — and the decade that would see the rise of the neoconservatives, the events of ‘September 11’, and the subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq — Murdoch was widely viewed as a powerful corporate figure, who in the United States at least (the nation in which he has spent the vast majority of his time since the late 1980s) remained committed to the ideals and agenda of the Republicans/neoconservatives. As Andrew Neil (1996:165) remarked on Murdoch’s ideological proclivities:

Rupert expects his papers to stand broadly for what he believes: a combination of right-wing Republicanism from America mixed with undiluted Thatcherism from Britain stirred with some anti-British Establishment sentiments as befits his colonial heritage. The resulting potage is a radical-right dose of free-market economics, the social agenda of the Christian Moral Majority and hardline conservative views on subjects like drugs, abortion, law and order, and defence.

In describing the politics of his former employer, Neil (1996:164) was not suggesting that Murdoch directly controls every editorial aspect of his vast network of news media. Rather, he argues that Murdoch’s editorial power is generally more subtle, in that he: (1) employs editors (who like Neil) broadly agree with his political beliefs; (2) favours staff,
or ‘courtiers’, who reaffirm his social and economic views; and, (3) makes his political views regularly and widely known to editorial and managerial staff (Neil, 1996:164-166).

In recent years, however, some commentators have questioned whether Murdoch remains committed to the Right of the political spectrum (Becker 2007: Cassidy 2006). For instance, between 1991 and 1997 Murdoch’s companies are reported to have donated $US928,000 in ‘soft money’ to US politicians, ‘with all but $US 75,000’ going to the Republican Party (Silverstein, 1998). Although this trend towards pro-Republican political donations was also present during the early years of the government of George W. Bush, by 2004 Murdoch’s companies were contributing far greater sums to the US Democrats than to their political rivals (see Arsenault and Castells, 2008:498). This shift in financial sponsorship can be explained by Murdoch’s changing relationship with the Clintons and his lack of a personal relationship with then President George W. Bush.

Whereas Murdoch has never been an ‘intimate’ of President Bush (having claimed to have met the former President only once at a state dinner), he has met with Bill and Hillary Clinton on many occasions. Moreover, he hosted a political fundraiser for Hillary Clinton’s Senate election bid, and has contributed to some of former President Clinton’s charities, such as the ‘Clinton Global Initiative’ (see Cassidy, 2006).

For some commentators, Murdoch’s more recent US-based political dealings are an unequivocal indication that he is becoming more liberal. Certainly, his relationship with the Clintons has effected the political stance (although not entirely) of at least some of his

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19 Michael Wolff (2008b), the most recent Murdoch biographer, believes that Wendi Deng Murdoch’s liberal political beliefs have helped to moderate her husband’s radical conservatism.
US media, with the *New York Post* reported as having reversed its once stringent anti-Clinton editorialising — no longer is Bill Clinton referred to as simply ‘the horn-dog in-chief’ (Cassidy, 2006). Likewise, in June 2009, Murdoch signalled that he was no longer as supportive of the neoconservative ideological agenda, selling the once-influential, yet financially unprofitable, *Weekly Standard* to conservative billionaire Philip Anschutz\(^{20}\).

Although Murdoch’s recent financial support for the Democrats raises questions about his current ideological beliefs, his media remain a powerful political force, with a broadly conservative orientation. For instance, despite having promised to maintain the editorial independence of the *Wall Street Journal*, after he purchased it (along with the Dow Jones) from the Bancroft family in 2007, Murdoch has been reported as ignoring this earlier commitment, having effectively sidelined the bureaucratic structure designed to keep his opinions from altering the influential newspaper’s tone and focus (Wolff, 2008b). Likewise, Murdoch has recently stated that he wants his UK-based Sky News service — an increasingly influential 24-hour news channel, with localised versions now in Australia and New Zealand (see Young, 2009) — to become more like his partisan Fox News in order to provide ‘a proper alternative to the [politics] of the BBC’\(^{21}\) (Gibson, 2007).

Such sentiments suggest that Murdoch’s core ideological values have not significantly moderated, with Fox News, under the leadership of Roger Ailes, continuing its partisan

\(^{20}\) Anschutz has instructed the magazine’s editors, William Kristol and Fred Barnes, ‘not to alter the publication’s ideological complexion’ (Arango, 2009).

\(^{21}\) Murdoch also expressed that this change is not likely to happen as ‘nobody at Sky listens to me’. Sky is under the direct control of James Murdoch (Gibson, 2007).
representation of the US Democrats and their policies. Indeed, in reference to Fox News, US President Barack Obama has recently stated, ‘I’ve got one television station that is entirely devoted to attacking my administration’ (Poor, 2009). Furthermore, Murdoch’s newspapers in the UK have indicated that they will no longer support the Labour Party, now led by Prime Minister Gordon Brown, and will return their support to the Tories (see ABC News, 2009). Given Murdoch’s oscillation between politicians and political parties, some of which are seemingly incongruent with his core beliefs, what, then, can be said regarding the politics of News Corporation?

Although it is tempting to dismiss Murdoch as merely another businessman who forges expedient relationships with politicians in order to continue the global growth of his company, to do so ignores a clear biographical/historical pattern that suggests much about the central ideologies of today’s News Corporation. Indeed, based on the known biographical information concerning Murdoch, there are several conclusions that can be made regarding his politics and their potential effects. First, it is clear that Murdoch is not dogmatically beholden to one political party, but is capable of forming relationships with his ideological opponents. Nonetheless, as is widely appreciated by both his editorial staff and politicians, Murdoch has a history of supporting right-wing political parties, and their causes, and is far more likely to give editorial support to a politician who reflects his personal political views. Second, while governments in the United States, Britain and Australia, will come and go, Murdoch has demonstrated remarkable consistency in his ideological beliefs, remaining committed to neo-liberalism and some of the broad principles once associated with the neo-conservatives. This ideological consistency was
made clear in 2008, when Murdoch, who was in Australia to present the Boyer Lectures, gave a series of speeches in which he reiterated his belief in global capitalism to bring about the end of authoritarian regimes (an ‘end of history’ thesis that will be discussed in Chapter 4). Third, regardless of any recent moderation in Murdoch’s ideological leanings, throughout the 1980s, 1990s, and into the new millennium, Murdoch has built a news media empire that has an historical trend towards supporting right-wing ideologies, particularly on the opinion and editorial pages of his newspapers (as is best demonstrated by the above quotation from Andrew Neil). This is perhaps the most important lesson from the biography of Murdoch’s News Corporation. For even if he decided to retire tomorrow, the editorial structure of his new media would take time to alter, thereby insuring that parts of News Corporation remain what Louis Althusser (1971) might label an ‘ideological multi-state apparatus’ for the normalisation of some radically conservative ideas.

**Reflecting on Murdoch’s Power and Effect**

The global ascent of News Corporation has had numerous repercussions. Although concurrent with wider socio-economic forces of market liberalisation and globalisation, News Corporation’s international rise has been seen by some academics as the catalyst for the profound institutional and ideological changes that have been transforming media operations around the world (see, for example, Marjoribanks, 2000b; Sonwalkar, 2002; Thussu, 2007). Indeed, as was noted in the introduction to this thesis, Murdoch has for some scholars come to represent the current *modus operandi* of the mass media, and has been the inspiration for the neologism ‘Murdochization’. Although originating in the
polemics of Murdoch’s numerous critics, researchers such as Daya Thussu (2006; 1998) and Prasun Sonwalkar (2002) have sought to develop and add the term to the working lexicon of the social sciences. In formulating the parameters of the concept, Thussu (1998:7) states:

Murdochization could be characterised by a combination of the following factors: a convergence of global media technologies; a tendency towards a market-driven journalism thriving on circulation and ratings wars; transnationalization of US-inspired media formats, products and discourse; and lastly, an emphasis on infotainment, undermining the role of the media for public information.

For Thussu (1998:7), Murdochization is a process that shifts the dimensions of media power, ‘from the public to privately owned, transnational, multimedia corporations’ that control both content and delivery platforms. Thussu (1998:7) insists that this phenomenon is not solely the work of the CEO of News Corporation, but is a pertinent example of phenomena that can be considered as emblematic of a general process. Consequently, the concept can be considered as embracing ‘all the faceless impersonal media corporations that are part of the same process’ (Thuss, 1998:7). ‘Murdochization’ is, then, a structural trend illustrated best by the content strategies and organisational synergies of News Corporation, but which is transforming many media industries and practices around the world as other national and transnational media companies seek to emulate Murdoch’s entrepreneurial success.
Yet, the term Murdochization should be used with some caution. It is not a formula for understanding the contemporary workings of the mass media, in the sense of straight ‘cause and effect’. If academics are to use the concept, then generalisations regarding the media’s power and effect must be supported by empirical data, while careful attention should be paid to the regulatory and cultural forces at play in different national media sectors. Murdoch’s media have had similar effects in different national contexts (be they due to the shrinking number of distinct media companies or to the imitation of the Murdoch business formula). However, the global nature of News Corporation, and the company’s ability to adapt to local cultural demands, ensures that ‘Murdochization’ does not refer to a collection of hegemonic phenomena, but rather describes the methods and products of different media companies operating in the age of global capitalism. Thus the value of the concept of Murdochization lies not in helping to provide a ‘catch-all’ explanation of the changes that have transformed the global media landscape in recent years, but in highlighting the mass media’s intricate involvement with wider socio-economic forces — such as globalisation and the spread of tenets of neo-liberalism — and their interplay within specific national contexts. It draws attention to the individuals, be they conspicuous media proprietors, such as Murdoch, or the faceless modern media executives, who are partially responsible for the structural transformations that, through the mass media, are shaping culture and social discourses.

As the head of the world’s first truly global media company, Murdoch and his broader social effects are an excellent starting point from which to understand the socio-cultural reverberations of the contemporary media. In particular, Murdoch’s outspoken political
views and his relationships with different politicians highlight the importance of understanding the power of the media and their impact on the public sphere and democratic processes. In subsequent chapters, the question of Murdoch’s political power will be explored in more depth, focussing on his relationship with the neo-conservatives and his role in supporting the 2003 Iraq War. Yet, before it is possible to move to this case study, it is necessary to reconsider and revise the conceptual models often employed in understanding the power of the mass media. Much has been written on the nature and consequences of media power, and yet there is not a commonly agreed upon normative framework through which to map the socio-political effects of contemporary media (due to scope and focus of the different academic disciplines engaged in media studies). It is, then, necessary to review briefly some of the more influential theories pertaining to media power, regardless of their academic origin, in order to establish an analytical framework capable of explaining Murdoch’s effect on the public sphere and democratic government. It is to mapping the dimensions of media power that this thesis now turns.
Chapter 3

Mapping the Dimensions of Media Power
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The mass media serve as a system for communicating messages and symbols to the general populace. It is their function to amuse, entertain, and inform, and to inculcate individuals with the values, beliefs, and codes of behaviour that will integrate them into the institutional structures of the larger society. In a world of concentrated wealth and major conflicts of class interest, to fulfil this role requires systematic propaganda.

Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky


In the developed world, the media are powerful institutional apparatuses of social influence. Media consumption accounts for significant periods of daily existence, with television viewing, in particular, accounting for 36 per cent (or over 20 hours per week) of the ‘average’ Australian’s total leisure time (Flew and Gilmour, 2006:175). Moreover, the modern commercial media are some of the most profitable transnational corporations that capitalism has hitherto produced, with several of the world’s largest companies belonging to the communications sector (Herman and McChesney, 1997). The media’s conspicuous place within society has historically been a cause for considerable concern. Indeed, at various times the ‘culture industries’ have been blamed for many nefarious social effects, including: the growth of secularisation; the spread of political apathy; the rise of violent crime; the ‘dumbing down’ of society; the promotion of sexual promiscuity; and the general ‘power to corrupt and deprave’ (McCullagh, 2002:2). Yet,
more so than the *possible* social and behavioural consequences of media consumption, media power lies more in the areas of political persuasion and ideological indoctrination. As John Street (2001:16) notes, in democracies it is assumed that ‘no one group or set of interests is systematically preferred over another and that the information available to citizens is accurate and impartial’. It is only under these conditions that ‘the principles of political equality and accountability can operate’ (Street, 2001:16). Thus, ‘true’ media power is the ability to represent one’s preferred political party, politician, or cause in a ‘biased’ manner (a working definition that informs this thesis and that is discussed at greater length later in this chapter). The implications of such an act of misrepresentation are clear: the erosion of the public sphere, and thereby the possible thwarting of democratic ideals and processes.

This chapter is concerned with exploring those central theories that are used to account for the media’s political and social ramifications. Rather than presenting an extensive account of all that has been written on the media, this chapter focuses on those concepts that help to conceptualise the power and content of the media in relation to ‘agenda-setting’, or the ‘manufacturing of consent’ (Herman and Chomsky, 1994), *vis-a-vis* the functioning of a cultural enriching and socially beneficial public sphere. Exploring the news media’s role as institutional agents that ‘frame’ and thereby shape socio-cultural interpretations of different events, the following discussion provides a paradigmatic synthesis of several key schools of thought, while seeking to salvage important (and contested) concepts integral to understanding media power and effects (such as the notion of media ‘bias’). This analysis begins at the macro level of social structures, institutions,
and ideology: the socio-cultural ‘structures’ that engender particular socio-political ‘effects’.

**On Discourse, Ideology and Institutions**

Although the idea that the media can ‘manufacture’ particular social effects contains an element of ‘structural determinism’ embedded within its logic, most scholarly accounts of media power have moved beyond simplistic ‘sender-receiver-effects’ communication models (sometimes referred to as ‘hypodermic needle’ models of transmission) to consider more fully the complicated issues posed by ‘ideology’ and ‘interpretation’. Here the concepts of Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault and Stuart Hall have proven particularly valuable and enduring, establishing new approaches to understanding media content that challenge how media researchers engage in the study of the production and consumption of news. Of course, the tension between structure and agency is a key focus point of their respective social theories, all of which force researchers to consider: to what extent do social structures, such as those that comprise the mass media, help to shape the everyday worlds and actions of subjects imbued with agency?

For Foucault (1972[1969]; 1973[1966]; 1980) this question regarding social structures and social effects takes form in ideas regarding ‘discourse’ and ‘discursive practices’. According to Foucault, meaning and, therefore, meaningful action, are only made so within the constitutive abstract space of a ‘discourse’ (a knowledge formation manifest in language that shapes how the physical and social world is interpreted and understood). This argument poses several implications for scholars of the mass media. Journalists, for
example, profess to impart social truths, operating within the context of a professional code that values ‘objectivity’, ‘balanced representations’ and the ‘public interest’. Such a code is, of course, a discourse, which influences the manner by which the substance of ‘news’ (events, objects and things) are represented in the media text (Hobbs, 2008). Other discourses also shape the form that a particular ‘news event’ takes, with the journalist interpreting the ‘truth’ of a news event through contextually defined ‘discursive ways of seeing’ (Hall, 1997; see also Rupar, 2006). Thus media texts are replete with the discourses that surround and define the events being represented, and they are the material/symbolic results of a discursive practice. Accordingly, ‘the journalist’, like the ‘the subject’, is created by discourse and operates within its conceptual parameters (Hobbs, 2008). Furthermore, journalists hold significant discursive power, as the institutional apparatuses of the media are intimately intertwined in the complicated embrace of ‘power and knowledge’. It is, therefore, the discursive practices of the journalist that have the power to ‘make true’ particular ‘regimes of truth’ (or discursive ways of thinking particular to a certain time and place), and that see the journalist participating in the ‘government’ of modern society.

In contrast to Foucault, Bourdieu seeks to overcome the ‘structure versus agency’ debate through his concepts of ‘habitus’ and ‘fields’, which explain how social structures (be they ‘institutions, discourses, fields, or ideologies’) impact upon the everyday practices and actions of the individual (Webb et al., 2002:1). According to Bourdieu (1984[1979]), ‘habitus’ is the meeting point of institutions and social agents, the engendering of behavioural dispositions pertaining to one’s social and cultural context, the intersection of
the ‘socio-cultural order’ and the ‘biological being’ (Calhoun, 2003:293). ‘Fields’, on the other hand, constitute specialised areas of action and practice — such as the fields of politics, religion, or cultural production — and explain the types of behaviour that can occur in particular social settings (Bourdieu, 2005:30-31; see also Benson, 1998; Benson and Neveu, 2005; Couldry, 2003; Couldry, 2007; Grenfell, 2004). Yet, ‘fields’ do not divest the subject of agency, as is the case with structural determinism. Rather, a field’s power structure and values help only to define the acceptable practices within a particular setting. Therefore, the field of cultural production (and thus the subfield of journalism) is contested ground where one’s ‘capital’ is employed in a struggle over the right to interpret a particular news event (Bourdieu, 1991:163-165). For Bourdieu (1991; 1998), this struggle over the ‘right to interpretation’ is an important contest, as the media are imbued with significant ‘symbolic power’: the ability to define the world by creating ways of seeing and thus ways of acting. In other words, the media subfield is, in fact, a continuously shifting institutional arrangement (inhabited and produced by social agents), within the broader ‘field of power’ (comprised by the state and its institutional apparatuses — Bourdieu 2005). Accordingly, the importance of Bourdieu’s work lies in connecting the consequences of ‘symbolic power’ to the media’s relationship with ‘news-defining’ individuals and institutions.

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22 Bourdieu’s notion of capital is central to his notion of fields and, indeed, the concept of the field of power (see also Benson, 1998; Couldry, 2003). ‘Capital’ is, for Bourdieu (1984[1979]), a form of power that individuals employ in the daily ‘struggle’ of social existence. Bourdieu’s writings suggest that the social world is structured and defined by two primary forms of capital, ‘cultural capital’ (namely, knowledge, academic qualifications, popularly approved tastes and values) and ‘economic capital’ (financial wealth or assets that can be readily converted into money).
Whereas both Foucault and Bourdieu offer broad, macro-level concepts for understanding both social structures vis-à-vis media power, Stuart Hall’s (1980; 1981a; 1981b; 1988) approach, although similar, is perhaps more ‘grounded’ in the experiences of the individual, in that he focuses on the relationship between media texts and audiences. Drawing on European semiotic theory and Althusserian interpretations of ideology, Hall (1988; 1997) sees the mass media as powerful institutions for ideological dissemination, constituting a communications system in which hegemonic discourses are forged — in the form of ‘taken for granted’ ideological codes — and by which ‘popular consent’ is ultimately achieved. Such an approach emphasises the socially constructed nature of the ‘news’, while anchoring the ‘polysemic nature’ of media messages within three hypothetical outcomes of interpretation: the decoding of a ‘preferred’, ‘negotiated’ or ‘oppositional’ reading of the text (Hall, 1980). Furthermore, Hall (1981b) highlights the importance of understanding the role played by ‘primary definers’ (individuals who occupy a structurally dominant position in the process of mediation) and ‘secondary definers’ (journalists and other commentators) in interpreting and representing a news event. Accordingly, Hall’s ideas set media researchers the goal of tracing the relationship between media texts and society’s wider discursive formations. The implication of Hall’s research is a focus on the ‘semiotic struggle over meaning’ which, in modern democracies, determines the legitimacy of ‘those who would be king’ (Hall, 1988).

Accordingly, while these three scholars offer differing conceptual tools and approaches to understanding the media, their ideas contain common themes, and ask similar questions regarding ‘media content’ and ‘media effect’. In relation to questions of war, democracy
and the news media, their ideas are the ‘foundation theories’ on which the analysis of this thesis depends, and are familiar to most academics from the field of media studies. In order, then, to understand better how the news media can distort a ‘news event’ to favour a particular ideological agenda, it is necessary to consider the work of more recent scholars. Since the publication of the broader theories of Hall, Foucault and Bourdieu, several works have emerged concerning the media’s power to shape public opinion and ‘set the agenda’ for those who control the institutional apparatuses of the nation-state. The most influential of these books is perhaps Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky’s (1994[1988]) _Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media_; the argument of which is of significant relevance to this thesis.

**The Mass Media and the Manufacturing of Consent**

In their book, Herman and Chomsky (1994:2) propose a ‘propaganda model’ for understanding media representations, arguing that the commercial media in the United States are imbued with the ideologies of the socio-political elite:

A propaganda model focuses on this inequality of wealth and power and its multilevel effects on mass-media interests and choices. It traces the routes by which money and power are able to filter out the news fit to print, marginalize dissent, and allow the government and dominant private interests to get their message across to the public.
The essential conceptual ingredients of this propaganda model are various news ‘filters’ through which the ‘raw material of news’ must pass in order to make it to publication (Herman and Chomsky, 1994:2). The first of these filters, ‘Size, Ownership, and Profit Orientation of the Mass Media’, accounts for the commercial limitations of the media often highlighted by scholars from a political economic theoretical tradition. This filter makes two central contentions: (1) that media monopolies are limiting the diversity of expression; and (2) that commercial ideologies and financial self-interest are engendering a organisational culture of self-censorship vis-à-vis the affairs of the parent corporation or those of significant advertisers (Herman and Chomsky, 1994:3-14). Accordingly, the first filter accounts for issues of oligopoly and monopoly, and pays particular attention to the manner by which the concentration of media ownership limits the diversity of voices present within the media-constituted public sphere (either by direct editorial interference, the establishment of a workplace culture that encourages self-censorship, or by restricting the market entry of new media proprietors — see also Barr, 2000:5-10). Likewise, the second filter, ‘The Advertising License to do Business’, further impacts on the diversity of voices ultimately expressed within the public sphere by militating against the commercial viability of those publications or programmes that fail to conform to the dominant discourses of the nation-state. In other words, in a commercial environment where advertising is central to large and small scale media operations, radical voices that run against ‘commonsensical wisdom’ (or hegemonic ideologies), may be deemed unimportant or, indeed, unprofitable, and will thus largely remain unheard.
The third filter, ‘Sourcing Mass-Media News’, refers to the symbiotic relationship between journalists and news sources, which due to economic rationalisation, and the dramatic rise of ‘public relations’, is impacting on the quality of even the most respected ‘fourth estate’ publications (Herman and Chomsky, 1994:18-25). From this perspective, ‘reciprocity of interest’ and an over-reliance on the ‘official version of events’ (as crafted by a public relations professional) are seen to be undermining important traditions of investigative journalism, such as fact checking, identifying multiple corroborative sources, and research: unprofitable and time consuming tasks incongruent with the economically efficient news room. In contrast, the fourth filter, ‘Flak and the Enforcers’, refers to the negative response provoked by media stories that conflict with the common discourses of the nation-state. More simply, it may also refer to the ‘flak’ resulting from the exposure of some unjust action perpetrated by a government or a corporation: a fourth estate function that might lead to a news company defending its interest in lengthy courtroom battles. ‘Flak’ is, then, pressure that ultimately jeopardises a news organisation’s potential revenue streams.

The fifth and final filter, ‘Anticommunism as a Control Mechanism’, refers to the powerful cold war ideology of the ‘evil communist threat’. Herman and Chomsky (1994:29) argue that:

Communism as the ultimate evil has always been the spectre haunting property owners. … [T]he ongoing conflicts and the well-publicized abuses of Communist states have contributed to elevating opposition to communism to a first principle
of Western ideology and politics. This ideology helps mobilize the populace against an enemy, and because the concept is fuzzy it can be used against anybody advocating policies that threaten property interests or support accommodation with Communist states and radicalism.

The power of this filter lies in preventing the creation of stories that might be considered unpatriotic, in that they conflict with the ideologies of private property and neoliberal capitalism. Although this filter is now outdated, given that the Cold War officially ceased in 1991, the recent and ongoing ‘war on terror’, and the patriotic fever exhibited by many US media organisations after the events of ‘9/11’, and during the subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, raises questions regarding a new ‘ideological filter’. This is one in which the image of the terrorist is invoked in order to manipulate the fears of the electorate, while generating popular support for controversial policies (such as the ‘Bush doctrine’ of pre-emptive military intervention — see, in particular, Allan and Zelizer, 2004; Kellner, 2005).

Collectively these filters, argue Herman and Chomsky (1994:2), ‘fix the premises of discourse and interpretation’ and define what is ultimately considered ‘newsworthy’. Clearly derived from neo-Marxist theory, the propaganda model draws upon the often contentious notion of ‘false consciousness’, implying that journalists are largely unable to see the ideological constraints curtailing their labour. Hence, the propaganda model portrays journalists as labouring under the misapprehension (or what Bourdieu would label the ‘misrecognition’) that they are being true to their impartial professional values
of ‘fairness’, ‘balance’ and, above all, ‘objectivity’, while in fact producing texts that reflect society’s dominant forms of social and political stratification. Herein lies the major flaw of the propaganda model. As it is a strongly structuralist argument, when the propaganda model is employed too rigidly it reduces journalists to a mass of unreflective automata. Furthermore, when only discussed at the macro level of media industries or programmes, the propaganda model does not consider the ‘semiotic qualities’ (or the communicative properties) of the text. Thus, it glosses over important issues regarding the interpretation of the ‘message’ and the contextual position of the audience. As such, the propaganda model is too vulnerable to the charge of structural determinism and is *per se* insufficient for explaining and accounting for all the various features and facets of media power.

Although the propaganda model has its weaknesses, Herman and Chomsky’s book contains several valuable methodological and conceptual insights that should not be forgotten. For instance, their methodological approach involves the comparison of news coverage from different events that contain similar themes (such as a murder committed by communist agents versus the atrocities committed by US-supported allies). Measuring the column inches (or the total space) of different stories, Herman and Chomsky seek to highlight empirically the media’s hypocritical treatment of US foreign policy, arguing that the disproportionate level of coverage can be explained by the ideological filters (in this case, Filter Five: Anti-Communism). Furthermore, they seek to support their quantitative data through exploring the emotive language and tone used in discussing the different stories, identifying the disproportionate use of experts who might be relied upon
to give a ‘suitable’ interpretation of the events in question (an interpretation which foreseeably conforms to the hegemonic ideological dispositions of the United States or discourse regarding war).

Herman and Chomsky’s qualitative and quantitative approach to content analysis has a number of advantages, such as the verification of findings through the cross-checking of data from different research perspectives (a research principle included in the methodological framework of this thesis — see Appendix A andAppendix B). Furthermore, Herman and Chomsky’s (1994:298) central contention that the media serve the interests of the socio-political elite through the ‘selection of topics, the distribution of concerns, the framing of issues, the filtering of information… and by keeping debate within the bounds of acceptable premises’, has merit (and, indeed, empirical validity). Many scholars, including Hall (1988) and others associated with British cultural studies, have come to similar conclusions using different methods. Thus, although the propaganda model is methodologically incomplete and too deterministic in regards to the agency of journalists (and, indeed, that of the audience), its central premise of a media ‘filter’ which ‘frames’ how the public can perceive an event or issue is an enduring contention. Indeed, it is of particular relevance during a time of political or social crisis (such as in war or the aftermath of a terrorist attack) when a government might seek to manipulate information to suit its political agenda (ideas discussed in greater depth in the next chapter).

While Herman and Chomsky use the word ‘frame’ to describe the ideological distortion of the news, they do not, however, adequately define or operationalise what they mean by
this term. This is a further shortcoming of their model, as it contains many ambiguities at the textual level, ignoring epistemological questions regarding how one identifies ideological bias. For instance, as is discussed later in this chapter, bias is a contested concept, often dismissed as merely residing in the ‘eye of the beholder’ rather than in the content of the text. By failing to operationalise bias and tie it to broader analytical frameworks that account for ideology (or, indeed, discourse), Herman and Chomsky’s ‘propaganda model’ is unable to account for the full spectrum of textual nuances that construct meaning. Likewise, questions regarding the audience’s interpretation of ‘the message’, or the presence of oppositional discourses, are largely ignored or inadequately explored. In order, then, to fully extend the interpretative power of the political economic model to the textual level, it is important to remove any conceptual ambiguities regarding the textual manifestation of ideology. In other words, it is necessary to define concepts such as the media ‘frame’ or ‘framework’, in order to understand better the manner by which certain messages/meanings are encoded and decoded at the expense of other, potentially oppositional, readings.

Towards the Operationalisation of ‘Framing’

The development of a more sophisticated account of framing (and, indeed, of media power) necessitates a brief sociological/social psychological redirection towards the work of Erving Goffman. Although Goffman was not the first to propose the concept of ‘a frame’ (see Goffman, 1974:7), he was perhaps the first researcher to layout a detailed definition of the term in relation to ‘frame analysis’, which he believed could be used to explain much of the behaviour of the social world. Goffman is not a sociologist often
called upon by scholars from the field of media and communications. Indeed, his use of
the terminology ‘interpretative frames’ (short for interpretative primary frameworks)
does not refer to media texts at all, but rather concerns the situational interactions of
individuals or, more specifically, the socio-psychological methods by which social reality
is interpretatively constituted and acted out by individuals inculcated according to its
rules or ‘guiding frames’ (Goffman, 1974:8). As a researcher who believed in
understanding social structures in the first instance, before studying their effects on social
behaviour (see Goffman, 1974:13), Goffman’s phenomenological approach to
understanding social reality shares a similar intellectual perspective to that of Pierre
Bourdieu, inasmuch as he views social existence as analogous to a ‘grand game of life’,
where individuals struggle for social success. Yet, whereas for Bourdieu, the actions of
individuals can be explained by their doxa, illusio23, habitus and capital (as shaped,
defined and facilitated by society’s social structures and an individual’s physiological
capacities), Goffman employs the concept of a frame as a type of overarching explanation
for the processes whereby individuals of the same social context understand (and act
according to) the rules (or mores) that govern particular situations, interactions and
events.

According to Goffman (1974:8), when ‘individuals attend to any current situation’ they
cognitively ask the same basic question, ‘what is it that’s going on here?’ Thus they draw

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23 ‘Doxa’ and ‘illusio’ are key features of one’s habitus. ‘Illusio’ refers to one’s emotional and cognitive
investment in ‘playing the game’, or abiding by the social rules of a particular field (Benson and Neveu,
2005:3). ‘Doxa’, on the other hand, refers to one’s ‘preconscious’ commonsensical understandings of the
world and the roles that one should play in particular social contexts (Calhoun, 2003:291). One’s doxic
outlook is shaped by biographical experiences. As such, doxa requires a significant level of
‘misrecognition’ regarding power structures and other behaviour shaping forces.
upon their interpretative schemata (or primary frameworks) to process the knowledge required to act appropriately in a particular social situation. As he unequivocally states:

I assume that definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events — at least social ones — and our subjective involvement in them; frame is the word I use to refer to such of these basic elements as I am able to identify. That is my definition of frame. My phrase ‘frame analysis’ is a slogan to refer to the examination in these terms of the organization of experience. (Goffman, 1974:10-11)

Goffman, then, saw frames as the cultural values and rules of a given society, the ‘belief structures’ engendered in individuals through the process of socialisation. Goffman’s ‘primary frameworks’ are conceptually similar to Foucault’s notion of discourses, discursive practices and ‘governmentality’, in that frames give meaning to events, situations and things, thereby guiding social action (Goffman, 1974:27). Indeed, Goffman’s frame analysis is concerned with all facets of social interaction, including its power dimensions, seeking to understand under what circumstances people think certain practices or relations are ‘real’ or authentic (in the sense that actions are made meaningful through the taken-for-granted belief systems, or the interpretative frames, of the individual subject).

Goffman’s concept of ‘primary frameworks’ resembles both Foucault’s notion of governmentality and Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus, in that it bridges the divide from social structures to human behaviour.
Although Goffman’s work is valuable for considering how an audience might employ interpretative schemata (or ‘frameworks’) to understand the details of a mediated event, he sheds no direct light on what constitutes a frame within a media text. Yet, as argued by Ciaran McCullagh (2002:26), the idea of interpretative frameworks is of considerable importance for media sociologists today, and lies at the heart of many socio-cultural critiques of the media’s power and social function. However, whereas there is broad agreement on the importance of the concept to media studies, its precise meaning is ‘elusive’, with definitions differing from study to study (William Gamson cited in McCullagh, 2002:27). This elusiveness is in large part the result of the subtle manner in which frames capture and curtail one’s reading of the text, as they often appear as ‘natural or obvious’ ways of communicating events to the public (both from the perspective of the journalist and that of the reader of the text). Therefore, McCullagh (2002:25) gives a broad definition of the concept, arguing that the media do not simply choose which details are to be included in a particular news story, but also provide ‘perspectives’ on the reported events. Thus, in relation to texts, framing as it has generally been used by media researchers refers to the ‘persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual’ (Gitlin cited in McCullagh, 2002:25).

In reviewing several key works from the framing paradigm, McCullagh (2002) notes its ambiguity, as well as its power to explain textual features and effects, from two distinct research strategies. The first approach is the inductive method, whereby the search for
latent interpretative frames involves the establishment of a set of selection criteria, which the researcher feels (either intuitively or based on the findings of a pilot study) will be of relevance to the particular topic under investigation. Such ‘frame analyses’ often look for critical omissions of factual detail, as well as ideologically loaded words and phrases that structure the frame, and, which in turn, structure the text. Examples of this approach, as first identified by McCullagh (2002:28-34), include studies concerning: the narrative of the West as ‘reluctant bombers’ vis-à-vis the 1999 conflict with Serbia (see Thussu, 2000; Vincent, 2000); the presentation of mental illness and the mentally ill as violent social threats (Glasgow University Media Group, 1996); and the comparison of stories of ‘innocent’ and ‘not so innocent’ civilian casualties (Entman, 1991). In contrast to the inductive method, the deductive approach to frame analysis lists a range of potential frames used by potential audiences in the decoding of a particular story. Examples of this deductive approach include: studies concerning different media representations of the issues posed by AIDS (be they medical frames, morality-infused frames, or critical frames — see Miller et al., 1998); investigations into the ‘narratives’ used to discuss and assess environmental disasters such as oil spills (‘corporate responsibility’, ‘natural disaster’, or ‘criminal negligence’ — Daley and O'Neil, 1991); studies of the different ‘story types’ used by the media in discussing political events like general elections (such as that of the ‘horse race’, characterised by endless coverage regarding which side is ahead in the opinion polls — Patterson, 1994).

As can be seen from McCullagh’s (2002) selection of key works using this approach, framing is a similar concept to several other media research tools, incorporating the ideas
of ‘story types’, ‘narratives’, and ‘discursive formations’ into its analytical logic. Indeed, the major distinction between the aforementioned media studies concepts (‘story types’ and ‘narratives’) is that framing refers to textual features and formations, while simultaneously considering wider ideological codes and their potential interpretation and cognitive impact. Framing is, then, a meta-concept, in that it can be used to refer to the accumulative consequences of narratives (or story types or discourses, for that matter), thus merging closely related scholarly fields of ‘discourse analysis’ and ‘narrative analysis’, while ensuring that these approaches extend beyond textual description to consider textual implications (moving beyond the structures of the text to the actions of the subject). This is not, however, to say that frame analysis is a flawless research technique. It, too, is limited in its scope and (re-)raises several epistemological problems. For instance, if frames are a natural and inevitable feature of news texts, how can researchers talk of ‘bias’ given that, through ‘the framing’ of a particular issue, all texts must communicate some manner of ‘bias’? When this line of thought is taken to its logical extreme, the framing thesis could be charged with promoting ‘a kind of relativism’ in which there is no great difference between news accounts (Philo cited in McCullagh, 2002:35). The meta-concept of framing is, then, not a theoretical panacea for the problem of understanding media power. Indeed, it must be wed to other structural theories if it is to be used as a tool for understanding and evaluating media content.

One media researcher who has endeavoured to overcome the shortcomings of the concept, and who has successfully wed it to a model of ‘agenda setting’ (more flexible than the propaganda model proposed by Herman and Chomsky), is the American political
scientist Robert Entman (see Entman, 1991, 1993, 2004). In particular, Entman’s (2004) book *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy* offers a sophisticated model of media power, one that considers the role of government, and other socio-political elites, in shaping the news media’s focus and content, and the ways in which such powerful institutions (and individuals) are represented to the public. In order to shore up the validity of the concept (which he sees as having been undermined by a lack of terminological standardisation), Entman (2004:26) argues that the verb ‘to frame’ (or ‘framing’) should be reserved for the process of ‘selecting and highlighting some aspects of a perceived reality, and enhancing the salience of an interpretation and evaluation of that reality’. He notes that many academics employ frame as a synonym for concepts such as ‘schema, script and image’ (Entman, 2004:26). For example, in relation to news texts, some researchers have discussed the ‘human interest frame’ or the ‘conflict frame’, when it would be more appropriate to speak of a ‘human interest script’ (Entman, 2004:26). In drawing such distinctions, Entman is not seeking to challenge the work of other researchers who have used ‘framing’ in a different manner than that proposed by his ideal type; rather, he seeks terminological standardisation so that researchers can more readily build on each others’ findings.

Crossing onto new conceptual ground, Entman (2004:6) contends that the term ‘schemas’ (or ‘interpretative schemas’) should be reserved for use in relation to the interpretative/cognitive processes undertaken by the mind in decoding the frame, rather than in reference to textual features. Such ‘schemas’ are for Entman (2004:7), ‘clusters or nodes of connected ideas and feelings stored in memory … [which] neighbour each other
psychologically and perhaps even physiologically, so are likely to be thought of together’. Such psychological schemas are the result of what Entman labels the ‘habitual schemas’ of one’s socio-cultural context (‘habitual schemas’ are, therefore, similar to Bourdieu’s idea of ‘doxa’). Entman (2004:24) argues that habitual schemas are often culturally organised into an ‘overarching paradigm, or meta-schema’ (what Foucault would label a ‘discursive formation’, and a neo-Marxist might label a hegemonic way of seeing). These overarching paradigms are what gives the textual frame its communicative power, and contribute to its ‘cultural resonance’ (as measured and determined by the repetition of images and words that are emotionally charged and connote a particular interpretation).

Indeed, the ‘success’ of a frame (as a communicative tool or as an instrument of propaganda) is dependent on how ‘culturally congruent’ its key messages are with both society’s wider paradigms (or discourses) and those habitual schemas employed by a person in interpreting their social reality. Those frames that are incongruent with dominant schemas, or which are overly complicated in their referential structure, risk passing what Entman (2004:14-15) calls the ‘tipping point’ on the continuum of interpretation, in that they invoke a ‘mental short circuit’ where the reader constructs an alternative interpretation more congruent with their habitual schema (what Hall, 1980, would label an ‘oppositional reading’ of the text). In contrast, those frames that are successfully imparted to the reader facilitate a psychological process of recognition and classification. Entman calls this process ‘spreading activation’, arguing that it takes place
within the confines of one’s mental ‘knowledge networks’ (or the spreading stimulation of mental schemas embedded in one’s long-term memory — see Entman, 2004:7).

While Entman’s definition of ‘framing’ (and related concepts) might seem somewhat removed from understanding media power, his model is integral to comprehending the complicated chain of communication, from news events and social elites, to media texts and their interpretation. Indeed, framing forms only part of what Entman (2004:9) calls his model of ‘cascading activation’ (a concept analogous to that of a waterfall). According to Entman (2004:9), cascading activation is about explaining the manner by which the ‘thoughts and feelings’ that support a particular frame flow down from government, through the rest of the system of mass communication. ‘Cascading activation’ is, thus, concerned with the ‘framing contest’ that takes places between socio-political elites. His model, developed in reference to geo-political context of the United States, consists of five stratified tiers, arranged in a descending order from: (1) ‘the Administration’ (including the White House, the State Department, and the Pentagon); (2) ‘Other Elites’ (including congressional members and their staffers, ex-officials, experts, foreign leaders); (3) ‘Media’ (including journalists and news organisations); (4) ‘News Frames’ (including framing words and framing images); (4) ‘Public’ (including opinion polls, and other indicators of public support or opposition). At each level of the system, the cascade model assumes the existence of personal and professional networks (much like Manuel Castells’ theory of the network society) along which travel the messages and frames in a process of ‘spreading activation’. ‘News’ does, then, cascade down these tiers, which are stratified in order to highlight that those tiers situated higher
up in the system of communication have the greatest ability to interpret and frame an event or issue according to how they ‘see’ the important details of the story.

While Entman’s model emphasises a ‘top down’ process of interpretation, individuals belonging to the ‘lower tiers’ of this system are not without influence. For instance, public opinion and media dissent have the ability to influence the policies and directions of government, particularly in states with a democratic system of government. Entman (2004:3) believes that this agenda-setting power of popular opinion, as quantified and communicated by the media, can be seen in relation to (former) US President George W. Bush’s desire to invade Iraq immediately following the events of 9/11:

The point is not that the media alone compelled the President to adjust his stance [to seek congressional and multinational backing for any conflict] — media choices are rarely if ever sufficient in themselves to alter public policy. Top public officials inside and outside the administration exert more decisive influence over the President. But that influence is conditioned in part by how fully the media cooperate with administrations, as against its opponents. Arguably, had the major news organisations ignored or trivialized the opposition to immediate war against Iraq, the political environment might have remained sufficiently acquiescent for Bush to pursue the original plans.

The implication here is that the media can activate counter frames to a government’s desired interpretation, highlighting the opinions of experts and other socio-political elites
that are ‘incongruent’ with the government’s (public relations) framing. Thus, the cascade model demonstrates its flexibility in accounting for both the public relation strategies employed by governments (motivated by the desire to manufacture popular support), and the conflict played out in parts of the public sphere by intellectuals and politicians who disagree with the government’s framing strategy. As such, Entman’s model takes an important step towards re-visioning the media from a ‘post-postmodern’ theoretical perspective, providing a conceptual schema for the study of both the media-government nexus and the textual manifestations of ideology resulting from the semiotic battle for public opinion.

However, like Herman and Chomsky’s (1994) model, Entman’s ideal type is incomplete (at least in relation to this thesis’ topic of investigation). Although his concepts provide a solid basis on which normative empirical investigation of media frames can proceed, he does not tackle the questions raised by ‘textual relativism’, in that he does not articulate a method for identifying media ‘bias’ vis-à-vis more ‘factual’ journalistic accounts. As such, he provides no way of assessing the validity or truth claims of different frames. Similarly, his model does not account for other ‘small picture’ stories (such as those concerning local crime) that are the ‘bread and butter’ of the tabloid media. The usefulness of Entman’s model lies in highlighting the media’s power to selectively construct interpretations of the world in order to benefit a political cause, party or individual. Yet, if media researchers are to move beyond simply ‘labelling’ media content (as possessing this frame or that frame) to understanding the processes whereby a representation becomes more ‘fictitious’ than ‘factual’, then it is necessary to consider
more epistemologically problematic ideas like ‘bias’. In other words, if researchers are to talk of the accuracy of different news programmes (or the ideological bias of news organisations), then it is necessary to salvage a working definition of ‘bias’, a concept which, like framing, has also been undermined through a proliferation of commonsensical usages.

**Salvaging the Concept of Bias**

As was suggested earlier, bias, much like the related concept of ‘truth’, is a contested term (Zaman, 2004:93; Rorty, 1998; Rorty and Engel, 2007), one that is often dismissed for being merely a matter of perspective; with one person’s critical journalism being another’s blatant propaganda. Yet, despite its controversial inclusion in the working lexicon of media inquiry, ‘bias’ occupies a conspicuous place in media research, and is of interest to media academics, journalists and politicians. To draw on a recent and prominent example, since the start of 2003 Iraq War the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation* (the ABC) has on several occasions been the subject of criticism by ministers within the former Howard Government (up until their electoral defeat in November 2007), as well as by right-wing media pundits, with the public broadcaster characterised as possessing an endemic ‘left-wing/anti-American’ bias (claims that have remained unsubstantiated — see Turner, 2005:110).

Far from being an isolated example of an incumbent government feeling misrepresented by a news media source, the ABC has often been criticised by governments from both ends of the political spectrum (with the party holding office generally more likely to feel
unjustly represented than the political Opposition), even though numerous inquiries have failed to locate what Graeme Turner (2005:110) calls the ‘chimera of ABC bias’. Of course, the regular return of accusations of bias, not limited to the journalism of the ABC, is unsurprising. As John Street (2001:15) notes, throughout the world, from South Africa to Russia, the topic of political bias is ‘guaranteed to ignite the anger of politicians and their media advisors’, and is seemingly the most emotive and important topic vis-à-vis politics and the mass media. Passions are unavoidably stirred given the implicit assumption that bias, or more specifically its media effects, will thwart democratic processes by misinforming citizens should misrepresentations be disseminated as putative ‘truth’ (Starkey, 2007; Street, 2001).

To label a media representation as ‘biased’ is, then, to question its validity, a challenge commonly based on the perceived failures of journalists to be ‘truthful’, ‘impartial’, ‘objective’ or ‘balanced’ (Street, 2001:17). Such a challenge is anchored in the traditions and codes of conduct associated with the profession of journalism, with journalists having self-consciously taken it upon themselves to observe certain (professional) values (see Allan, 2001; McKnight, 2001). These ethics of neutral or value-free journalism date back to the late 19th and early 20th century, where in nations such as Australia, Britain and the United States the operators of the new international telecommunications service, the telegraph, demanded the removal of superfluous adjectives from news stories, so as not to waste precious minutes with unnecessary (often partisan) description (Allan, 2001; see also Boyce, Curran and Wingate, 1978; Mayer, 1964; Schudson, 1978). Thus, the early twentieth century saw a spreading cultural desire for news which provided ‘just the
facts’; a desire that received a dramatic boost in the years immediately following the propaganda campaigns of the First World War (Allan, 2001; McKnight, 2001). Popular disillusionment with official sources of information and a desire ‘for just the facts’ led to more ‘objective’ forms of journalism, with the practice becoming synonymous with the press’s self-appointed role as guardians of the ‘public interest’ (Allan, 2001:24). Even though this break with the ‘interpretative’ style of journalism was neither total nor permanent, values of impartiality had come to reside at the heart of the profession (McKnight, 2001). As such, contemporary journalism, through a vernacular of interpretative reporting, aims to animate the ‘facts’, while maintaining the separation of ‘news’ and ‘opinion’ (McKnight, 2001; Rupar, 2006).

Although the serious news media continue to aim at maintaining the difference between ‘opinion’ and ‘news’ through structural arrangement of the text and the use of denotative headings, reporting ‘just the facts’ remains a more problematic proposition. Indeed, in a literal sense it is impossible to report ‘just the facts’ since subjective interpretations inevitably decide which ‘facts’ (or how many ‘facts’) are to be included in a text. Furthermore, the notion of an independent reality that can be impartially captured and reproduced within a text is, in itself, problematic. ‘News events’, while based on occurrences in the physical world, can only be understood through the interpretative framework of a journalist, ‘which creates order out of an infinite number of possible observations and impressions’ (Street, 2001:31). Indeed, to a certain extent the socio-cultural values and interpretations, of both the journalist and the reader, schematically ‘create events’, imbuing observations with meaning. This is not to adopt a
philosophically idealist argument, such as the postmodern variant argued by the late Jean Baudrillard\textsuperscript{25}, where the plurality of textual meanings destroys reality (see, in particular, Baudrillard 1983; 1988; 1990; 1996; 2003). It is, rather, to return to Stuart Hall’s (1981b) more modest epistemological point regarding the socially constructed nature of the news. That is to say, before an event can become a communicative event it must first be interpreted by a journalist (and other news definers) before then being encoded and animated as a story.

Accordingly, the creation of ‘news’ is defined by socio-cultural evaluations of events and the modern conventions of ‘story telling’ (the sequencing of details in order to create a narrative, which in turn contributes to how the details of the event are framed). Far from being a simple representation of the ‘facts’, journalism from this perspective is a creative cultural process, with the nature of the communicated images dependent on the subjective (discursive) outlook of the journalist and the interpretative schema of the reader. Further problematising the already problematic, this critique of the socio-cultural production and interpretation of news suggests that partial representations of events or issues (commonly denounced as evidence of bias) may, in fact, be the result of the creative processes of newsgathering and the production of journalism (in other words, no partisan editors or proprietors need be assumed — see Rupar, 2006). The implication here is that ‘bias is in

\textsuperscript{25} Although Baudrillard’s work on ‘simulation’, ‘simulacra’ and ‘hyper-reality’ is valuable in that it highlights the tenuous relationship between media texts and the representation of reality, his arguments are insufficient for the analysis of the contemporary news media. As Douglas Kellner (2003:31) notes, beyond the level of media spectacle, Baudrillard does not help readers understand events such as the Gulf War, because he reduces the actions of actors and complex political issues to categories of ‘simulation’ and ‘hyper-reality’, thereby ‘erasing their concrete determinants’. While Kellner (2003:32) believes that Baudrillard’s pre-1990s work on the consumer society and the political economy of the sign is useful (and can be deployed within critical social theory), he prefers to read Baudrillard’s later, more controversial and obscure writings as ‘science fiction which anticipates the future by exaggerating present tendencies’ (see also Hobbs, 2007b; Kellner, 1989).
the eye of the beholder’: an argument not without merit, born from the ‘gulf between ontology (which concerns the nature of existence), and epistemology (the nature of knowledge)’ (see Starkey, 2007:3). Indeed, as was mentioned earlier, audience studies have demonstrated that individuals can decode different meanings from the one text, so creating interpretations that contrast with those made by the researcher and each other (see Stevenson, 2004:30).

This epistemological and ontological clash, which at its heart is concerned with the multivocal aspects of the sign, has been used to critique notable works on media bias — such as the Glasgow University Media Group’s ‘Bad News’ studies (see Beharrell et al., 1976, 1980) — which seemingly are premised on an unequivocal reality to which the truth of media texts can be held to account (see the discussion in Stevenson, 2004:28-32). Yet, although the production of news is both a social and interpretative process, such an argument does not necessarily undermine empirical inquiries seeking to expose biased interpretations of the world. Rather, theoretical schemas that expose the social and linguistic processes involved in the mental construction of news can wrestle with questions of bias, provided that concepts such as objectivity and balance have been operationalised and applied in the assessment of media texts. Furthermore, although an audience might fail to perceive a textual flaw (such as factual misrepresentation), this does not mean that an editor or a journalist has not deliberately tried to distort the ‘truth’ (see Stevenson, 2004:30). Accordingly, accounts of the social production and interpretation of the news retaining the notion of bias are capable of critiquing the ideological structure of the news text, while leaving room for both differing
interpretations of the audience and the multi-vocal (or ‘polysemic’) properties of the sign (see Appendix B). In other words, bias is still a useful and important analytical tool provided that the concept has been appropriately defined and employed.

One scholar who has attempted to establish an operational definition of ‘bias’, or rather biases, is Denis McQuail (1985; 1992). In essence, McQuail (1992) has identified four types of media bias, operating on a two dimensional matrix (see Table 1 below for a summary). The first dimensional classification of bias is concerned with the explicitness of the representation, whether it is overt or hidden. The second concerns the intentions behind the bias, whether it is deliberate encoding or merely the ‘product of an ingrained unconscious process’ (Street, 2001:20). The first type of bias operating within this matrix is ‘Partisan Bias’, which McQuail defines as both explicit and deliberate (and is thus relatively easy to identify), and which often takes the form of editorial comment endorsing a political cause or party. The second type, ‘Propaganda Bias’, takes the form of stories which covertly, but also deliberately, ‘make the case for a particular party or policy or point or view’ (Street, 2001:21-22). History is filled with examples of this more pernicious type of bias, which is found in racist texts attempting to fuel prejudice or general discontent (such as that characterising the propaganda of the Third Reich). The third type, ‘Unwitting Bias’, although explicit, is the result of unconscious news-producing practices and their associated ‘news values’ (the working assumptions of journalists regarding ‘newsworthiness’ — see Hall, 1981b:149). Rather than a deliberate attempt to distort ‘truth’, ‘Unwitting Bias’ is manifest in the inevitable judgements made by journalists and editors who are forced through practical restraints (be they temporal,
physical or fiscal) to decide not only what is ‘newsworthy’, but also the depth in which a particular topic should be explored. McQuail’s category here is clearly drawing on the work of Stuart Hall (1981b:150), who in relation to ‘unwitting bias’ argues that:

It comes through in terms of who is or who is not accorded the status of an accredited witness: in the tone of voice: in set-up of studio confrontations: in the assumptions which underlie the questions asked or not asked: in terms of the analytical concepts which serve informally to link events to causes: in what passes for explanation.

Closely related to ‘Unwitting Bias’ (indeed Hall makes no clear distinction between them), McQuail’s final category, ‘Ideological Bias’, is also unconsciously manifested. Yet, unlike the former category of bias, ‘ideological bias’ is hidden (or latent) rather than explicit. Thus this category of bias includes the hidden assumptions and value judgements held by journalists and other ‘news’ producers, and can only be detected through a close reading of the text. Such values and judgements often appear to reflect a ‘normal’ or commonsensical view of the world — insofar as certain social dimensions and factors are de-contextualised and presented as self-evident truths — so tacitly reinforcing the ideological framework sustaining the socio-political status quo (along the lines of Marxist theories of hegemony). In other words, ‘ideological bias’ assumes a ‘natural’ discursive order; for example, neo-liberalism is the only plausible economic model, suicide bombers are ‘terrorists’ rather than ‘freedom fighters’, and men will always dominate the sports pages.
Table 1 McQuail’s Definitions of Bias

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Bias</th>
<th>Unconscious (unintentional)</th>
<th>Conscious (intentional)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explicit (manifest)</td>
<td>Unwitting</td>
<td>Partisan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implicit (latent)</td>
<td>Ideological</td>
<td>Propaganda</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Drafted from McQuail (1992)

Although McQuail’s classifications suggest that most media texts are biased in one form or another, so clearly undermining claims of the ‘objective’ reporting of the ‘facts’, this is not necessarily a theoretical indictment of the professional values of journalism. For representations of events can still be considered to be fair accounts provided that ‘competing perspectives have been ‘balanced’ in such a way that none of them gain any advantage from the act of mediation taking place’ (Starkey, 2007:xvii). This is not to argue that ‘total balance’ is possible or even desirable. Good journalists, drawing upon their professional values, must decide the important and central voices to include in any story, given space and time constraints, striking a balance between impartiality and the deliberate exclusion of some views that they consider to be marginal, inconsequential or offensive (for example, xenophobic opinions — Starkey, 2007:xviii).

Although in making such an interpretative value judgement there is clearly considerable room for prejudice or human error, balance (much like objectivity) is a professional value conducive to truth, in the sense that it leads to the creation of more truthful
representations devoid of strongly partisan ideological frames (accounts premised on notions of fairness and accuracy). As a value, balance can only exist in a pure sense at a conceptual level (much like a Weberian ideal type — see Weber, 1978:23-26), and is thus something to be aspired to by the working journalist, rather than something readily or easily achieved. Accordingly, balance and bias can be seen as ‘mutually exclusive terms’, with biased news amounting to ‘unbalanced representations’ that fail to meet the professional ideas of journalism (Starkey, 2007:xvi).

This definition of bias, offered by media researcher Guy Starkey, helps to add substance to McQuail’s analytical categories. In the first instance bias should be defined as the absence of balance, where ‘balance’ refers to the relatively equitable inclusion of differing interpretations (see also Starkey, 2007). While this definition is not incontrovertible, the notion of bias being defined as a lack of balance allows media researchers to assess the impartiality of media texts by focussing on empirical features, such as the space or time given to opposing political parties or causes. While such studies must adjust their defining parameters according to each different media event, this is an effective (although imperfect) method for ensuring fair and equitable media coverage, provided that such assessments of balance do not end with measurements of time or space (quantity), but include assessments of the ‘character’ (or quality) of media content (Street, 2001:23). In other words, the assessment of balance relies on quantitative evidence regarding content features and qualitative insights into the layers of meaning brought to the text by journalistic practices and values (such as those stemming from ‘objectivity’ — which for a journalist is both a method and an attitude). By considering
both the textual features and the ideological frames of a text, media researchers can make informed judgements regarding the truthfulness of story.

Therefore, in order to identify bias — regardless of its type or whether it is the result of deliberate or unintentional news creating practices — it is necessary to ask:

1. How much news space was directly provided to the unedited reproduction of different statements by political actors?

2. Were factual details, identified as critical by scholars or other media sources, ignored, trivialised or omitted?

3. Who were the authoritative sources used in explaining this event?

4. What words were used to describe and frame the event, and were some words used more frequently than others?

5. Did the use of certain words or phrases (such as pejorative terms or negative adjectives) undermine the objective tone or overall balance of different news articles?

6. What were the common narratives and myths drawn upon in structuring and framing the story, and were some frames used more frequently?

Although the research findings from such questions are ‘suggestive’ rather than absolute indications of deliberate distortions of the ‘truth’, through engaging with media texts at
both qualitative and quantitative levels media researchers can create tabulated juxtapositions that assess the quality of different news media (see Appendix C for the Content Analysis Coding Guidelines employed in this thesis). Such an approach to textual analysis does, of course, require detailed accounts of the events in question, from reputable sources (such as academic analyses and factual-based journalism), if researchers are to reflect on the truthfulness of the studied media texts. Thus, the next chapter of this thesis provides a detail examination of the invasion of Iraq and its antecedents, so as to assess the factual ‘quality’ of the stories presented by the newspapers that comprise the empirical case study. However, before this thesis can explore issues of bias as they pertain to the Murdoch news media and the 2003 Iraq War, it is necessary to return to the problem of mapping media power. Having defined bias, it is now possible to offer a new model of media power, a synthesis of key works and ideas from the aforementioned literature, one that maps the roles, functions and effects of the mass media as such consequences pertain to Australia and similar democratic societies.

**Re-visioning the Power of the Mass Media**

Based on the above discussion it is possible construct an ideal type of the media role and power, one which moves beyond the structure versus agency divide to consider: (1) the socio-cultural processes involved in the interpretation of the ‘subject’ (be it an event, issue or person); (2) the role played by socio-political elites and other ‘news definers’ in framing the story; (3) the position or perspective of the audience in the decoding of a message communicated via a semiotic chain of signification. Such a model must take into account the political economic dimensions of the business of news production, while
remaining sensitive to the nuances of symbolic power. Furthermore, such a model needs to operate on three ‘planes of reality’ and thus three planes of knowledge: the metaphysical, the hermeneutic, and the phenomenological. Accordingly, the following ideal type, the ‘Triadic Model of Mass Communication’, seeks to offer a new perspective of the media, their role, and their implications for democratic societies.

In essence, the Triadic Model of Mass Communication can be conceptualised as consisting of three primary shapes, a rectangle, a triangle and a circle, each of which corresponds to a different ‘plane of reality’ (and conceptual focus) vis-à-vis the social position and effects of the mass media. The model is essentially designed to track the ‘communication flow’, from the interpretation and animation of real events to their textual manifestation and interpretative impact. The communication flow begins at the top of this model, with the rectangle (see Figure 2.1), before then flowing down into the triangle (Figure 2.2), and finally the circle (Figure 2.3). Although comprised of three primary segments, all of these shapes should be regarded as sitting side-by-side in order to construct a conceptual whole. The first segment, Figure 2.1, is concerned with the object/subject which is the focus of the news story, be it an event, issue, person or any combination of these ‘things’. As the object/subject is at this stage yet to encounter either an individual’s interpretative schema or the cultural institutions of the mass media, it is, therefore, on what can be called the ‘plane of unmediated reality’. It exists only as a metaphysical ‘pure’ event, unadulterated by the socio-cultural and biological processes of cognition, classification and interpretation (much like an event in the realm of pure mathematics or physics, it operates on a higher plane of ‘truth’).
Figure 2.2, however, moves from this metaphysical plane of ‘pure reality’ and ‘truth’ to the everyday world of social structures, political ideologies and agency-imbued individuals. It is here that the communicative system begins the processes that will interpret and ultimately define the ‘message’ (or messages) of the subject/object. Information of the object/subject, in the form of ‘known’ details of the event/issue in question, is represented in Figure 2.2 by the red lines that proceed down through the triangle. As this segment of the triadic model is concerned with the everyday world of people and institutions the triangle can be seen as residing on the plane (or the field\textsuperscript{26}) of the nation-state, and should be divided into three segments, in order to reflect the power structures of the socio-political world. In being interpreted and animated from the plane of unmediated reality, the message enters one (or all) of the segments of the triangle, with stories of national significance heavily influenced by the upper two most segments: the institutional fields occupied by the ‘executive’ and ‘elites’. Following the arguments of Herman and Chomsky, Entman and Bourdieu, the ‘Executive’ segment at the top of the triangle encapsulates those individuals belonging to the primary field of power, to those in control (or in the employ) of the institutional apparatuses of government. Although such individuals are relevant more to the definition of ‘big picture stories’, particularly those of national importance (such as Australia’s decision to join the ‘coalition of the willing’ in the ‘liberation’ of Iraq), than ‘small stories’ regarding, say, local crime, such individuals (be they politicians or bureaucrats) exercise significant power in setting the focus (or the frames) of ‘macro stories’.

\textsuperscript{26} The fields of the triangle can be regarded as a reworking of Pierre Bourdieu’s (2005) concept of a ‘field of power’.
Figure 2.1 Triadic Model of Mass Communication (Part A: Object/Subject)

Object/Subject

Event

Issue

Person

The Plane of Unmediated Reality

Knowledge/Information concerning the Object/Subject

Executive
Government Officials

‘Primary definers’

‘Secondary definers’

Society/the Nation-State

Elites
Academics, public commentators, other relevant professionals (such as police officers or media spokespersons)

Mass Media
Institutions and Journalists

Media Texts: Representations and Interpretive Frames

Figure 2.2 Triadic Model of Mass Communication (Part B: Fields of Definition)
The next segment in Figure 2.2, ‘Elites’, is comprised of all other news defining individuals — including experts (such as academics), public commentators (such as senior journalists or media ‘personalities’), representatives of pressure groups (such as unions, environmental lobby groups), and other professionals (such as police officers, fire fighters, doctors) — often called upon by the media to ‘add comment’, and thereby interpret, a particular event or issue. Following the work of Hall (1981a; 1981b), in this
triadic model such individuals are labelled ‘primary definers’, in order to reflect their power to constitute and reinforce the dominant ideological codes (or discourses) through which the broader public will ‘read’ the issues/events in question. In contrast, the third and final subsection of the triangle concerns the *modus operandi* of the mass media as a field comprising a network of institutions (be they corporations or regulatory bodies and legislative frameworks), journalists (including editorial and executive staff), and cultural artefacts (be they in the form of broadcast programmes or broadsheet newspapers). Following Hall, individuals belonging to this subsection are labelled ‘secondary definers’, in order to reflect their power to choose which details, narratives and frames are going to be used in constructing and communicating stories. It is in this section that events and issues are interpreted and encoded onto a vast array of texts. Moreover, it is in this field that political economic forces and structures influence the content and form of ‘the news’.

In contrast, Figure 2.3 considers the position of the audience and the individual in decoding the text. The circle at the heart of Figure 2.3 is in fact three circles, with the smaller circles sitting inside one another (much like the layers of an onion). At the heart of this model, the inner-most circle, resides the ‘Individual’, imbued with the physiological capacity for sensory perception and the psychological functions of ‘knowledge networks’ and ‘interpretative schemas of classification’ (as argued by Entman, 2004). Thus, the large red line penetrating to the subject/individual denotes the transmission and signification (via the semiotic chain of communication) of the media’s
messages, which must be decoded by the individual according to their interpretative schema (as contended by Hall and Entman, respectively). Moving out from the individual/core, the next ring of the circle is that of the ‘Audience’. Comprised of many individuals, the collective audience has a greater capacity to influence the actions of those individuals higher up in the socio-political power structure of society (as represented by the broken red line) through mechanisms such as opinion polls or participatory media (in the form of letters to the editor, calling a talk-back radio programme, or writing a letter of complaint to a public official). To a certain extent, then, the opinions of ‘the audience’ can (on occasion) influence a democratically elected government into changing its cause of action, or to change how it might be ‘representing’ a particular issue.

The audience does, of course, reside within the larger circle of the ‘Social/Cultural Context’. This circle represents the wider values that the audience and the individual are inculcated with through the ongoing processes of socialisation (values which comprise the interpretative schemas employed in the decoding of the media messages). Thus, the Social/Cultural Context contains what Entman calls the Meta-Schema/Paradigms of a particular culture, what Foucault would label as society’s discourses and discursive formations. Through conceptualising the position of the individual and the audience in this way, it is possible to see how the subject is (to a certain extent) the product of their social context. This conceptual positioning makes it possible to theorise the effects that social structures will have on consciousness, such as the curtailment of rational thought as is the case with ideological indoctrination. Like the overall theoretical approaches of both Goffman and Bourdieu, this model does not seek to rob the individual of their
agency, but rather to highlight how behaviour can be influenced by different social structures (be they media, cultural or political structures).

This point regarding structure and agency applies to journalists as much as to the news media’s audiences. Indeed, Figure 3 below shows how the ‘onion model’ can be used to conceptualise the working context of media producers. At the heart of this model resides the agency of the journalist, or the consciousness of a human imbued with both ‘free will’ and ideological ‘ways of seeing’. Although at first glance ‘free will’ and ‘ways of seeing’ might appear as a contradiction of terms, inasmuch as the latter concept implies the distortion of the former, such concepts are not mutually exclusive (one can suffer from ‘false consciousness’ or more, accurately, ignorance, without necessarily being conceptually reduced to an unthinking automaton). It is, therefore, the goal of the researcher to deduce empirically how this tension between consciousness and ideology shapes the habitus and actions of the subject vis-à-vis the wider socio-cultural context (the search for discursive formations and discursive actions).

Moving from this nucleic core, the next layer of ‘the onion of the journalist’ is that of the ‘Professional’. This layer refers to the values and practices of journalism, particularly such values as objectivity, fairness and balance. For Bourdieu (see, in particular, 1977; 1996; 1998; 2005), these professional values and practices are the ‘illusio’ of the journalist, while Foucault (see, in particular, 1967; 1972; 1973; 1979; 1986) would label them the ‘discursive ideas’ and ‘discursive practices’. Regardless of which term is applied, media researchers must consider the role of such values in the creation of
particular news texts. What is more, they can be inverted and used to critique the very qualities of media texts, measuring and assessing the veracity of the story (as will be shown in subsequent chapters).

**Figure 3 The Socio-Cultural Context of the Journalist**
Moving to the next layer of this onion-like model of the journalist, the ‘Institutional’ layer refers to the physical and temporal constraints that affect the qualities of the text. As political economic and organisational approaches to studying the media have emphasised, institutional factors or forces play a large role in helping the journalist decide which details of a particular news story need to be included: be they temporal, fiscal, cultural or physical/material. It is at this layer of the model that it is possible to theorise and detect the presence of wider social/institutional forces, such as, for example, the increasing flows of public relations material into ‘the news’ resulting from the deadlines and economic constraints curtailing the investigative activities of the journalist.

Finally, in considering all of the forces that impact on the journalist, it is necessary to consider the ‘Ideological’, the final layer of this model. In essence, the Ideological refers to the interpretative schema of the journalist (their political dispositions and prejudices) that will influence the cognitive processes that determine which details of an event or issue are important in telling this story. Of course, the same ideological lens helps to determine the manner in which such details should appear in order to animate the ‘facts’ as a coherent narrative (creating a textual structure that helps to frame and communicate a particular issue). Yet the ‘ideological layer’ is not limited to accounting for the personal political beliefs of the journalists, but also refers to those wider ideological forces that impact on the production of news texts, such as those dominating the workplace culture of a particular news organisation. Thus, the journalist must work within the confines of a personal ideological way of seeing, but must also contend with the political and ideological prejudices of editorial staff and other senior executives. Such institutional-
ideological forces need not take the form of direct editorial interference, but can be as simple, and as subtle, as a workplace culture which promotes the self-censoring of views that fail to dovetail with the agenda of the publication or programme. This intersection of the meta-schema of the workplace and the personal beliefs of the individual is perhaps best explained by Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, in that those journalists best able to compete in this institutional field (in terms of fiscal reward and promotion) will usually have a habitus congruent with the hegemonic workplace culture.

Although the Triadic Model of Mass Communication has the power to situate journalists, institutions and ideology within its explanatory framework, it is important to remember that it is merely an ideal type and should not be reified. Indeed, the extent to which it explains the power of the mass media (to shape a particular interpretation of an event or issue) must be contingent on empirical inquiry. Accordingly, while the Triadic Model is the central theoretical schema informing this thesis, it is a conceptual tool employed in conjunction with the triadic method of empirical research, the results of which are discussed in Chapter 5. The next chapter seeks to aid the explanatory power of the Triadic Model by re-contextualising the 2003 Iraq War, exploring the history of the news defining, socio-political elites who become of central importance to the Iraq story, as well as the justifications for the conflict. Chapter 5 builds on this discussion, offering an empirical case study of media representations of the Iraq/weapons of mass destruction story in the key weeks immediately prior to the invasion. Collectively, these chapters show how, in a post-postmodern world of social inquiry, it is still possible to talk of
media bias and to produce works of cultural sociology that are theoretically cogent, empirically grounded and politically relevant.
Chapter 4

Re-contextualising the 2003 Iraq War
Chapter 4  Re-contextualising the 2003 Iraq War

‘Know the enemy,
Know yourself,
And victory
Is never in doubt,
Not in a hundred battles’ ...

He who knows
Neither self
Nor Enemy
Will fail
In every battle

Sun-Tzu (c. 551-496 BC)
The Art of War (2005:17).

Whereas the previous chapters of this dissertation were concerned with constructing the analytical framework through which it is possible to study the power of the mass media, it is the goal of this chapter to establish the necessary contextual information concerning the 2003 Iraq War, in order to assess (with the benefit of scholarly research and hindsight) the veracity and validity of the news media’s accounts of the unfolding ‘Iraq/weapons of mass destruction crisis’ of early 2003. The second Gulf War, or ‘Operation Iraq Freedom’ as it was dubbed by the Pentagon (Mazarr, 2007:1), officially
began on 20 March 2003, with a strategic aerial assault on Baghdad designed to ‘decapitate’ the regime of Saddam Hussein by killing the dictator and other key members of his Baath-party government (Kellner, 2005:63-64). Although at the time there was some conjecture within the Australian media regarding whether the night-time bombardment lived up to the US military’s rhetoric of a first-strike that would ‘shock and awe’ (see Rampton and Stauber, 2003:123-126), hostilities quickly escalated as the US-led invasion force — reported to number between 300,000-400,000 (to which Australia contributed no more than 2,100 military personnel — Bromley, 2004:225) — surged into the southern regions of Iraq from the neighbouring Middle Eastern state of Kuwait. Acting against the wishes of much of the international community, the coalition’s self-appointed mission was to depose the Iraqi government and to identify and neutralise any ‘weapons of mass destruction’ that Saddam Hussein’s was believed to possess. Despite pockets of resistance by Hussein’s ‘elite’ Republican Guard, coalition forces quickly rolled over the demoralised and ill-equipped Iraqi army which, thanks to the United Nations’ blockade and the British and US air-strikes conducted in the 1990s, was technologically incapable of matching the coalition forces (Ahmad, 2003). Like the first Gulf War, this was once again a rout, with very few coalition casualties sustained during the initial invasion.

As US tanks and infantry units rapidly moved towards Baghdad, the world once again bore witness to the effectiveness of the Western military machine, the dramatic TV spectacle of a twenty-first century blitzkrieg. Journalists selectively ‘embedded’ within US combat units reported on the daring and courage of the coalition soldiers, sacrificing
emotional objectivity for the immediacy of battle (Allan and Zelizer, 2004; Tumber and Palmer, 2004). Their dramatic, personalised news reports from the every-shifting ‘front’ were complemented by the now-expected footage of ‘precision’ and ‘smart’ bombing (Tumber and Palmer, 2004), dutifully supplied by a military eager to show, once again, how an explosion can be ‘surgical’. All these images and stories were explained (and framed) by the carefully scripted statements of military personnel based at the US Central Command in Qatar, where in an air-conditioned media centre (costing US$1.5 million and designed by Hollywood director George Allison), journalists were told of victory after victory for the unstoppable coalition force (Tumber and Palmer, 2004:65). While not all the stories that surfaced out of the Second Iraq War followed the script desired by the US administration and its allied governments in London and Canberra, the news media, and in particular the US broadcast news media, celebrated the triumphant march of the coalition forces (Kellner, 2005:63-69). The few coalition casualties sustained in the initial invasion (122 American and 33 British killed) did not subvert this triumphant narrative, with conservative media pundits in Australia taking the opportunity to attack verbally the ‘coalition of the whining’ (those who had been outspoken critics of the conflict prior to the invasion) for their lack of nerve in the face of a ‘clear’ threat posed by a murderous dictator (Manne, 2005a). For much of the news media, the Iraq War was a simple *casus belli* script: Iraq was being ‘liberated’, the ‘evil doer’ and his ‘weapons of mass destruction’ were being neutralised, and ‘the war for peace’ would be won (Rampton and Stauber, 2003:130).
Barely six weeks after the US-led coalition began ‘Operation Iraqi Freedom’, the world’s media were informed that the Hussein regime had been dealt its *coup de grace*. Statues of the former dictator were being torn from their foundations (thanks to the muscle of US tanks), while preparations had begun to facilitate a new Iraqi administration, one that would eventually take the nation down a more democratic (and politically turbulent) path.

As so much of this conflict had unfolded like a Hollywood action movie, replete with the decontextualised myths and narratives that had accompanied the first Gulf War, it was perhaps fitting that the (now former) US President George W. Bush should provide the final military spectacle of the ‘official’ conflict. In what was a carefully planned media event, on 1 May, 2003, a Navy S-3B Viking jet landed on the deck of the *USS Abraham Lincoln* (Kuypers, 2006:76). Emerging from behind the controls, garbed in the regalia of a fighter pilot, a confident President Bush crossed the flight-deck to stand before an enthusiastic and excited crowd (Kellner, 2005:78). Under a banner proclaiming ‘mission accomplished’, George W. Bush (cited in Kuypers, 2006:80) proceeded to give one of the most famous and powerful speeches of his political career, stating that:

> Our war against terror is proceeding according to principles that I have made clear to all … Any person, organization, or government that supports, protects, or harbours terrorists is complicit in the murder of the innocent, and equally guilty of terrorist crimes. Any outlaw regime that has ties to terrorist groups and seeks or possesses weapons of mass destruction is a grave danger to the civilized world — and will be confronted. And anyone in the world, including the Arab world, who
works and sacrifices for freedom has a loyal friend in the United States of America.

Reaffirming the Bush doctrine and its divisive sentiment that ‘you’re either with us or against us’, the US President was proclaiming a victory in the perpetual ‘war on terror’. Two weeks later, the then Australian Prime Minister John Howard echoed the sentiments of his US counterpart informing the Australian parliament, which for the first time in its history had not provided bi-partisan support for war, that combat operations had indeed ceased (Barker, 2003:8). As Prime Minister Howard and his ministers were quick to inform the Australian public, the United States’ victory was also Australia’s victory.

However, as quickly became apparent, Bush’s declaration onboard the USS Abraham Lincoln, a choreographed spectacle intended to connote the myths of US cinematic blockbusters such as Top Gun (a film that Douglas Kellner 1995:75-83 has labelled a Reaganite ‘wet-dream’ for its superb construction of a conservative dominant ideology) proved to be premature. For over six years, Iraq has been torn by warring ethnic factions (Sunni versus Shiite), by suicide bombers, by ‘insurgents’, and (at times) by over-zealous US soldiers. The US-led coalition, aided by the security forces of a now ostensibly democratic Iraq, has been forced to fight a complex ‘insurgency’ conducted by various military factions, including supporters of the former Ba’athist regime, al-Qaeda operatives, Sunni militia, and foreign ‘jihadists’ (from neighbouring Middle Eastern nations), all of whom have been keen to engage in a war of attrition against the military forces of the United States. The number of casualties for all factions has climbed since
the end of the ‘liberation’, with the Iraq Body Count (2009) research group arguing that appropriately 100,000 Iraqi civilians have been killed as a direct result of the ongoing violence. Yet this figure might be a conservative estimate, with Gary Younge, a journalist working for the British newspaper *The Guardian*, asserting that over one million Iraqis have been killed as a direct result of the war and its aftermath (see Younge, 2009:7). Coalition casualties have also continued to rise, with the death toll having risen to 4683 as of November 2009 (Iraq Coalition Casualty Count, 2009). While a ‘troop surge’ launched by former US President George W. Bush in January 2007 has helped to curb the number of deaths resulting from the ethnic and religious conflict (Cocks, 2008), Iraq continues to suffer from almost daily acts of militancy, with the possibility of a stable, peaceful, and truly democratic Iraq still in question.

President George W. Bush, and his British and Australian allies, former Prime Ministers Tony Blair and John Howard, have all now left the political arenas of their respective nations, prompting coalition partners to rethink the conduct of the war and the rehabilitation of Iraq. Fulfilling an election promise, the Australian Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, withdraw Australia’s small contingent of combat troops in 2008, while the British ended their combat operations on 30 April 2009 (Sullivan, 2009). Likewise, US President Barack Obama appears set to fulfil his electoral commitment to end the increasingly unpopular conflict (Obama and Biden, 2008), having announced 2011 as the likely year for the withdrawal of US forces (The Sydney Morning Herald, 3 March 2009:6). The war has proven particularly costly for the United States. In addition to the thousands of soldiers and private contractors killed in Iraq during the last six years, the financial cost
of the war and its aftermath is estimated at $US 3 trillion, making it the ‘most expensive’
war in the history of the United States (The Sydney Morning Herald, 3 March 2009:6). Beyond the casualties and the financial costs of the conflict, the widely publicised human
rights abuses in Guantanamo Bay and in the Abu Ghraib prison have tarnished the
reputation and image of a nation that has often claimed to be a champion of liberty. While few would argue that Saddam Hussein was other than a murderous dictator, the six
years and counting of death and violence wrought by the coalition’s invasion is cause for
reflection vis-à-vis the implementation and consequences of foreign policy. Indeed, given
that the justifications for the invasion of Iraq have proven to be unfounded, it is
worthwhile analysing the ideological factors that propelled the United States, and
consequently Britain and Australia, to war.

**Neoconservative Ideology and the War against Iraq**

Although in early 2003 the news media were replete with stories of ‘weapons of mass
destruction’ and the alleged danger Iraq posed to the Western world, the more immediate
cause for the coalition’s military intervention can be traced to the ‘existential void’ left by
the collapse of the Soviet Union (Kellner 1995), and the subsequent rise of
neoconservative ideology. An event largely unforeseen by both the academic community
and foreign policy analysts, the sudden end of the Cold War seemed to herald a new age
of international relations, one in which the world was no longer so starkly divided along
ideological lines. While for some the collapse of the Cold War’s antagonistic binary
promised an exciting new age of international cooperation, for a number of political and
social theorists the early 1990s were a time of ‘ontological [in]-security’ (to borrow an
appropriate phrase — see Giddens, 1991) as international relations was robbed of many of its ideological certainties. Buoyed by the confidence brought by the triumph of neo-classical capitalism, new political and social intellectuals emerge, scholars who offered new interpretations of the world and its civilisations. Such influential theorists of this time include the neoconservative Francis Fukuyama (1992), whose book *The End of History and the Last Man*, argued that the global spread of modernity will see the ‘inevitable’ march of democracy. According to Fukuyama (1992), history, given time, will see the collapse of all autocratic governments and of single party states, as economic progress and an emerging middle class ensure that democracy is the last stage of political evolution (see also Fukuyama, 2006:53-56). Adopted by the neoconservatives who were to make up a large part of the administration of George W. Bush, Fukuyama’s argument was robbed of its complexity and reduced to a simplistic belief that the ‘non-Western’ world would inevitably ‘become more like the West in general and the United States in particular’ (Jowitt, 2003, cited in Fukuyama, 2006:54-55).

However, with the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the Bush administration decided it could no longer wait for history to transform certain dictatorships into peaceful, Western friendly, democracies (see Fukuyama, 2006). New policy frameworks were being created according to a ‘hawkish’ discourse, one that gave primacy to other post-Cold War theories concerning ‘failed states’ and their facilitation of extremism and ‘terrorist organisations’ (see Rotberg, 2002). The world was once again being divided along ideological lines, with the thesis of a Harvard Professor, the late Samuel
Huntington (1927-2008), regarded as prophetic and seminal in its prediction of what now appeared, post-9/11, as a war between ‘Islam’ and the ‘West’:

World politics is entering a new phase … The great divisions among humankind and the dominating sources of conflict [in this new world] will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future. (Huntington, 1993:22)

Within some sections of academia, Huntington’s thesis was criticised for its crude definitions, for its sweeping generalities and simplistic reformulation of ‘the West versus the Rest’ paradigm (see, for instance, Said, 2001). Nonetheless, Huntington’s thesis, much like Fukuyama’s argument regarding the ‘march’ of democracy, clearly influenced policy formation within the Bush administration, helping to provide an intellectual justification for direct military intervention in nations perceived as hostile to the interests of the United States. The ascent of this ‘extreme real politik paradigm’, labelled ‘Hard Wilsonianism’ by some (Fukuyama, 2006:40), became the intellectual core of the new ‘Bush Doctrine’ in days of introspection and anger following 9/11, giving former cold war intellectuals a new cause in which to believe (Barker, 2003). As former Prime Minister John Howard noted at the time, the United States had been ‘traumatised’ by the events of 9/11, with the spectacle of the collapsing twin towers inducing a rare ‘sense of
vulnerability’ in the world’s sole superpower (Barker, 2003:24). Indeed, on the 12 of September 2001, the American people wanted answers, a somewhat directionless Republican administration needed a cause, and the world’s most advanced military needed an enemy (Halper and Clarke, 2004). The neoconservatives could provide for all.

The Ascension of the Neoconservatives

Although the continuing chaos in Iraq has seen a marked decline in the number of politicians and intellectuals openly identifying themselves as being a neoconservative, in September 2001 key members of the newly elected Bush administration conspicuously identified themselves as the then fashionable ‘neocons’ (see Fukuyama, 2006; Halper and Clarke, 2004). While not a ‘card carrying’ political organisation (Halper and Clarke, 2004:10), the neoconservatives have been a force within US politics since the 1960s, with their affiliated ‘think tanks’, such as the American Enterprise Institute and the Project for the New American Century (PNAC), having had a profound influence on the governments of George W. Bush (see Altheide and Grimes, 2005; Ehrman, 1995; Halper and Clarke, 2004; Steinfels, 1979). For instance, PNAC’s members, in the years immediately prior to the second Gulf War, consisted of such notables as Paul Wolfowitz (then Deputy Secretary of Defence and later Chair of the World Bank), Donald Rumsfeld (then Secretary of Defence) and Dick Cheney (then Vice-President of the United States — see Altheide and Grimes, 2005:633). Although there has been considerable debate regarding whether George W. Bush entered office as a neoconservative, his adoption of ‘regime change’ policies laid out by neoconservative acolytes, and their ‘hawkish’ (or, rather, ‘hard Wilsonian’) allies (Boot cited in Fukuyama, 2006:40), has led to the
conclusion that in the post ‘9/11’ world, President Bush was a powerful new neoconservative convert (Fukuyama, 2006:46).

Although the history of the neoconservatives and their influence within both political and intellectual circles is complex and difficult to clearly trace (due to the lack of a unified ideological doctrine espoused by all early members), the overall influence of the ‘movement’ is clear, with a study in the late 1970s suggesting that one in every four of America’s most ‘prestigious’ intellectuals identified themselves as a ‘neoconservative’ (Halper and Clarke, 2004:46). By the 1990s many of the group’s senior members had overcome early disputes to construct a clear set of core principles around which foreign and domestic policies could be shaped. Drawing partially on the sophisticated philosophy of Leo Strauss, but more readily from the work of his students such as Allan Bloom (1987), author of The Closing of the American Mind, the ‘second generation’ of neoconservatives sought to incorporate Straussian ideas on religiosity and morality into applied political concepts (Halper and Clarke, 2004:64-67). In particular, the neoconservatives took Strauss’ theories on regimes, and their role in shaping certain behaviours, and fused them with a moralistic interpretative framework whereby capitalism and liberal democracy are considered vastly superior to any other form of government or socio-economic system (Fukuyama, 2006).

From this perspective, the idea of ‘regime change’ is divorced from the traditional principles of the ‘just war’, or jus ad bellum, with the neoconservative logic turning concepts such as ‘invasion’ into ‘liberation’. Moreover, the notion of pre-emptive war
became justifiable on a moral level, with dissenting voices constrained by ethical arguments regarding freedom and patriotic sentiments. Based on their research on the writings of many neoconservatives, Stefan Halper and Jonathan Clarke (2004:11) summarise the central principles of the ‘second generation’ of the movement as:

1. A belief deriving from religious conviction that the human condition is defined as a choice between good and evil and that the true measure of political character is to be found in the willingness by the former (themselves) to confront the latter.
2. An assertion that the fundamental determinant of the relationship between states rests on military power and the willingness to use it.
3. A primary focus on the Middle East and global Islam as the principal theater for American overseas interests.

Based on these principles, it is relatively easy to imagine the frustration felt by many neoconservatives with what was, at least according to their moral framework, the premature conclusion of the first Gulf War. As has been noted by Geoffrey Barker (2003:21), during the first Gulf War, after the Iraqi military forces were retreating from Kuwait, many neoconservatives situated within the government of the first Bush administration but not yet in possession of the influence that they would later wield, argued strongly for the UN-sanctioned force to push on to Baghdad, and to bring about total regime change in Iraq. When George Bush (senior) refused, fearing the UN force would fall apart if stretched beyond its mandate, some neoconservatives came to see the
conflict as a missed opportunity and a half-measure (Barker, 2003:21; Halper and Clarke, 2004:148-149). Such discontent only deepened with the rise of the ‘liberal’ (in the ‘small-l’ sense of belong to the left-wing of the political spectrum) Democratic President Bill Clinton. For, although some neoconservatives flirted with the US Democrats (the United States’s ideological equivalent of the Australian Labor Party), by the end of President Clinton’s first year in the White House, ‘they were all unambiguously against him’ (Halper and Clarke, 2004:84).

As members of the second generation of neoconservatives were marginalised from direct influence within the US government during the Clinton years (1991-2000), they regrouped in think-tanks and other institutions from which they continued to publicise their views, seeking new and powerful allies in both the media and the growing evangelical movement (see Halper and Clarke, 2004). Gradually their support base grew, as did their frustration with President Clinton. Such frustration manifested itself with the publication of an open (and openly bellicose) letter to Bill Clinton in 1998, in which senior neoconservatives and like-minded allies within PNAC, such as Francis Fukuyama, Paul Wolfowitz, Donald Rumsfeld and Richard Armitage (among others), called for the removal of Saddam Hussein by military force (Barker, 2003:22). Arguably, however, the neoconservatives were not expecting large-scale military action from the Clinton administration. Nor would a Republican election victory — such as the ousting of the Democrats by George W. Bush in 2000 — necessarily be able to convince the US Congress and the American people of the ‘benefits’ of war with Iraq based on intellectual (or rather ideological) grounds. As a report released by PNAC in 2000 noted, it would
take ‘some catastrophic and catalysing event like a new Pearl Harbor’ to effect a major paradigm shift in US foreign policy (cited in Barker, 2003:22).

The catalyst arrived during the new Republican administration of George W Bush, when on September 11, 2001, Islamic militants and followers of Osama bin Laden hijacked four plans and proceeded to attack the United States, and to a limited extent the wider Western world, on both a physical and metaphysical level (Carroll, 2004:255-260). Attacking what has been labelled the world’s most potent symbol of democratic capitalism, the World Trade Centre in New York, as well as the headquarters of the US military establishment, the Pentagon, 15 men of mostly Saudi origin precipitated a tragic media spectacle that reverberated around the world (Carroll, 2004:255-260). Live footage of the aeroplanes striking the 110 storey World Trade Centre, and the ensuing implosion of the buildings that killed nearly 3000 people, fixated viewers from around the globe, collapsing time and space, and instilling a feeling of shared experience (Kellner, 2005:28). After the attacks, Osama bin Laden proclaimed that this was a holy war, with the “‘camp of belief” pitted against the “camp of unbelief”” (Carroll, 2004:256).

Seemingly along the lines of Huntington’s (1993) clash of cultures thesis, Bin Laden was rhetorically and physically attacking the ‘faithless’ West, challenging the might of modernity with his religiosity and guile (Carroll, 2004); arguably a 21st century embodiment of Max Weber’s concept of charismatic authority. While the neoconservatives had not foreseen the possibility of such a large scale and dramatic attack from a small camp of Islamic fundamentalists, they wasted no time in laying out a
new agenda for a US President largely inexperienced at the level of foreign policy (Halper and Clarke, 2004:131-133). Indeed, on 15 September 2001, before the dust had truly settled in New York, Paul Wolfowitz and Donald Rumsfeld were lobbying President Bush to take immediate military action against Iraq (Barker, 2003:23; Halper and Clarke, 2004:204). Although President Bush decided to heed the advice of his Secretary of State Colin Powell (that Afghanistan and al-Qaeda should be the military’s first target), he had by now adopted the neoconservative doctrine of ‘regime change’ in Iraq. Consequently, the liberation of Iraq, and the nation’s oil fields (which are the second largest in the world and highlighted as a possible motivation for the conflict\textsuperscript{27}), were now on his agenda (Solomon and Erlich, 2003:107-116; Thussu and Freedman, 2003). As Halper and Clarke (2004:138; see also Davidson, 2007:260) contend:

In the tumultuous days following 9/11, the neo-conservatives were ready with a detailed, plausible blueprint for the nation’s response. They were not troubled that their plan had been in preparation for a decade for different reasons, in a different context, and in relation to different countries and, as such, did not in any way represent a direct response to events themselves. They were motivated only to ensure its adoption … America and the world will have to live with the consequences long after the neo-conservatives themselves are but a distant memory.

\textsuperscript{27} In 2007, Alan Greenspan (a prominent US Republican and chairman of the US Federal Reserve Bank from 1987-2006) stated that the Iraq War was ‘largely about oil’ (Beaumont and Walter, 2007).
Five years on since Halper and Clarke’s (2004) published criticisms, ‘America alone’ (with only limited support from former coalition partners) continues to battle to reconstruct Iraq, to build a democratic outpost amongst the mostly Islamic autocracies of the Middle East. Far from providing the US with a lasting unifying socio-political doctrine, the neoconservatives now appear to be a spent political force (Fukuyama, 2006). They failed to foresee the animosity that their liberation would bring, and they miscalculated the forces and costs needed to implant democracy in Iraq (more a failure of their ontology than the military might of the United States — much like the quotation which opens this chapter suggests). While most neoconservatives have left the world’s stage, there is still one neocon — or, rather, a neoconservative sympathiser (much like Fukuyama, 2006) — who continues to wield the same unabashed political power, whose business assets were of fundamental value to the organisation in its early attempts to capture the ear of the American public: namely, the unbowed (and seemingly unrepentant) Rupert Murdoch.

**The Power of Rupert Murdoch**

Although ‘the road to war’ was ultimately paved by the rhetoric and ideologies of key neoconservative mandarins within the administration of George W. Bush, their influence within the White House, like that within the political public sphere, was made possible due to the support of certain media outlets, such as those controlled by Rupert Murdoch. As discussed in Chapter 2, Murdoch has often been accused of interfering in the political processes of Western democracies, particularly in Australia, Britain and the United States (see also Greenwald, 2004; Manne, 2005a; McKnight, 2003, 2005). Described as a
frustrated politician by a former executive (McKnight, 2003:348), Murdoch cultivates relationships with prominent politicians, not solely for possible regulatory benefits, but also from a genuine desire to influence the decisions of the bureaucratic polity. As is perhaps best demonstrated by the many lectures that Murdoch has presented at both think-tanks and universities, the media mogul is interested in ideals far loftier than the mechanics of the market or the operation of a global corporation. Indeed, in relation to politics Murdoch has often demonstrated his keen interest, with his media assets in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States having a general history of supporting right-wing politicians and their causes (although not to the extent that his personal political beliefs will be permitted to override his business interests, thereby compromising his ability to deal with a popular left-of-centre government). Like his father, Sir Keith Murdoch, Rupert has always seen the news media as being more than merely a profit-making enterprise. For him the news media are assets not only capable of producing great wealth, but institutions capable of producing significant ideological effects. Thus a large part of the news media’s value for Murdoch is their power to shape public opinion, to manipulate democratic processes in order to bring about certain political formations. In the political contexts of Australia, Britain and the United States, Murdoch has shown no trepidation in the use of this power.

Although he was not the sole sponsor of the neoconservatives (see Halper and Clarke, 2004:188), Murdoch’s news media in the United States was of fundamental importance to the neoconservative cause. In 1996 Murdoch created the Fox News Channel (commonly known as FOX News or FOX), installing the former conservative political
consultant Roger Ailes at its helm (Kimmel, 2004:204). According to Halper and Clarke (2004:185) FOX News had a profound effect on broadcast journalism in the United States, with the traditional Murdoch formula of sensationalism and entertainment employed in the pursuit of ratings and revenue (see also Brock, 2004; Greenwald, 2004). Presenters on FOX News abandoned journalistic traditions of objectivity and political neutrality (belied by their slogan ‘fair and balanced’), employing instead a combative interview style (see Greenwald, 2004). Such dramatic, yet engaging, techniques distinguished the cable news channel from its competitors, and helped to ensure that FOX News would become the most watched cable news service during the 2003 invasion of Iraq (Brock, 2004:330). As American media scholar Andrew Calabrese’s (2005) argues:

Murdoch’s FOX News set the standard for patriotic television with an editorial policy that echoed the Bush administration’s official stance, making any challenge to the White House’s plans for war seem tantamount to treason. As the [cable news] ratings leader during the war, FOX became the model for the other US commercial networks. While chasing after FOX in the ratings war, the other networks also shifted more closely towards FOX’s ideological terrain.

Labelled the ‘FOX effect’ (Greenwald, 2004), the editorial policies and journalistic formula at FOX have had a detrimental impact on United States’ public sphere; at least on those sections constituted by the television news media. Indeed, the ‘FOX effect’ highlights quite well the problems posed by ‘infotainment’, with a number of studies showing the disproportionate level of misconceptions held by viewers of FOX News (see
Brock 2004; DellaVigan and Kaplan, 2007, Halper and Clarke, 2004:193). Even in the post-invasion phase of the Iraq War, long after US forces failed to locate Saddam Hussein’s alleged hordes of biological and chemical weapons, audience research has indicated that 80 per cent of Fox viewers continued to possess a number of misconceptions about the Iraq War and its central justifications, including the beliefs that the coalition had found weapons of mass destruction and that Saddam Hussein had orchestrated the September 11 terrorist attacks (see Calabrese, 2005; Kull, Ramsay and Lewis, 2003). In other words, long after the initial invasion of Iraq, neoconservative arguments regarding a supposed link between Iraq and al-Qaeda were still circulating as putative truth.

Rupert Murdoch’s television assets have, then, been utilised by the neoconservatives to disseminate their ideas, almost verbatim. Indeed, after the 11/9 terrorist attacks, neoconservative intellectuals increasingly became the central authoritative sources employed by FOX News in order to explain the intricacies of US foreign policy, with their views overwhelming counter interpretations of events (Halper and Clarke, 2004:186). As the polemical documentary Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch’s War on Journalism (Greenwald, 2004) revealed, executives at FOX News circulated internal memoranda to ensure that interviewers and journalists were aware of the language and jokes that they were to use in framing dissenting ‘liberal’ (or left-wing) individuals. In addition to this conscious and deliberate ideological distortion, FOX is accused of self-censorship, having ignored some news stories that would reflect poorly on the policies of the Bush administration (Brock, 2004). The accumulative effects of such practices were a
broadcasting force antithetical to the traditional ‘truth aims’ of journalism (McKnight, 2001). Rather than acting as a critical watchdog for the public interest, FOX News helped to normalise belligerent foreign policy concepts, such as the Bush doctrine’s notion of ‘pre-emptive war’, which had previously been alien to modern US politics (Halper and Clarke, 2004).

However, more so than FOX News, Murdoch’s most important contribution to the neoconservative cause was his ‘serious toned’ political magazine, The Weekly Standard. Founded by Murdoch in 1995, William Kristol, a second generation neoconservative and founder of the think-tank PNAC, was installed as the magazine’s editor, and issued with a mandate to build a partisan publication that could act as a prestigious neoconservative voice in America’s political discourse (McKnight, 2005:67-69). As David McKnight (2005:59) has noted, most critics of Murdoch have characterised the chairman of News Corporation as a man of crude power, motivated solely by profits. Yet this representation is somewhat misleading, reducing his modus operandi to a mere commercial strategy (McKnight, 2005:59). It ignores Murdoch’s overt commitments to certain ideological causes; commitments that are clearly demonstrated by News Corporation’s continued financial subsidisation of unprofitable, yet ideological significant, news media (see McKnight, 2003, 2005).

For The Weekly Standard, despite being widely read by conservative politicians (former Vice President Dick Cheney is reported to have sent one of his employees to collect 30 copies every Monday - McKnight, 2005:68), is read only by a small political elite, and
has run at a financial loss since its inception. With a weekly circulation of approximately 83,000, this magazine demonstrates Murdoch’s commitment to the neoconservative cause (at least until its sale in 2009), with the publication having served as an incubator for the central political doctrines that would be used to guide US foreign policy in post-9/11 America (Aronowitz, 2007:67). Indeed, during the period of the Iraq War, The Weekly Standard was arguably the flagship of Murdoch’s conservative news media, with its articles syndicated to News Corporation’s other newspaper holdings, thereby helping to set the tone and focus of many news pages both in the United Kingdom and Australia, (see, for instance, Manne, 2005a).

**Australia Joins the Coalition: Selling the Neoconservative War**

With Rupert Murdoch’s media support helping the neoconservatives obtain control of the levers of government in the United States, America was largely set on the path to war from the moment that the first aircraft struck the World Trade Centre, with a somewhat traumatised American population providing little public opposition for a new Gulf War that had nothing to do with directly fighting the forces responsible for the devastation in New York (Garran, 2004; Kellner, 2005:35). Australia’s participation in the 2003 Iraq War was also partially precipitated by the spectacle of the collapsing twin towers. As if the attacks had taken place in Sydney rather than New York, the images of the imploding World Trade Centre dominated the Australian news media for months, provoking genuine and popular displays of anger and grief. While at first such empathy might appear odd, particularly from an international perspective, in generalised terms Australians tend to hold a more favourable view of Americans than perhaps other
Western people. As Donald Horne (1986 [1964]:99-105) famously noted over 40 years ago in his seminal cultural exploration of the ‘Australian character’, Australians have an ‘affinity’ for Americans; a mythic bond built on perceived historic and cultural similarities (such as the myth of the ‘frontier’), and one that has undoubtedly been strengthened in the modern media age through the copious importation of American popular culture. Indeed, although there are many outspoken Australians who are quite critical of the United States (see, for instance, Bell and Bell, 1998), there is, nonetheless, a kind of ‘kindred spirit’ between the two former British colonies, with the similar civic structures and cultural values giving rise to favourable pre-dispositions, thereby creating what political theorists might label ‘natural’ allies.

This view of a natural US/Australia relationship was exemplified and rhetorically amplified in many of the speeches made by the former Prime Minister, John Howard, in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. It was also a theme to which Howard would return in the lead up to the war with Iraq (O’Connor, 2004:207), with the then Prime Minister passionately reminding the Australia public of the ‘common values’ held by Americans, of the US-Australia alliance ‘steeped in history’ (O’Connor, 2004:8). In essence, former Prime Minster Howard was appealing to a popular socio-historical conception of the United States as a friend and protector of Australia, an argument supported by an overt history of joint military actions and strategic partnerships. Since World War II, when Australia turned to a new ‘great and powerful friend’ (in the words of Australia’s longest serving Prime Minister, Robert Menzies) in what is commonly perceived to be modern Australia’s ‘darkest hours’ of defence against the inexorable
advance of imperialist Japan, Australian governments have actively pursued a close strategic alliance with the United States. While there have been periods of greater foreign policy independence under Labor governments (see Garran, 2004:83-110), in the post-World War II era Australia’s relations with Asia and the wider world have often mirrored the foreign policy interests of the United States, with Australia having provided substantial military support in the Cold War conflicts in Korea and Vietnam. Indeed, the cornerstone of Australia’s defence policy since the end of World War II is arguably the ‘ANZUS treaty’, an alliance that obliges members to come to the aid of each other in the advent of war (although New Zealand’s decision in the 1980s to bar US nuclear warships from its waters has perhaps undermined that nation’s membership — Garran, 2004:2; Grant, 2004:113).

Not only, then, do the United States and Australia share similar civic structures and cultural values, it has become something of a tradition for Australia to follow the US on major military operations. Although it is perhaps too simplistic to assert that Australia followed the United States to Iraq solely because of a history of military support, or, indeed, due to similar socio-cultural traditions and values (there were also strategic incentives, such as inclusion within a proposed US missile defence shield, as well as a potentially lucrative free trade agreement — see O’Connor, 2004), such symbolic bonds clearly played a part in determining Australia’s participation in the ‘coalition of the willing’. Indeed, former Prime Minister Howard, having been evacuated from Washington immediately following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, became the first Australian Prime Minister to invoke the ANZUS treaty (Barker, 2003:24; Downer, 2005; Garran,
Motivated by a desire to reaffirm Australia’s commitment to a ‘friend and ally’, this decision was seemingly made *ad hoc*, in transit back to Australia, onboard ‘Air Force Two’ (the Vice President’s aeroplane). It was, then, a decision based more on instinct than knowledge, before ‘the implications of the attacks had been assessed and defined’ *vis-à-vis* Australia’s national interests and international obligations (Barker, 2003:24).

From the immediate post 9/11 phase, in which George W. Bush made his famous ‘either you are with us or you are with the terrorists’ speech, former Prime Minister Howard had ‘intuitively’ and ‘uncritically’ committed Australia to the USA’s ‘war on terror’ (Barker, 2003:24). The first stop on this new, potentially perpetual, ‘tour of duty’ was (the Taliban-controlled) Afghanistan (the first battlefield for ‘Operation Enduring Freedom’) and the camps in which Osama bin Laden trained his ‘holy warriors’. In the lead up to this conflict, a sympathetic US news media failed adequately to question the goals, means and potential repercussions involved in this rapid military deployment, with the infamous ‘anthrax attacks’ on 18 September (which killed five people) contributing to the terrorist-alerted hysteria gripping the United States. Douglas Kellner (2005:36) has documented the mood in America at this time:

> From September 11 to the beginning of the U.S. bombing acts on Afghanistan in October, the U.S. corporate media intensified war fever, and there was an orgy of patriotism such as the country had not seen since World War II. Media frames shifted from ‘America under Attack’ to ‘America Strikes Back’ even before any
military action was undertaken, as if the media frames were to conjure the military response that eventually followed.

As Australian audiences watched the unfolding drama in the United States, the Howard Government reaffirmed the country’s military support in any counter strike in the War on Terror (Barker, 2003). Accordingly, on 7 October, 2002, after the Taliban Afghan government failed to meet George W. Bush’s demands regarding the closure of the al-Qaeda training camps and the relinquishment of members of the terrorist organisation, the US and British Navies fired the initial missile salvos that marked the beginning of the still-ongoing war (Garran, 2004:115).

Having committed the Australian defence forces to the US-led military action, the Howard Government dispatched Australia’s elite (and highly secretive) soldiers, the Special Air Service (or, more commonly, the SAS), to join the military offensive in Afghanistan (see Birmingham, 2005; Garran, 2004:115-117); a commitment that was later supported by a reconstruction force, comprised of combat engineers and other military personnel (a military commitment that continues at the time of writing, some eight years later). Yet, despite Osama bin Laden eluding capture and having failed to stabilise the newly liberated Afghanistan, the might of the US military machine was quickly beginning to turn towards Iraq (Garran, 2004). Throughout 2002, expansive speeches made in Washington and London, and mimicked in Canberra, helped to shift the discourses surrounding the ‘war on terror’ to a critical ‘post-Afghanistan’ phase (Barker, 2003). Neoconservative politicians increasingly discussed the ‘true’ menaces of the new
age of mass terrorism, in which an ‘Axis of Evil’ — a clever semiotic construct connoting the actual Axis powers of World War II, but denoting the unaligned nations of Iran, North Korea and Iraq — threatened the peace of the entire ‘free world’ (Kuypers, 2006).

Yet, where the *casus belli* for war in Afghanistan was relatively simple, with the brutal regime of the Taliban having sheltered the al-Qaeda terrorist network (Birmingham, 2005; Rampton and Stauber, 2003), the case for war against Iraq was a more dubious proposition; at least for informed ‘audiences’. As key neoconservative Paul Wolfowitz (cited in Barker, 2003:10) later noted, in order to sell the war with Iraq, an emotive justification was needed to surmount the clearly tenuous link with 9/11: ‘For bureaucratic reasons we settled on weapons of mass destruction ... because it was the one reason everybody could agree on’. Accordingly, throughout 2002, Australia’s news media became increasingly fascinated with the emerging nuclear-threat rhetoric emanating from the White House, as the Howard Government maintained its acquiescence to the neoconservative interpretation of the world. Following President Bush’s ‘Axis of Evil’ speech in January 2002, former Prime Minister Howard began to face questions regarding President Bush’s moralistic sabre rattling, telling reporters in February 2002 that he ‘fully understood’ the US President’s terms of reference and thinking (Barker, 2003:25). One month later, Prime Minister Howard was exhibiting public signs that he would consider furthering Australia’s commitment to the war on terrorism, including involvement with the United States in any military operation seeking to deprive Iraq of ‘banned’ weapons of mass destruction (Barker, 2003:26).
Throughout 2002, then, Australia continued to travel the road to war with increasing momentum. President Bush’s speech on the first anniversary of the September 11 terrorist attacks marked the beginning of what was to be a final massive public relations campaign to justify an invasion (akin to an advertising blitz just prior to a sale), one which was to employ both quasi-religious rhetoric and spurious evidence in order to induce a sense of crisis (Rampton and Stauber, 2003). In Australia, this sense of vulnerability, and in some cases anger, reached new heights when on 12 October 2002, the bombing of the ‘Sari nightclub in Bali drove home … the horrors of terrorism’, with 88 Australians among the 180 killed (Garran, 2004:147). Perpetrated by the Muslim fundamentalist group Jemaah Islamiyah, this atrocity was evidence, so Prime Minister Howard informed the federal parliament, ‘that terrorism can strike anyone anywhere at any time … [and thus] the war against terrorism must go on in an uncompromising and unconditional fashion’ (Howard quoted in Garran, 2004:147). While the Prime Minister continued to insist, at least when asked directly, that he had not as yet committed Australia to a potential war in Iraq, his government was by this stage doing its utmost to convince a somewhat sceptical population that Iraq posed a genuine threat to world peace because of its fanatical links with ‘Islamic terrorists’ (Goot, 2003). Indeed, as the Australian summer of 2002/2003 drew near, the unofficial ‘countdown to war’ began, with the Government seemingly intent on establishing the popular perception that Australians were vulnerable to suicidal, Islamic terrorists (capable of causing death and destruction on a horrific scale).
‘Countdown to War’: September to March

Although there is insufficient room here to explore critically and deconstruct all public statements made by the Howard Government, and its allies in Washington and London, during this important September to March, 2003 period, it is important that the main ostensible (and arguably duplicitous — see Wilkie, 2004) reasons for Australia’s immediate involvement in the coalition are raised. In essence, the debate regarding Australia’s participation in a ‘pre-emptive’ invasion of Iraq revolved around four interconnected issues: first, that (following his defeat in the first Gulf War) Saddam Hussein had not complied with UN resolutions requiring him to dismantle all of Iraq’s known biological and chemical weapons (in particular, UN Security Council Resolution 1441: which was only passed on 8 November 2002 thanks to a concerted diplomatic campaign by Washington and other coalition allies — see Garran, 2004:147-148); second, that Hussein had or was endeavouring to acquire nuclear weapons; third, that Hussein was supporting terrorist operations against the US and its allies; and fourth, that Iraq posed an imminent threat to its own citizens and its immediate neighbours (this justification was given greater emphasis as the coalition failed to locate weapons of mass destruction — O’Connor, 2004:210).

In attempting to ‘sell’ the war to the Australian public, the Howard Government relied heavily on the public relations script articulated by the neoconservatives in the United States. Former Prime Minister Howard was seemingly content to simply re-word (for the Australian vernacular) much of the ambiguous oratory and rhetorical strategies emanating
from the White House (Barker, 2003:14; Grant, 2004:117). Furthermore, despite Australia spending millions on its own intelligence agencies, the Howard Government preferred to use reports compiled by the espionage and intelligence organisations of the US and the UK, such as those prepared by the CIA and MI6 (Garran, 2004:158), and only vaguely referred to the findings and/or analyses of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), the Office of National Assessment (ONA) and the Defence Intelligence Organisation (DIO). Like their fellows in the United States and Britain, when an Australian journalist occasionally asked a difficult question regarding the details of these intelligence reports, cabinet ministers within the Howard Government were evasive, invoking national security imperatives to justify the selective release of information. As Geoffrey Barker (2003:15) has noted, ‘this was tantamount to saying “trust our intelligence agencies and trust us to tell you the truth about their assessments”’. It is at this juncture that it is relatively easy to see how government ministers could largely avoid critical media security. By claiming that their privileged positions as parliamentarians gave them access to official (and yet confidential) intelligence sources, key Howard Government ministers, such as Alexander Downer (Foreign Affairs) and Robert Hill (Defence), could disseminate their opinions without too much critical media feedback (thus acting as powerful primary definers in the processes of communication). For a journalist to question the information provided by a minister was to question the integrity of the Australian intelligence services: an unpopular line of inquiry given its potential to conflict with the high esteem in which the Australian defence forces are commonly held (Bromley, 2004; Nourry, 2005). Moreover, Iraq’s recent history clearly
supported the assertions made by government ministers. For instance, Iraq in the 1980s had unscrupulously used chemical weapons against Iran during their war, had gassed thousands of Iraqi Kurds, and, throughout the 1990s, the regime had hindered and openly resisted UN weapons inspectors (Barker, 2003:31). Not only did such historical details undermine the pious assertions of a murderous dictator, while strategically keeping Hussein’s enemies in both the West and the Middle East ignorant regarding Iraq’s military capabilities, they gave the Australian news media a predisposition to privilege the ‘truthfulness’ of official government sources, rather than those from a figure often painted by some sections of the news media, and with some justification, as the ‘Hitler of Arabia’. Accordingly, as the momentum for war increased in the latter half of 2002, much of the Australian news media largely neglected their fourth estate ideals and simply disseminated each new intelligence handout without caveats, creating a mounting body of evidence seemingly condemning Iraq.

For Australian audiences, the first major release of local ‘evidence’ condemning the regime of Saddam Hussein took place on 17 September, 2002, when Alexander Downer informed the federal parliament of the risks posed by Hussein’s ‘weapons of mass destruction programmes’. Following George W. Bush’s address to the United Nations General Assembly on 12 September 2002, Downer argued that Australian intelligence findings continued to show that Iraq was developing WMD capabilities, as ‘there is evidence of a pattern of acquisition of equipment which could be used in a uranium enrichment program … [such as the acquisition] of very specific types of aluminium tubes’ (Downer cited in Barker, 2003:44). Despite Downer referring to ‘Australian
intelligence’, it became clear that his assessments regarding Iraq’s ability to construct an atomic weapon were based on research conducted by US intelligence agencies, and did not acknowledge that considerable ‘reverse engineering’ would be necessary to make any such aluminium tubes remotely suitable for use in the production of a nuclear weapon (see Wilkie, 2004:91-96). As Barker (2003:44) notes, Downer’s words did not provide insights into the basis of these beliefs, nor were his statements rich in detail. Rather, his ambiguous elusions seemed calculated to inflame popular concerns, while invoking ‘the spurious authority of “intelligence”’ (Barker, 2003:44). Indeed, the only ‘hard evidence’ that the former Foreign Affairs Minister was to present to the parliament came late in September, after Britain’s Blair Government released the first of two dossiers (see Wilkie, 2004:95-102).

As former Office of National Assessments employee Andrew Wilkie (2004:75) has noted, the September dossier, *Iraq’s Weapons of Mass Destruction: the Assessment of the British Government* (see British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2003), was ‘a key building block’ in the mounting case seeking to justify military action. Containing a ‘frank foreword’ by Prime Minister Tony Blair, the central findings listed in the ‘British Dossier’ were: first, that Iraq had a useable stockpile of chemical and biological weapons, in breach of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 687; second, that Iraq’s nuclear weapons development programme had not been deactivated, with the government having tried to obtain uranium from Africa; and third, that the Iraq’s military had the capability to launch a chemical or biological weapon in under 45 minutes (Wilkie, 2004:75-77). The credibility of these findings was to fall into serious question, however,
when in May 2003 BBC reporter Andrew Gilligan disclosed that government officials had ‘sexed-up’ details of the original draft of the dossier, such as adding the ‘45-minutes-to-launch’ claim, in order to help ‘spin’ the case for war. Such accusations were to spark a dramatic public inquiry in the United Kingdom, one that facilitated (eventually) the resignation of Prime Minister Blair’s chief ‘spin doctor’, Alastair Campbell, and was perhaps a motivating or contributed factor in relation to the suicide of Dr David Kelly (the supposed source of the leak — see Barker, 2003:33-40). Furthermore, the argument concerning African uranium, which involved Iraq attempting to purchase yellowcake from Niger, had been previously investigated by the CIA when the British Government first passed on the intelligence in late 2001; intelligence which the UK had received via an Italian intelligence agency (see Barker, 2003:56-60; see also Wilkie, 2004:96-98). Although, the findings of this CIA backed inquiry suggested that the story was ‘highly doubtful’ (Barker, 2003:57), Tony Blair and John Howard presented the dossier’s findings without caveats.

It was not long after the release of the British dossier that President George W. Bush presented his ‘evidence’ justifying war at the 7 October Cincinnati address. This was an important speech for the US President, as it provided the final opportunity to persuade the American Congress of the need to vote in favour of military action. It also provided the Howard Government with many of its subsequent justifications for Australia’s commitment to the coalition. Without being overtly bellicose, Bush’s speech sought the difficult task of connecting September 11, al-Qaeda, Iraq and nuclear devastation in a manner that demanded preventative, or rather pre-emptive, military action:
[Iraq] possesses and produces chemical and biological weapons. It is seeking nuclear weapons. It has given shelter and support to terrorism, and practices terror against its own people … We know that Iraq and the al Qaida [sic] terrorist network share a common enemy — the United States of America. We know that Iraq and al Qaida [sic] have had high-level contacts that go back a decade. Some al Qaida [sic] leaders who fled Afghanistan went to Iraq … We’ve learned that Iraq has trained al Qaida [sic] members in bomb-making and poisons and deadly gases. And we know that after September 11, Saddam Hussein’s regime gleefully celebrated the terrorist attacks on America … The evidence indicates that Iraq is reconstituting its nuclear weapons program. Saddam Hussein has held numerous meetings with Iraqi nuclear scientists, a group he calls his ‘nuclear mujahideen’ — his nuclear holy warriors … (George W. Bush quoted in Wilkie, 2004:77).

Although Bush’s speech was sufficient to convince the US Congress to back military action, like the British dossier’s claims, much of George W. Bush’s evidence was to prove to be, at best, based on faulty intelligence, and at worst, blatant propaganda. For instance, when Bush claimed that an Iraqi defector, Hussein Kamel (Saddam’s son-in-law and the former head of Iraq’s military industries), disclosed in 1995 that Iraq had produced over 30,000 litres of anthrax and other biological weapons, he neglected to mention that Kamel (whose story was corroborated by another informant) had also told the CIA that the deadly stockpile had in fact been destroyed (Scheer, Scheer and Chaudhry, 2003:74-75).
Likewise, Bush’s claim of an active link ‘going back decades’ between the fundamentalist organisation al-Qaeda and the decadent, and largely secular, regime of Saddam Hussein, was another case of ‘spinning’ weak intelligence, while pandering to media speculation. For instance, beginning in November 2001 and continuing throughout 2002, certain media sources in the US, such as the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal and the Weekly Standard, published accounts of a meeting said to have taken place in Prague between the leader of the 9/11 highjackers, Mohamed Atta, and an Iraqi intelligence officer, Ahmad al-Ani. While the details of the encounter (or, indeed, ‘encounters’) varied slightly depending on the media source, most accounts ambiguously cited Czech intelligence sources as supporting evidence. Yet, as was later revealed by the New York Times, the Czech President had personally and quietly contacted the White House to debunk the story, an important detail ignored or forgotten by the central figures in the Bush administration (Scheer, Scheer and Chaudhry, 2003:56). According to media researchers Christopher Scheer, Robert Scheer and Lakshmi Chaudhry (2003:53), this is a ‘classic example’ of the information strategy employed by the Bush administration, where the White House would leak an unconfirmed and sketchy intelligence report to sympathetic pundits and journalists, who would then proceed to blow the information completely out of proportion, disseminating the details with little regard for accuracy, validity or, indeed, potential repercussions.

The information goal here was more obfuscation than the blatant lies of old fashioned propaganda (such as one would expect from an authoritarian regime). For, although the
then Director of the CIA George Tenet released a written statement on 7 October 2002 in support of President Bush’s Cincinnati speech claiming that the CIA had ‘solid reporting of senior level contacts between Iraq and al-Qaeda going back a decade’, the actual details of the intelligence reports note only a tentative link between Saddam and al-Qaeda: vague reports based on contacts said to have taken place in the early 1990s (Scheer, Scheer and Chaudhry, 2003:46-47). Far from illustrating an active connection of 10 years, this intelligence could have just as easily been worded to emphasise that the CIA had been unable to find any link between these two major players in Middle Eastern affairs for the last decade (Scheer, Scheer and Chaudhry, 2003:47; see also Wilkie, 2004:61-74).

Given the large number of Americans who continue to believe that Saddam Hussein played a role in the September 11 attacks (Calabrese, 2005), this was clearly an effective propaganda technique, one repeated by senior Bush administration officials during the closing months of 2002. It was also a technique that John Howard tried to imitate when he made the ‘Iraq/Bali/War on Terror’ link in the Australian Parliament on 4 February, 2003:

The Australian government knows that Iraq still has chemical and biological weapons and that Iraq wants to develop nuclear weapons. In hindsight the world has been too trusting — not careful enough in our dealings with the Iraqi President. Iraq has not changed — but we have. We now understand, after the events in Bali and those of 11 September 2001, that we are living in a world
where unexpected and devastating terrorist attacks on free and open societies can occur in ways that we never before imagined possible. (John Howard cited in Wilkie, 2004:78)

The day after Howard claimed an inevitable connection between Bali and Iraq in the Australian Parliament (an argument that he would repeat despite provoking considerable derision), US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, fronted the United Nations to present ‘conclusive’ and ‘damning’ evidence of Iraq’s possession of WMDs. This was a much anticipated address, one brought about in part by pressure to seek a UN mandate exerted from London and Canberra, with the charismatic and widely respected Colin Powell seen as something of a ‘dove’ in an administration dominated by neoconservative ‘hawks’ (Scheer, Scheer and Chaudhry, 2003:58). Powell’s presentation was at that date the fullest account of the coalition’s accumulated intelligence, a prima facie tour de force ‘backed up by sources, solid sources …’ detailing the ‘facts’ the ‘United States knows’ about Iraq (Colin Powell cited in Barker, 2003:42-43). Drawing upon satellite images and graphical digital simulations depicting what were alleged to be mobile and covert weapons production facilities (‘obviously’ the reason why UN inspectors had failed to locate them), Powell (cited in Wilkie, 2004:79) argued:

We know from Iraq’s past admissions that it has successfully weaponised not only anthrax, but biological agents including botulinum toxin, aflatoxin and ricin … Our conservative estimate is that Iraq today has a stockpile of between 100 and 500 tons of chemical weapons agent … Saddam Hussein already possesses two
out of the three key components needed to build a nuclear bomb. He has a cadre of nuclear scientists with the expertise and he has a bomb design … Since 1998, his efforts to reconstitute his nuclear program have been focussed on acquiring the third and last component … Iraq and terrorism go back decades … But what I want to bring to your attention today is the potentially much more sinister nexus between Iraq and the al Qaida [sic] terrorist network.

Complementing the arguments of the newly released second British intelligence dossier, *Iraq: Its Infrastructure of Concealment, Deception and Intimidation* (otherwise known as the ‘Dodgy Dossier’ after it was quickly revealed to be based on outdated information and largely plagiarised from a PhD dissertation: spelling mistakes included — Barker, 2003:35), Powell earnestly reiterated many of the claims laid out previously by Bush and Blair, attempting to push the dual danger of al-Qaeda and WMDs to a new level. Citing reports that senior (and now deceased) al-Qaeda operative, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, had moved unhindered throughout Iraq as evidence of Saddam Hussein’s support for bin Laden’s terrorist network, Powell sought to establish a direct link between the dictator and the fanatic. Yet, as was noted shortly after Powell’s address, any notion of a ‘relationship’ between the two philosophically opposed individuals was only speculative, clearly based on their common hatred of the United States. Indeed, when examined closely the details of Powell’s address to the UN seemed to indicate only a ‘live-and-let-live’ relationship, and certainly not one of active support (Scheer, Scheer and Chaudhry, 2003:64).
Likewise, other evidence presented by Powell, such as the satellite images supposedly depicting a chemical weapons production camp, turned out to be erroneous when investigated by foreign journalists (Scheer, Scheer and Chaudhry, 2003:62). What is more, the mysterious ‘mobile chemical weapons production facilities’ proved to be overestimations of Iraqi offensive capabilities, with post-invasion investigations by coalition forces failing to locate conclusive evidence of such equipment (although three trucks sparked some premature claims to the contrary — see Barker, 2003:64-65). In short, despite Powell’s smooth oratory and glossy images, there was little factual substance to his presentation, with the central thesis amounting to no more than ‘if you are not an enemy of our enemy, you are an enemy to us’ (Scheer, Scheer and Chaudhry, 2003:64). As Scheer, Scheer and Chaudhry (2003:64) note:

Not only did this [divisive sentiment] have a certain internal logic, it was actually an expression in Powell’s more refined tones of the apocalyptic sentiments Bush had been shouting since 9/11: You’re either with us or against us.

By this stage in the lead up to the Iraq War it was clear that Australia, with or without a mandate from the United Nations, would follow its two ‘great and powerful friends’ into Iraq. In February 2003, Australian military forces had joined the troops of fellow coalition partners on ‘pre-deployment’ at undisclosed bases across the Middle East (Barker, 2003:87; Hibbert and Starr, 2004). Although the ostensible reason for this deployment was to apply pressure on Saddam Hussein to comply with UN inspectors, who under Hans Blix (Chair of the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and
Inspection Commission) continued the search for illegal weapons, few doubted it was the strategic placement of an invasion army (despite former Prime Minister Howard insisting that war was a course of action that had yet to be decided upon — see Garran, 2004:159). With the extreme temperatures of Iraq’s deserts leading most tacticians to believe that war would need to be commenced by mid-March, 2003, the public, too, sensed that war was imminent, with mass protests breaking out against Australia’s potential involvement; including the ‘return to sender’ mailing of an estimated 150,000 ‘Anti-Terror Kits’ (a rather propagandistic booklet which the federal government had delivered to over eight million Australian homes for the cost of around AU$15 million — see Tilley, 2004). As an official parliamentary report (Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee On ASIO, ASIS and DSD, Inquiry into Intelligence on Iraq’s Weapons of Mass Destruction — 2004) would later note, the government was by this time selectively quoting from reports compiled by the Australian intelligence agencies with little regard for the caveats stressed by the authors or other analysts (Garran, 2004:67-69). Although the war had not as yet commenced, such selective use of the ‘facts’ suggests (along the lines of Phillip Knightley’s (1975) much celebrated dictum) that truth was already a ‘casualty’ of this conflict. Not even the very public protest resignation on 11 March, 2003 of senior Office of National Assessment employee, Andrew Wilkie, seemed to halt the government’s campaign of ‘public persuasion’, with Prime Minister Howard dismissing Wilkie’s dissent as merely a difference of opinion, arguing that the government could not be expected to provide ‘Old Bailey’ proof because ‘if you wait for that kind of proof, you know, it’s virtual Pearl Harbor’ (former Prime Minister Howard quoted in O’Connor, 2004:210).
By mid-March, then, the world waited for the US-led military juggernaut to unleash its promised ‘shock and awe’. Efforts to convince the United States that United Nations’ weapons inspectors needed more time to complete their searches had failed; with members of the Bush administration and neoconservative commentators publicly mocking the UN and former allies France and Germany for their lack of fortitude (‘Freedom Fries’ had by this stage replaced ‘French Fries’ on fast food menus across the United States — *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 June, 2005). In Australia, the government’s media campaign now had a life and momentum of its own, with the international news pages of major newspapers conveying in a somewhat breathless manner that war was an inevitability, running under sections entitled ‘Countdown to War’ (*The Australian*) and ‘the Road to War’ (*the Sydney Morning Herald*). Like the assembling military juggernaut, Australian journalists joined the hordes of reporters now in the Middle East, gearing up for war, armed with satellite phones and press passes, with some logging applications to be ‘embedded’ in US military combat units. President Bush’s deadline for Saddam Hussein to flee Iraq and seek exile, and thus avoid war, was fast approaching.

**The War for Peace**

On the 18 March 2003, in a parliamentary reply to John Howard’s decision to support the USA’s imminent military campaign against Iraq, then Opposition Leader of the Australian Labor Party, Simon Crean (quoted in O’Connor, 2004:211), addressed the House of Representatives, declaring that:
The Prime Minister today, in a reckless and unnecessary act, has committed Australia to war. The Prime Minister had his moment of truth, and what did we see? We saw capitulation and subservience to a phone call from the United States President. This is a black day for Australia and it is a black day for international cooperation.

Despite a lack of either bipartisan or, indeed, popular support (as opinion polls and mass protests continued to demonstrate — see Goot, 2003), Australian fighter-jet aircraft and SAS commandos joined major military operations against Iraq just days after Crean’s address. After the rapid collapse of the Hussein regime, former Prime Minister Howard, like President Bush, had his own ‘mission accomplished’ moment, declaring on the 14 May 2003 that Australian forces could now be scaled back as a ‘decisive victory’ had been achieved (O’Connor, 2004:210). With no Australian casualties and little media coverage of the human costs exacted by coalition bombs, anti-war sentiment faltered, as right-wing media pundits denounced former ‘naysayers’ concerned that the conflict would prove to be a new ‘Vietnam War’. Whereas opinion polls prior to the invasion indicate that, without a mandate from the United Nations, approximately 54 per cent of the Australian population were opposed to a military conflict (compared with 36 per cent in favour), polls taken after hostilities had commenced showed an emerging trend in favour of the military intervention, with one poll claiming 57 per cent of Australians now supported the war (versus 36 per cent against — see Goot, 2003:4-6). Indeed, Prime Minister Howard’s declaration was greeted by large parts of the Australian public with
considerable optimism (and perhaps a little relief), as the ‘victory’ had been too swift, and the images of battlefield horrors too sanitised, to interrupt triumphal media narratives.

The Bush/Howard ‘mission accomplished’ statements were, then, the seemingly happy ‘Hollywoodesque’ ending that had been cut from the 1991 conflict, for despite the record numbers of journalists, this war, like the first Gulf War, was in the main an un-confronting representation for Australian audiences, a six o’clock family friendly media event. Yet this time, unlike the first Gulf War, the ‘Hitler of the Middle East’ was now ‘on the run’ (and had in fact gone into hiding; only to be captured by US troops on 13 December, 2003, before then being executed on 30 December, 2006). In contrast to what might have been expected during the summer of 2002-2003, when one Australian protest had close to 500,000 participants (Goot, 2003:4), the mass protests of only weeks before seemed to lose all popular momentum, as a strong discourse of ‘support the troops’ became prevalent in the mainstream news media, helping to engender a climate of ‘watch, wait and see’ (see Bromley, 2004). In short, Gulf War 2 initially lived up to the promises of Howard, Blair and Bush, with the removal of Hussein appearing both relatively easy and bloodless, a clear military victory for the neoconservatives and their allies, their first fait accompli.

With the true costs of toppling the Hussein regime yet to be realised, what began in 2003 as an operation to remove WMDs from Iraq — a nation, so the public were told, that eagerly and readily awaited democratic emancipation — has ruptured into six years (and
continuing) of ‘bloody chaos’, where stories of rape, torture and murder have been at
times commonplace (see Manne, 2005a:75). Although the US-led coalition dispatched
Iraq’s army with ease, gross miscalculations were made regarding the reception that
‘liberated’ Iraqis would provide US and coalition forces, and consequently how many
troops would be required to fill the law and order vacuum left by the ousted Hussein
regime. Despite a recent decline in the number of daily violent attacks (perhaps thanks to
the US troop surge), Iraq today remains one of the most dangerous places on earth, where
local Iraqis and US soldiers, augmented by private ‘security’, continue to battle for the
peace. Mocking pre-invasion assurances of a decisive blow against terrorism, the
‘liberation’ has served to unleash the forces of sectarian violence and religious
fanaticism, with Iraq’s seemingly porous borders soaking up weapons and ‘insurgents’
bent on attacking the interests of the United States and its allies. While a brutal dictator
has been removed, the coalition has appeared powerless to bring the democratic freedoms
and prosperity that pre-invasion neoconservative rhetoric vociferously promised.

Given the literal life and death importance of arguments for and against war, the situation
in Iraq today serves as a vivid reminder that the decision to go to war is the single gravest
decision that a government can make (Barker, 2003:16). It is, then, of fundamental
importance that, when the decision to go to war is made, it is done for the ‘right’ reasons,
as a last resort and as a defence against a hostile force (the traditional theory of the just
war — Manne, 2005b:78). Prime Minister Howard, following Bush and Blair, argued that
Iraq needed to be deprived of WMDs or else the world would face a future catastrophe.
Yet, as the dust settled and it become clear that little evidence could be found to support
pre-invasion assertions, the justifications used to ‘sell’ the war began to change. The images of mushroom clouds and man-made pestilences were gradually abandoned as Australia’s motivations for coalition participation moved from a *casus belli* argument regarding the scourge of terrorism and the potential of mass destruction, to a more altruistic justification of helping an oppressed people break free from the shackles of tyranny. This observation does not, of course, imply support for the former government of Saddam Hussein, or to suggest that a stable dictatorship is somehow preferable to an unstable representative democracy. This author does not believe in a political/cultural relativist position of ‘don’t judge our political system by your values’. It is, rather, to note that such a clear shift in the government’s public reasons for going to war begs a number of questions regarding the sincerity of government ministers, not to mention the effectiveness of Australia’s costly intelligence agencies. With a number of studies having shown the power of the news media to set the public agenda (see, for instance, Iyengar and Reeves, 1997), such a shift in the *raison d’être* for war also raises pertinent questions regarding the media’s role in manufacturing (at least partial) consent for this belligerent course of action. Although it is relatively easy to argue that the governments of Bush, Blair and Howard are ultimately responsible for the chaos in Iraq, and that the new governments of these nations must now work to alleviate the suffering, what level of responsibility, if any, should be laid at the feet of the news media? Or, more accurately, what level of responsibility can be assigned to different media corporations?

**Final Questions**
This question of responsibility is about more than merely assigning blame. It is a question with deeper significance, of fundamental importance to understanding the ‘nature’ of the news media, one that delves directly into issues of journalistic quality. By drawing the eye of the inquirer back to issues of media content, this question considers the role of journalists and editors (be their ‘participation’ witting or unwitting) in the dissemination of propagandistic arguments and the reproduction of particularly biased ideological interpretations of the world. Importantly, it also acknowledges that not all media corporations, or their various publications and programmes, are equal when it comes to questions of veracity and truth. Indeed, the question is in part born out of a tendency within socio-cultural media theory to discuss the news media as a homogeneous mass, as an ‘industry’ rather than ‘industries’. Although sweeping generalisations regarding media effects or media bias are not without some theoretical support, and are perhaps unavoidable given the size of the field of inquiry, it is important to return to the micro level of structures, practices and content, in order to confirm (empirically) macro conceptualisations and propositions. Like the 20th century debates within sociology that saw the return of human agency to grand (structural) theory, focussing on individual companies can create juxtapositions more amenable to mapping the behaviour, and effects, of influential, ‘market leading’, corporations. It is, accordingly, not enough simply to state that ‘the news media constructed biased representations of the Iraq War’, without identifying the role played by individual media corporations, and the forces ultimately shaping their editorial policy. Through adopting this analytical approach to media study, it is easier to understand the role played by the mega media companies, such as Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation, in the political processes of democratic nations.
Indeed, in order to understand fully Australia’s participation in the invasion of Iraq, it is necessary to understand the role played by the Murdoch media in ‘selling’ and ‘legitimising’ the war. Democratic governments, of course, must obtain at least partial public support for the conduct of war (Hibbert and Starr, 2004:67); otherwise they face mass civil dissent and eventual removal from office. Like his coalition partners in the US and the UK, John Howard retained office in the post-invasion political climate, suggesting that the Iraq War, although unpopular in early 2003 (particularly without the support of the United Nations), was of far less influence on voters in the federal election of the 9 October, 2004. Voters were seemingly so unmoved by the then Leader of the Opposition Mark Latham’s pledge to withdraw Australian forces from Iraq by Christmas 2004 (which at the time was less than three months away), that the issue barely gained any media ‘traction’. This is not, however, to blame the Murdoch media for the electoral misfortunes of Mark Latham and the Australian Labor Party: many domestic issues, and other factors, played a part in the re-election of the Howard Government. It is, rather, to suggest that the Murdoch news media, which in Australia commands approximately 70 per cent of metropolitan newspaper sales (among several other media assets), helped to turn public opinion from the anti-war anger driving mass demonstrations, the like of which had not been seen since the Vietnam War, towards an ethically muddled apathy regarding how best to fix a situation which has no clear or easy solution. As conservative commentators have argued since the invasion, although many Australians might have initially opposed the military action, especially before the commencement of hostilities, it is another thing entirely to advocate that Australian forces abandon Iraq to the sectarian
violence threatening lives and infrastructure (yet this argument failed to influence Australia’s new Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, who maintained the Labor Party’s 2007 election promise to withdraw all military forces by mid-2009).

While it cannot be determined to what exact degree Murdoch’s Australian media shaped popular perceptions of either the invasion or the ensuing occupation/stabilisation without undertaking mass audience studies (well beyond the scope of this thesis), the argument that Murdoch played a role in legitimising the Iraq War is not without scholarly support. For instance, Australian political scientist Robert Manne has argued that the agenda setting Murdoch press, which helps set the tone for commercial talkback radio and other politically influential news sources, argued loudly for invasion, and has in the years of chaos since continued to support the occupation along the lines of the official Bush White House script. Exploring the opinion pages of a number of Murdoch’s most widely read newspapers, such as The Australian (national circulation), the Herald Sun (Melbourne’s most read newspaper) and the Daily Telegraph (Sydney’s most read newspaper), Manne (2005a:78) argues that:

Through their editorials, opinion columnists and the presentation of the news, these newspapers softened an originally hostile and sceptical public in preparation for Australia’s participation in the invasion of Iraq in March 2003, an invasion many political commentators around the world still regard as unlawful, unprovoked and unnecessary. When the justification for the invasion — Iraq’s supposed possession of an arsenal of weapons of mass destruction — turned out
to be totally false, and when Iraq began to fall apart, these same papers helped reconcile public opinion to what the government had done.

Supporting the claims made by Roy Greenslade (2003), Manne (2005a:75-77) further argues that pervading the Murdoch press in Australia, on the issue of invading Iraq, there was a standardising of editorial opinion (with the initial exception of the Hobart Mercury, which, after receiving a letter from ‘head office’, fell quietly into line). Indeed, Manne (2005a:76-77) notes that Murdoch, like his honesty in foregrounding oil as an incentive for the coalition’s war against Iraq (see Greenslade, 2003:1), does not even pretend to let his editors exercise independent thinking on issues of interest to him:

As [Murdoch] laconically explained to an ABC journalist at News Corporation’s final shareholders’ meeting in Adelaide in October 2004: ‘With our newspapers we have indeed supported Bush’s foreign policy. And we remain committed that way’.

While Murdoch’s admission clearly highlights the potentially propagandistic nature of news media dominated by an old-fashioned press baron, it does not explain satisfactorily the manner in which his political views become manifest in his publications, or, indeed, to what extent. Once again, questions arise regarding the nature of media content. In a media market such as Australia’s, where newspapers aim (at least publicly) for the political centre (so as not to alienate potential readers), what form of support did the CEO’s voice take? Was it restricted to the editorial and opinion pages of his newspapers,
or were entire newspapers subjected to distortions of representation in accordance with the views of the proprietor? Importantly, what is the evidence that allows the Murdoch press to be labelled ‘biased’?

These questions are the focus of the next chapter, and are explored by analysing the coverage of the flagship of the Murdoch press, *The Australian*, and its chief commercial rival in New South Wales, Fairfax’s the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Drawing on both qualitative and quantitative content analysis, as well as a semiotic case study, the chapter deconstructs the various representations presented in the two newspapers, creating juxtapositions of competing truth claims. In particular, this empirical exploration deconstructs the ‘official’ Iraq War/weapons of mass destruction (WMD) story, reflecting on the veracity of the accounts. For behind the public rhetoric concerning the ‘WMDs’ and suicidal terrorists, there were less reported invasion motivations, such as the geo-strategic interests of the United States, the self-righteousness of core neoconservative beliefs, Iraq’s immense oil reserves, and, in Australia’s case, a closer relationship (both economically and militarily) with a ‘great and powerful friend’. The tabulations and analyses in the following empirical chapter will aid the above discussion in the re-contextualisation of a socio-historical event that continues to have far reaching repercussions.
Chapter 5

Searching for Media Bias: Empirical Data and Analyses
Chapter 5  Searching for Media Bias: Empirical Data and Analyses

Oh, I believe [President George W.] Bush is right, certainly. Well, we can’t back down now, where you hand over the whole of the Middle East to Saddam [Hussein], and I think Bush is acting very morally, very correctly, and I think he is going to go on with it.

Rupert Murdoch


This chapter is concerned with the media coverage of the unfolding ‘Iraq/weapons of mass destruction crisis’ of early 2003, focussing on two of Australia’s most influential newspapers, The Australian (owned by Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation) and the Sydney Morning Herald (SMH) (owned by Fairfax Media Limited). The Australian and the SMH were chosen for analysis for three reasons: first, in the geo-political context of Australia, both broadsheet newspapers are archetypical ‘agenda-setting’ news media, ‘uncovering’ stories that are subsequently picked up by the tabloid press and the broadcast media (see Pearson et al., 2001); second, The Australian is commonly considered the flagship of Murdoch’s Australian news media (as is demonstrated by both his unwavering financial support for the daily broadsheet, despite it reportedly running budget deficits for the first 20 years of its operation — see Cryle, 2007; McKnight, 2003); third, the SMH is one of the world’s oldest, continuously published, daily newspapers, and is the broadsheet metropolitan newspaper of Australia’s largest city, Sydney. Primarily, the following empirical analysis seeks to identify the manifestation of ideology in The Australian, using a comparative contrast with the content of the
ostensibly more neutral SMH as a way of testing the results (unlike Rupert Murdoch, neither the directors nor the dominant shareholders of Fairfax Media indicated public support or opposition for the war). As Appendix A and Appendix B discuss the methodology used in the following analysis, this chapter does not address research practices or reflections. Rather, it focuses on analysing the results of the research process, and concludes by exploring their implications vis-à-vis the earlier discussion on media power and politics. Yet, before proceeding to the empirical findings, it is necessary at this juncture to reiterate an operational definition of bias.

As was noted in Chapter 3, Denis McQuail (1992) believes that the concept of bias can be split into four analytical categories that, when considered collectively, constitute a typology of the concept: ‘Unwitting’ (bias that is explicit and yet unconsciously encoded); ‘Ideological’ (implicit and unconsciously encoded); ‘Partisan’ (explicit and consciously encoded); and ‘Propaganda’ (implicit and consciously encoded). While McQuail’s (1992) classifications premise a notion of objectivity, the do, nonetheless, effectively problematise the concept of bias, and draw attention to what can be considered greater or lesser distortions of representation (with propaganda, for example, being more ethically repugnant than unwitting bias). Yet, answering questions regarding the intent behind the creation of a media text (whether its bias is a deliberate outcome of news production or merely an unintended consequence) is fraught with difficulties, and is not a goal of this thesis. Indeed, an analytical focus on the intent of news workers requires substantial supporting data, ideally in the form of testimonial evidence or ‘first-hand’ ethnographic observations — primary research material beyond the scope of this
thesis (although biographical accounts of media companies provide an alternative to such data — as was demonstrated in the history component of Chapter 2).

However, as will be made clear below, it is possible to identify the textual manifestation of bias (regardless of its type) through the use of empirical measurements and semiotic deconstructions. To a certain extent, such research methods make it possible to reflect on the issue of ‘intent’ behind a constructed representation, a process that needs also to include ‘reliable’ contextual details regarding the studied media organisation and the event in question (details such as those presented in the previous chapters of this dissertation — in particular, Chapter 2 and Chapter 4). Yet, uncovering the ‘intent’ of the encoder should not be interpreted as the central goal of an empirical assessment of media texts, nor do researchers need to aim to identify, categorically, the type of bias discerned within a text. McQuail’s concepts are useful for thinking about human agency within the structure of a news company, yet such matters are largely of secondary importance to the task of exposing how a representation is biased. Indeed, while McQuail shows that there are various types of bias — with some texts being far more ‘truthful’ in their representations than others — the primary goal of the media researcher, at least in the first instance, should be to identify those texts that can be classified as biased (regardless of its type), and whether such biased texts amount to a significant, institution-wide, empirical trend. This is an empirically grounded research process that requires the establishment of several conceptual guidelines.
For instance, as media texts are all constructed ‘representations’ (or interpretations of available information according to the professional ‘news values’ of the journalist) and are, therefore, flawed conduits for the communication of ‘reality’ (at least in an unproblematic, ‘absolute’ sense of the term), all texts are, to a certain lesser or greater extent, biased. Thus, the research methods used to detect bias (or, indeed, biases) are essentially seeking to determine which texts are ‘better’ than others, or which texts are more ‘truthful’ in their journalistic accounts (this assessment is made possible provided that the researcher has access to ‘reliable’ — hopefully independent and factual — sources of information; as presented in the previous chapter). Accordingly, news stories can be placed on the analytical ‘scales’ of the social scientist, with the truth content of particular news sources weighed against competing representations of the same event (be they from scholarly analyses and/or other news media). In seeking evidence of bias, this assessment must identify a reasonable level of ‘balance’, where balance refers to the equitable inclusion of differing interpretations (Starkey, 2007). Although not incontrovertible, the notion of bias defined as a ‘lack of balance’ is often the starting point for research aiming to assess the impartiality or objectivity of media texts, with the space or time given to opposing political parties or causes often used in empirical studies seeking to determine equitable ‘balance’ (as was noted in Chapter 3).

However, as defining bias by an absence of balance requires both a longitudinal and broad research focus — suitable more for explaining entire newspapers or news programmes rather than individual stories — the assessment of bias must also consider the ‘character’, or quality, of media content (Street, 2001:33). In other words, particular
attention must be paid to individual stories, and their layers of meaning, in order to assess news articles for what are commonly considered the important features of good journalism, such as the level of ‘factual detail’, the tone of the narrative (whether it be objective or rhetorical), and other professional practices, such as the disclosure of commercial interests or relationships when reporting on matters connected to the news company.

A biased news story is, therefore, unbalanced journalism, in that it frames (or, indeed, ignores) certain details of an event or issue in a manner that ‘unfairly’ favours the interests of a particular ontological outlook or ideological agenda. As was first noted in Chapter 3, in seeking to establish bias it is necessary to identify:

1. How much news space was directly provided to the unedited reproduction of different statements by political actors;

2. Whether factual details, identified as critical by scholars or other media sources, were ignored, trivialised or omitted;

3. The authoritative sources used in explaining this event

4. Which words were used to describe and frame the event, and whether some words used more frequently than others;

5. Whether the use of certain words or phrases (such as pejoratives or negative adjectives) undermined the objective tone or overall balance of different news articles;
6. The common narratives and myths drawn upon in structuring and framing the story, and whether some frames were used more frequently.

Findings from such questions are suggestive rather than absolute indications of deliberate distortions of the ‘truth’ (as was noted earlier), yet by engaging with media texts at both the qualitative and quantitative level media researchers can, nonetheless, build comparative analyses, such as those immediately below, that juxtapose and assess the quality of different news media. What follows works towards this goal.

**Quantitative Content Analysis**

In order to explore these questions of journalistic quality and ideological bias, this thesis employs three different methods of textual analysis: quantitative content analysis, interpretative (or qualitative) content analysis, and semiotic analysis. Formulated with the intent of going deeper than single-method forms of textual analysis (which are the norm in media related inquiry), this triadic methodological approach enabled the studied newspapers to be vigorously ‘cross examined’ in accordance with the epistemological principle of ‘triangulation’ (using three points of reference in a process of empirical validation), a principle more often associated with the multiple statistical and ethnographical methods employed by social scientists in the study of human behaviour than those who study media content (see Jankowski and Wester, 1991:61-63). Using the 30 days immediately prior to the US-led coalition’s invasion of Iraq as the defining parameter of the research sample (from the 21 February to 21 March, 2003), the first research method, quantitative content analysis, was focused solely on the manifest
content of the studied newspapers (thus aspiring to a high degree of objective ‘inter-coder reliability’ — in the sense that other researchers should obtain similar results should they employ the same methods). After having first established a basic coding scheme (see Appendix C), quantitative content analysis was used to search the sampled newspapers for the pre-determined ‘units of measure’. In essence, this quantitative research process sought three objectives: first, to identify the extent to which a potential war with Iraq was being discussed in either newspaper; second, to measure some of the ‘indexical words’ (or keywords) used to communicate the Iraq story (those words suggestive of different ideological frames); and third, to identify and measure the space given to certain authoritative sources — such as politicians, military personnel and academics — in discussing, defining and framing this event.

In essence, the first tabulations generated from the ‘units of measure’, Figures 4.1 and 4.2, provide an overview of the placement of all articles in *The Australian* and the *SMH* that mention the key terms ‘Iraq’ and ‘war’ somewhere within their text, along with those small articles (found in ‘the news in brief’ columns) and letters to the editor that were clearly discussing the potential conflict. Despite their complexity, Figures 4.1 and 4.2 show the news dispersal pattern for the Iraq War story during the sampled period (until ‘saturation of coverage’ after the commencement of the invasion). The data show a gradual increase in the reportage of the Iraq War story as both broadsheet newspapers ‘counted down’ to the outbreak of hostilities (as was noted earlier, for much of the sample *The Australian* ran the subheading ‘Countdown to War’ on relevant news pages). Beyond this expected and somewhat insignificant finding, these graphs *per se* are limited
in what insights they can shed, as each data set explores a different feature of either
ewspaper. Yet what is discernable from this juxtaposition is that, although overall there
is not much difference between the dispersal patterns for the sampled newspapers, the
SMH had a clear rise in the number of letters to the editor (or, more commonly, ‘Letters’) as ‘the road to war’ was travelled with increasing velocity (‘The Road to War’ was a
popular subheading in the SMH during this period). Although it cannot be determined
whether The Australian was receiving the same quantity of Letters during the sampled
period, the empirical difference between the newspapers here is perhaps suggestive of
diverging editorial practices, at least in regard to the amount of space provided to public
opinion, with the SMH seemingly allowing a slightly greater exchange of public voices
during this emotional period.

Figure 4.1: ‘Iraq War’ articles in The Australian, from 21 February to 21 March, 2003
In addition to determining how many relevant articles were placed within the different sections of each newspaper, the quantitative content analysis also measured the size of each article. As can be seen by juxtaposing Figure 5.1 and Figure 5.2, both newspapers provided a similar amount of small and large articles concerning the developing Iraq crisis (with the SMH containing more small articles than The Australian), and the high number of large articles in both newspapers is clearly indicative of their broadsheet format (the general rule is: more page space, more content). Although these graphs are useful for illustrating the increase in the reportage of the Iraq crisis as Australia’s military prepared for war, they also demonstrate that both newspapers provided approximately equal levels of ‘news’ and opinion’ on the unfolding story, and had not as yet succumbed
to the commercial forces downsizing the news rooms and content of former broadsheet newspapers (in recent years, newspapers have, of course, struggled to maintain their circulations and financial viability — see, for instance, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2008).

Figure 5.1 Overview of article size in *The Australian*, from 21 February to 21 March, 2003

![Figure 5.1](image1)

Figure 5.2 Overview of articles size in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, from 21 February to 21 March, 2003

![Figure 5.2](image2)
Whereas the empirical significance of the above graphs is marginal, with the tabulations useful only inasmuch as they provide insights into the extent of the coverage provided by the sampled newspapers, the second data set (or ‘units of measure’) yielded far more instructive findings. Continuing the focus on manifest content, these data provide insights into the ‘type’ of coverage present in each newspaper (in relation to both tone and focus), highlighting the use of certain ‘indexical words’ (or keywords), heavy with either pro-war or anti-war connotations (see the Appendices for definitional details). Such data are suggestive of the focus and emphasis of each newspaper, and highlight incidents of content omissions and ideological bias. For instance, Figure 6 depicts the total use of indexical words by The Australian and the SMH. Supporting the proposition that Rupert Murdoch’s newspapers represent the CEO’s political beliefs, the data from The Australian showed clear signs of being generally more pro-war than its rival. Indeed, implying ideological bias, The Australian was far more likely than the SMH to use the emotive (and rhetorical) justification of ‘weapons of mass destruction’ (rather than the use of more precise terminology).

The Australian was also far less likely to label the ‘military action’ an ‘invasion’ than was the SMH (thereby avoiding stark connotations of military aggression). Moreover, The Australian was more likely to mention ‘collateral damage’, and less likely to mention the potential for ‘civil casualties’, than the SMH (albeit, the statistical difference for this last indexical word category was only slight). Importantly, The Australian was also more likely to discuss al-Qaeda and terrorism in an article mentioning Iraq than the SMH, thereby discursively supporting attempts made by the governments in Washington,
London and Canberra to link conceptually Saddam Hussein’s regime with the haunting images of the collapsing twin towers. Yet, perhaps the most telling statistical differentiation from the indexical word data relates to Iraq’s immense natural resources. For, although the critics of the invasion highlighted oil as a potential motivation behind the US-led military juggernaut, The Australian mentions this valuable commodity far less than the SMH, despite the prospect that crude oil prices would undoubtedly be affected by any war in the Middle East.

Figure 6 Indexical words in Iraq War news items in The Australian and The Sydney Morning Herald, from 21 February to 21 March, 2003

Although such data yield only a general overview of the relevant coverage in the weeks leading up to the invasion, splitting these ‘indexical units’ into categories according to article placement highlights the extent to which certain sections of the sampled newspapers were more balanced or, indeed, more biased. For instance, Figure 7 shows
the indexical word counts for the Opinion and Editorial pages (excluding the letters to the editor), as well as those words counts for the ‘News Feature’ pages (and similar sections, such as ‘News Insight’ or ‘Analysis’). To a large extent the pages from these sections reflect the editorial policies shaping the official (and unofficial) ideological stance of each newspaper, with the ‘objective’ prose of serious journalism abandoned for more engaging and emotive news narratives. Although in these graphs some of the instances of statistical differentiation are less striking, the indexical word count for this tabulation continues to highlight that The Australian possessed a more pro-war disposition, with the News Limited newspaper once again far more likely to employ the unqualified phrase ‘weapons of mass destruction’ (or ‘WMDs’), and far less likely to mention telling keywords such as ‘invasion’ or ‘oil’.

Figure 7 Indexical words in Iraq War news items, within the news feature, opinion and editorial pages of The Australian and The Sydney Morning Herald, from 21 February to 21 March, 2003
With the notable exception of their references to ‘WMDs’, ‘invasion’ and ‘oil’, the New Features, Opinion and Editorial pages of *The Australian* and the *SMH* showed that the two newspapers discussed similar themes and issues (at least in reference to the ‘Iraq story’). In contrast, Figure 8 is generated from the Regular News pages, and re-asserts the extent to which the two newspapers differed in their foci. Here the empirical differences are once again stark in a number of areas, with the *SMH* far more likely to mention ‘oil’ and ‘invasion’ than *The Australian*. ‘Terrorism’ also manifested a strong statistical resonance within *The Australia*, implying a greater blurring of the boundaries between the ‘war on terror’, al-Qaeda, September 11 and Iraq (a finding further supported by the methodology’s other qualitative forms of textual analysis — discussed below). Although such indexical word counts are in themselves insufficient evidence on which to base definitive conclusions regarding balance or bias, collectively these data are suggestive of a qualitative difference in the type of coverage provided by the two newspapers.
To complement the findings of the indexical word counts, the next data set sought to identify how often particular authoritative sources — such as members of opposing political parties or conservative or liberal\textsuperscript{28} commentators — were directly quoted in order to contextualise, ‘flesh-out’ or frame a particular story. As noted earlier, measurements regarding the different voices published in the news media are a popular research method for those researchers who posit that bias is defined by a lack of balance, with the research approach capable of providing clear insights into the diversity of

\textsuperscript{28} It is important to note that the use of the word ‘liberal’ here denotes the increasingly pervasive American definition of the term, synonymous with the now less common ‘leftist’, and does not refer to the Australian Liberal Party (which, in fact, is Australia’s major conservative party). At the birth of the Liberal Party in 1943, members decided that they would unite themselves behind the banner of ‘Liberal’ in order to associate themselves with the political ideals of liberalism (see Hancock, 2000; Starr, 1980). In Australia today, the Liberal Party believes in economic rationalism (or neo-liberalism), while remaining a party dominated by self-proclaimed conservatives.
opinion within a collection of texts (and thus further insights into the different ideologies resonating within parts of the public sphere). Of course, the search for balance must be adjusted to match the definitional needs of each different study. Thus the ‘categories of analysis’ must be ‘operationalised’ according to the socio-political complexities and context of the events being studied.

For instance, whereas in Australia the debate regarding the invasion of Iraq was split neatly along party-political lines (with the Left opposed and the Right in favour), in the United States and in the United Kingdom partisan support was not as cleanly divided, with many members of the opposition parties — be they from the US Democrats or the British Conservatives — supporting the conflict. Consequently, this study could not identify how often members of ‘opposing’ political parties were quoted (as was originally hoped). Rather, it was necessary to adjust the counting of units according to both the national context, and the views that were being expressed. Thus, whereas for the Australian geo-political context a member of the Liberal/National coalition government could be coded as pro-war (with members of the Labor Party, the Democrats and the Greens being anti-war), in the US and the UK attention had to be paid to what was being said, and by whom, in order to ensure that dissenting voices within both the British Labour Party and the US Republican government could be classified as being either pro-war or anti-war (see Figure 9 below).

This classification of ‘authoritative sources’ also tracked the textual appearances of individuals other than politicians, such as military personnel and academics (who are, of
course, primary definers of particular news events — albeit, individuals with less symbolic power than news-making politicians). Data regarding the quotation of military personnel and academics are useful for providing insights into which individuals are populating the columns of newspapers (other than the ‘news makers’), and are to a certain extent indicative of the level of analytical depth within the sampled newspapers. Soldiers were, for instance, drawn upon to provide a very different source of information than that of a scholar; whereas stories regarding the life of the troops on ‘forward deployment’ in the Middle East formed part of a very different news narrative than those from an article in which a scholar is quoted in order to explain a particular course of action. Indeed, in general, academics were far more critical of the casus belli arguments being put forward by the exponents of the invasion (be they pro-war politicians or media commentators) than were military personnel (whose job, regardless of their personal beliefs, would be to serve in such an undertaking\textsuperscript{29}). Yet, rather than statements from military personnel or scholars, the authoritative quotations structuring the different news stories were more commonly small ‘sound bites’ taken from regular citizens somehow involved with the events being covered (if only indirectly). Accordingly, this section of the data analysis also recorded the number of times a non-expert voice was manifest (in the form of direct quotations) within the sampled news pieces. As the issue of ‘WMDs’ and the arguments regarding the invasion of Iraq were ‘emotionally charged’ debates, many of the shrillest voices, be they for or against the war, were included in this data set, with most originating from concerned citizens quoted (perhaps ostensibly) to balance the

\textsuperscript{29} It is important to note that many of the military personnel quoted in the sampled newspapers did not directly advocate or oppose the idea of an invasion, but spoke instead of ‘military capabilities’ and their daily experiences (‘on forward deployment’) in the Middle East. Nevertheless, statements made by military personnel often helped to support the prevalent pro-war discourse regarding the dangers posed by Saddam Hussein and his weapons of mass destruction.
other perspectives within a particular article. Such individuals, where appropriate, were recorded in the liberal or conservative commentary categories (see Figure 9).

Figure 9 Quoted sources in Iraq War news items, in *The Australian* and *The Sydney Morning Herald*, from 21 February to 21 March, 2003

As Figure 9 shows, in both *The Australian* and the *SMH* pro-war members of the Republican government, as one would expect given the more newsworthy status of the ‘key players’ in the Bush administration, were quoted far more often than their political detractors or opponents. Similarly, at least as far as *The Australian*’s readers were concerned, anti-war statements made by members of the British parliament were perhaps of less ‘news value’ than the statements made by the British prime minister. It is, therefore, also unsurprising that, here again, the balance is skewed towards ‘the news makers’ of the UK context, some of whom, such as former Prime Minister Tony Blair,
were also central figures in the unfolding Iraq crisis (this statistical difference is slightly greater for *The Australian* than for the *SMH*).

In Australia, one would assume that the cabinet members of the federal government would also appear in the news more often than their opposition counterparts, with the difference here being much smaller given the greater importance of the political opposition to local readers (which was at that time the Australian Labor Party). Yet, as can be seen in Figure 9, this difference is quite large, especially for *The Australian*, with members of the Howard Coalition Government considered of far greater news value than members of the opposition parties (be they from Labor or the minor political parties, such as the Greens or the Australian Democrats). In essence, Figure 9 shows a slight statistical leaning towards politicians from the pro-war political Right/Centre. It is also apparent that military personnel are quoted more often than scholars (be they historians, political scientists or others), fitting with this seemingly pro-war discursive formation. However, by far the largest single statistical difference in these graphs is the domination of the conservative/pro-war commentators by their diametrical opposite. Indeed, at first glance such a stark differentiation undermines the findings discussed thus far, suggesting a strong anti-war voice resonating throughout both newspapers. Yet, this point is challenged in the next data set where ‘space’ (as determined by the number of words in a direct quotation) is the unit of measure, rather than the frequency of appearance (see Figures 12 to 14 below).
In a manner similar to the sectional split of the indexical word data set discussed above, the data on the Authoritative Sources were also divided into categories capable of garnering insights into the character of different newspaper sections. As can be seen, Figure 10 shows similar characteristics to the tabulations for the entire newspapers (Figure 9 above), with all categories (barring the very notable exception of ‘liberal commentators’) indicating a greater textual presence of ‘pro-war’ individuals. Once again, data from The Australian displays this trend more than that from the SMH, suggesting that this newspaper’s pages from the News Features, Opinion and Editorial sections lean further to the pro-war Right (provided one ignores, for the moment, the high
manifestation of ‘liberal commentators/anti-war commentators’\textsuperscript{30} — discussed below).

Indeed, this trend is also present in the graphs highlighting the characteristics of the Regular News articles (Figure 11), with the data from \textit{The Australian} suggesting (once again) that this newspaper, more so than the \textit{SMH}, possessed a slant towards the conservative/neoconservative\textsuperscript{31} end of the political spectrum (although the differences in the graph for the Regular News articles are not as striking as they are for the News Features, Opinion and Editorial pages, due to the normative journalistic values regarding objectivity and balance applied by journalists to ‘news’ as opposed to ‘opinion’).

\textsuperscript{30} The miscellaneous category ‘other conservative commentator’ included all individuals who were clearly advocating a pro-war ideological position, but who did not belong to any of the other pre-defined classifications. This research approach was also taken for the category ‘other liberal commentator’, which included all those individuals against an invasion of Iraq, but who fell outside the pre-defined anti-war categories.

\textsuperscript{31} Given the widespread adoption of neoconservative ideas at this time (both in the United States and Australia), it was difficult to distinguish ‘traditional conservatives’ from the more radical neoconservatives.
However, in order better to understand the role played by the different authoritative sources drawn upon by journalists and editors in defining and explaining the ‘Iraq War story’, it is necessary not only to track the ‘frequency of appearance’, but also the extent of direct quotation. While an individual might be quoted once or a number of times during the course of the news cycle, the more pertinent question is: how much column space did that person receive in order to express their views? For instance, as indicated above, individuals classified as belonging to the miscellaneous category of anti-war ‘liberal commentator’ appeared far more frequently than any other grouping (seemingly suggesting a strong anti-war slant). Yet, as can be seen in Figure 12, ‘frequency of quotation’ did not equate with figures for the total ‘lengths of quotations’.
For *The Australian*, this difference was more significant than in the *SMH* (see Figure 12), with the data from Murdoch’s newspaper showing that the combined space given to all anti-war quotations was far less than that provided to pro-war quotations (1996 lines versus 3138 lines). What this finding suggests is that in *The Australian*, and to a certain extent also the *SMH*, individuals classified as belonging to the ‘liberal commentator category’ were given much shorter quotations than, for example, federal cabinet politicians. Although this finding can be explained in part through the focus of a particular news article (with a story on anti-war protest clearly going to contain more quotations belonging to ‘liberal commentators’), figures on the relatively small size of liberal quotations are indicative of the ‘news values’ of each media organisation. In relation to the debate immediately prior to the 2003 Iraq War, such values ranked many ‘liberal voices’ as being of lesser importance than those of pro-war ideologues — with the dissenting liberal voices merely ‘sound bites’ needed to ‘flesh out’ a story (at best, a tokenistic gesture of balance).

While to a certain extent it might be expected that pro-war commentators would outnumber their liberal detractors, as arguably it is more important to hear what the president of the United States has to say on Iraq than, for instance, a disgruntled office worker participating in a protest march, such figures are not easily accounted for by ‘news values’. Indeed, it is reasonable to assume that many of the individuals who were coded as belonging to the ‘liberal commentator category’ were also significant actors within the unfolding controversy, and were not marginal to Iraq/WMD story, such as the head of the United Nations’ weapons inspectors, Hans Blix, and the (now former) French
President, Jacques Chirac (an outspoken opponent to the war). In other words, what this data set suggests is that in as far as the ‘authoritativeness’ of the codified authoritative sources went, ‘liberal commentators’ played less of a role in defining this news event than did their pro-war counterparts.

Figure 12 Lines of quotation from sources in Iraq War news items, in The Australian and The Sydney Morning Herald, from 21 February to 21 March, 2003

Figure 12 does, then, continue to support the proposition that journalists and editorial staff at The Australian provided more favourable coverage, in terms of unedited space\(^\text{32}\), for the neoconservatives (and their ‘hawkish’ allies around the world), than they did for the different groups opposed to the invasion. In splitting this data set according to newspaper sections, the pattern is continued and magnified. For instance, Figure 13

\(^{32}\) In this particular context, ‘space’ refers to the number of line of direct quotation, with an average of 5.5 words per line.
shows that *The Australian*’s News Features, Opinion and Editorial articles, which collectively make up the newspaper’s larger pieces of journalism, clearly favoured the neoconservatives and their allies, with right-wing commentators and US Republicans given far greater space (not only on the opinion and editorial pages) in which to expound their views than their opponents. This trend is significantly different in the *SMH* (Figure 13), where the data indicate a strong leaning towards voices critical of the march to war. Although at first glance this might suggest the *SMH* possessed an anti-war bias on its News Features, Opinion and Editorial pages, this pattern is more likely to be the result of news values — such as the journalistic principle of ‘watchdog scrutiny’ and a desire to report the ‘facts’ — and their collision with the federal government’s public case for war.

*Figure 13 Lines of Quotations from sources in Iraq War news items, within the news feature, opinion and editorial pages of *The Australian* and *The Sydney Morning Herald*, from 21 February to 21 March, 2003*
As one would expect, this pattern suggesting both a pro-war slant in *The Australian* and a somewhat more balanced position in the *SMH* was also reflected within the Regular News articles of both newspapers — although here the data indicate a greater level of balanced journalism in both publications (due, of course, to the normative journalistic values regarding ‘news’ as distinct from opinion). As Figure 14 shows, ‘news making’ politicians (the key members of the governments of the ‘coalition of the willing’) continued to receive greater coverage (in terms of column space) than their Opposition counterparts, with the dissenting or critical voices of ‘liberal commentators’ registering more strongly on the Regular News pages than was the case for the News Features, Opinion and Editorial pages (again, this tendency was greater in *The Australian* than the *SMH*). Here the higher level of oppositional/anti-war voices confirm a more balanced form of journalism for both newspapers, an ‘objective’ style of reporting that includes a diversity of voices based on assumptions regarding newsworthiness. Indeed, if it were not for the juxtaposition with the *SMH*, it would be impossible to determine that *The Australian*’s Regular News pages, like the rest of the newspaper, leaned slightly to the pro-war neoconservative Right. As was noted earlier in this thesis, it is through such comparisons that the truth claims and factual details of different news sources can be weighed and measured, with subtle biases exposed to analytical scrutiny.
In addition to measuring the total space given to the different actors defining the ‘Iraq story’, the final component of the quantitative content analysis endeavoured to track both the ‘frequency of appearance’ and the ‘total space’ given to authoritative sources, as the month defining this sample expired and Australia moved closer to war. The intent here was to search for any pattern that might show a possible intensification in the presence of either pro-war or anti-war voices as debates approached ‘fever pitch’ (data that would perhaps be indicative of a greater level of editorial pressure to manufacture popular consent for any impending military action). Although the generation of such tabulations was possible, little is clearly revealed by the resulting line-graphs (see Figures 15.1, 15.2, as well as Figures 16.1 and 16.2, directly below).
Figure 15.1 Frequencies of quoted authoritative sources in *The Australian*, from 21 February to the 21 March, 2003

![Graph showing frequencies of quoted authoritative sources in *The Australian*.]

Figure 15.2 Frequencies of quoted authoritative sources in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, from 21 February to 21 March, 2003

![Graph showing frequencies of quoted authoritative sources in *The Sydney Morning Herald*.]
Figure 16.1 Lines of direct quotations from authoritative sources in *The Australian*, from the 21 February to 21 March, 2003

![Graph showing lines of direct quotations from authoritative sources in *The Australian*]

Figure 16.2 Lines of direct quotations from authoritative sources in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, from the 21 February to 21 March, 2003

![Graph showing lines of direct quotations from authoritative sources in *The Sydney Morning Herald*]
Accordingly, Figures 15.1, 15.2, 16.1 and 16.2 have been included here so as to complete the disclosure of the collected data. Yet, with the exception of highlighting an increased trend towards more space for the neoconservative/pro-war camp just prior to the outbreak of war (with this trend slightly greater in *The Australian* than the *SMH* — see Figures 16.1 and 16.2), these graphs largely fail to show anything of interest beyond the unpredictable pattern of ‘news’ caught within the tumultuous news cycle, as events are constructed in the ‘first draft of history’. In order, then, to better understand the manifestation of pro-war or anti-war voices, it is necessary to probe deeper into the sampled data by turning to the findings of the interpretative content analysis.

**Interpretative Content Analysis**

Complementing the quantitative content analysis (which was concerned solely with manifest content), the interpretative (or qualitative) content analysis aimed to explore the ‘latent’ ideological dispositions of each newspaper (see Bryman, 2001:183). As interpretative content analysis is more qualitative in its application — and, thus, comes with the risk that other researchers might interpret and code data differently (thereby reducing the validity of an analytical method premised on inter-coder reliability) — it is, nonetheless, a common research method for probing beyond the surface of mass communication, to the level of linguistic and semiotic constructions (Bryman, 2001). In order to ensure a reasonably high level of inter-coder reliability, this thesis deployed clear coding guidelines, restricting the analysis to those articles which showed unambiguous signs of supporting one of the pre-identified ideological dispositions (see Appendix C). Large articles (such as those found on the News Features pages), which initially appeared
‘balanced’ (inasmuch as they mentioned at least some oppositional arguments), were given particular attention, with careful consideration paid to determining the extent of the bias. Accordingly, some of the large articles that were clearly polemics or diatribes, and yet still contained some ‘oppositional perspectives’, were coded (when appropriate) as being ‘partially biased’ (i.e. coded as ‘0.5’ as opposed to the full numerical score of ‘1’). Such research practices limited the total number of articles that could be included within this section of the analysis, while also ensuring that the following tabulations are broadly representative of the tone, or the polemical force, of the collective pro-war and anti-war discourses. Yet such methodological measures strengthen the validity of the following findings (as those articles which comprise this data set were all unambiguous vis-à-vis their views on the proposed invasion of Iraq).

The interpretative component of the content analysis sought to identify whether individual news articles were: (1) pro-war (with the intent of helping the Iraqi people); (2) pro-war (with the intent of protecting Australia and the ‘national interests’); (3) pro-war (combining the above two pro-war themes); (4) pro-war (with different themes to the above two); (5) against the war (with the conflict seen as an unwarranted invasion); (6) against the war (without the support of the United Nations); (7) against the war (combining the above two anti-war themes); (8) against the war (with different themes to the above two). As can be seen in Figure 17, the data collected for these categories support many of the inferences made by the quantitative findings, with The Australian showing a clear propensity for pro-war articles by a proportion of approximately two to one (57.5 for the invasion versus 33.5 against). Here also the SMH shows signs of a
higher level of critical (what might be called ‘fourth estate’) journalism. For, while most of the categories for the *SMH* in Figure 17 are fairly even, the last category (which incorporates the miscellaneous anti-war themes) towers over the other classifications. Much like the higher level of ‘liberal commentators’ in the proceeding graphs, the *SMH’s* disproportionate representation of data in the category ‘against the war (with different themes)’ is perhaps indicative more of the values of critical journalism, and the nature of the ‘evidence’ underpinning the Howard Government’s push for war, than of any intentional ‘anti-war’ (or ‘Leftist’) bias. Indeed, the size of each newspaper’s data category for ‘against the war (with different themes)’ shows that both the *SMH* and *The Australian* contained many articles that analysed the opinion polls taken prior to the invasion indicate that, without a mandate from the United Nations, approximately 54 percent of the Australian population were opposed to a military conflict, compared with 36 percent in favour (Goot, 2003:4). Yet polls taken after hostilities had commenced showed an emerging trend in favour of the military intervention, with one poll claiming 57 percent of Australians now supported the war, versus 36 percent against (Goot, 2003:6). Media studies academic Michael Bromley (2004) argues that, after the invasion commenced, a strong national discourse of ‘support the troops’ emerged, effectively shifting public opinion by producing a climate of ‘watch, wait and see’. public case made for war — a critical journalistic feature their ‘serious’ broadsheet status.
Figure 17 Pro-war and anti-war articles in *The Australian* and *The Sydney Morning Herald*, from 21 February to 21 March, 2003

However, despite both newspapers showing signs of quality journalism, *The Australian*’s overall coverage of the Iraq story, clearly, was very different compared to that of the *SMH*. Further supporting many of the findings already suggested by the above data — as well as supporting popular views regarding the biased nature of the Opinion and Editorial pages of *News Corporation*’s newspapers — by splitting this data set according to newspaper sections, a now familiar pattern emerged of a pro-war/pro-neoconservative *Australian* and a more balanced *SMH*. Indeed, as can be seen in Figure 18, there was a stark difference between the ideological dispositions of the News Features, Opinion and Editorial articles of the two newspapers, with *The Australian*’s collective coverage clearly more ‘war mongering’ than ‘fourth estate’ journalism. This finding is further substantiated by the data for the Regular News pages of the newspapers, with Figure 19 showing that *The Australian* possessed both more articles with an ideological disposition
(regardless of which type of classification), and leant more towards the pro-war/neoconservative Right.

Figure 18 Pro-war and anti-war articles in the news feature, opinion and editorial pages of *The Australian* and *The Sydney Morning Herald*, from 21 February to 21 March, 2003
In addition to exploring the ideological dispositions within the journalism of each newspaper, the interpretative content analysis also sought to identify the pro-war and anti-war voices of the public, with the final data set generated from the letters to the editor (or Letters). Unlike the patterns displayed and discussed above, Figure 20 shows that both newspapers overwhelmingly published anti-war letters during the weeks preceding the invasion of Iraq, with the SMH seemingly publishing more anti-war letters in the days immediately prior to the invasion than The Australian (see Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2 above). Although it is possible that the publication of such a large number of anti-war letters — which was higher for the SMH — was the result of random editorial selection processes, it is more likely that this anti-war discrepancy reflects the professional values of the editorial staff and the level of public opposition to the war. This data does, then, highlight the commitment of these newspapers to the public sphere.
ideal of ‘open discussion’, with the Letters pages (at least during the sampled period) providing the space where citizens could engage in the unfolding debate. What this data also shows is that *The Australian* does not merely publish letters that take a particular political or ideological line, but is in fact willing to print the views of its readers regardless of whether such views run contrary to those that dominate the News Features, Opinion and Editorial pages. In other words, despite that *The Australian* (taken as a whole) supported the neoconservative Right and the Howard Government’s push for war, there were some anti-war voices and discourses present in the editorial/opinion sections of the newspaper.

Such oppositional public voices can, of course, undermine the hegemony of the official views as structured, selected and written by editorial staff. Thus newspapers like *The Australian* and the *SMH* can carry many contradictory ideological themes (which collectively frame different events and issues), with the content of articles read and interpreted in part based on information from other sources (which could potentially include stories/letters from the same news page). The manner by which articles on the same topic and on the same page can contain different, sometimes contradictory, meanings in a process of articulating meaning referred to as ‘intratextuality’ is the focus of the semiotic analysis below.
Figure 20 Pro-war and anti-war Letters to the Editor, in *The Australian* and *The Sydney Morning Herald*, from 21 February to 21 March, 2003

**Semiotic Analysis: A Case Study in Representation**

The third method of textual analysis comprising the triadic methodology of this thesis, semiotic analysis, also focused on the latent ideological content of the sampled newspapers. Yet, unlike the longitudinal capabilities of content analysis, the intricate nature of the semiotic critique, where individual texts have their outer ‘layers of meaning’ removed in order to expose the cultural assumptions and prejudices that lie beneath the constructed (or ‘signified’) representations, makes the qualitative method suitable only for a case study approach to media inquiry. As such, the texts which make up the semiotic section of this analysis have been deliberately selected for inclusion (rather than the result of a random process of sample selection). Yet, these texts have not been chosen as overt or extreme examples of the types of reportage that characterised the Iraq War
story during the lead up to the invasion. Indeed, while it was relatively easy to locate articles (particularly from the opinion and editorial pages) that blatantly took either a pro-war or anti-war position (due to the diversity of journalists and guest columnists), clearly such an approach would be epistemologically flawed and somewhat dishonest — merely a polemical example rather than a truly indicative representation. As this study seeks insights into the level of balance of each newspaper, as well as into the official editorial line of both news organisations, the need for a selective, yet fair, sample was apparent from the outset.

Rather than selecting blatantly biased texts (regardless of whether they were for or against the invasion), the news pages comprising this case study were chosen because they: (1) were broadly indicative of the style of journalism offered by either newspaper (thanks to their date of publication and their position within the overall layout of the newspaper); (2) highlighted the official editorial position of the newspaper (being the editorials that most directly address Australia’s involvement in the war). As such, it was decided that the case study would consist of four news pages: the front page of each newspaper on the day after the United States launched the opening military air strikes (21 March, 2003); and the editorial pages, or rather columns, that best highlighted the official editorial position vis-à-vis the war. Initially it was hoped that the respective editorials on the first day of the war could be used to comprise part of the case study. While this was possible for The Australian, for the SMH the editorial page from the 19 March, 2003 had to be used — being the closest to 20 March 2003 on which the newspaper provided editorial comment regarding the invasion — as the editorial page from the 21 March
2003 referred only to a general election in the state of New South Wales (which took place on the following day: 22 March, 2003). Despite the obvious limitations of an inductive analysis based on a selection of only four texts, the sampled news pages, nonetheless, contained a number of the central narratives and myths used to frame representations of the unfolding Iraq crisis, and are to a certain extent indicative of the reportage styles and ideological beliefs that characterised these newspapers during this particular socio-historical context. Such a result is due to the significance of front page news items and the unambiguous elucidation of political views in the editorials.

As is discussed in much more detail in the appendices of this thesis (see Appendix A and B), the semiotic critique employed in studying the sampled texts can be considered a ‘post-postmodern’ version of textual analysis, in the sense that the technique is used in light of poststructural criticisms of (structural) semiology, such as those mounted by Jacques Derrida (1976; see also Gottdiener, 1995). Yet, in acknowledging the epistemological problems posed by ‘polysemy’ and ‘intertextuality’ (and the potential for infinite interpretations of signs, which in turn refer merely to other signs), this thesis does not ascribe to the philosophical idealism articulated by the latter work of the postmodern iconoclast Jean Baudrillard (as discussed above), nor his notion of ‘hyperreality’ (where images and signs merely refer to each other, rather than a referent). Nor does this thesis agree with Derrida’s polemical and deliberately provocative statement that ‘there is nothing but the text’ (Derrida cited in Gottdiener, 1995:19). Rather, this semiotic analysis sits within the more sociological and pragmatic traditions of social inquiry: an approach
that seeks to understand the communicative properties of cultural artefacts (or ‘texts’) in relation to the socio-cultural and political context in which they were created.

Informed, then, by the concepts of the pioneers of the semiotic research method — Ferdinand de Saussure (1960), Charles Saunders Peirce (1960) and (the early work) of Roland Barthes (1964; 1973) — as well as by some of the concepts of leading ‘poststructural’ thinkers, such as Jacques Derrida’s (1976) notion of ‘deconstructionism’ and Michel Foucault’s (1980) emphasis on discourses and power — the following analysis is concerned less with a detailed structuralist classification of all the evident content contained within the sampled texts, and more with the types of manifest and latent ideological codes intentionally and unintentionally inscribed (or, rather, ‘encoded’ — Hall, 1980) by journalists and editors. In other words, although texts can indeed be read differently by different interpreters (as meaning is not inherent but rather loosely confined by cultural specific semantic fields, or the meta schemas of interpretation), the goal of semiotic analysis (or, indeed, of other forms of qualitative textual analysis) should be to expose (through demystification) the ontological values that shape the content and meaning of the ‘news’, seeking to identify the ‘preferred’ or ‘dominant’ meanings that ultimately ‘texture’ one’s mediated reality (Hall, 1980). This form of analysis is not the same as assuming a single unbiased or ‘correct’ articulation of meaning (made possible perhaps through the more ‘truthful’ use of certain signs and the avoidance of myth connotations). But, rather, that there are better elucidations of the ‘facts’ (the details of particular events), more critical accounts in which the ideals of accurate reportage and balance become somewhat less problematic. Such an approach seeks to assess the
veracity of accounts through comparative semiotic analyses, and is capable of reflecting on the ‘biasness’ of a text by assessing: (1) its level of detail; (2) the types of narrative and myth employed in the creation of the news story (Bird and Dardenne, 1988); and (3), whether such content amounts to a ‘fair and balanced’ representation (see, for example, Hobbs, 2007a).

In order to assess the veracity of competing representations, the first step of the semiotic critique should be to reflect on the narratives (and the discourses) that permeate both media texts and the socio-historical context in which a particular text has been produced, as such ideological codes are integral to defining the possible meanings made available by the news media. As Bird and Dardenne (1988) argue:

> While news is not fiction, it is a story about reality, not reality itself. Yet because of its privileged status as reality and truth, the seductive powers of its narratives are particular significant.

Indeed, ‘news’ by definition is a ‘factual’ narrative, a story in which meaning is produced through the (‘syntagmatic’) progression of linguistic and/or visual signs (Bignell, 1997). Such narratives are the products of the values and beliefs of a particular culture — tied to the different ‘discursive formations’ facilitating the ‘regimes of truth’ of a particular socio-historical context (Foucault cited by Hall, 1997:41-52) — and are, essentially, the ideological codes that help to ‘construct meaningful totalities out of scattered events’ (Ricoeur, 1981:278, cited in Bird and Dardenne, 1988:70). As codes of meaning,
narratives often draw upon higher ideological codes, those which operate on what Roland Barthes (1973:123) argued was the second order of signification, the level of myth. In doing so, narratives resonate with mythic (or ideological) values, with news stories offering more than merely ‘cold facts’, but ‘reassurance and familiarity’ vis-à-vis a shared community experience (Mead, 1926, cited in Bird and Dardenne, 1988:70). In other words, by providing seemingly credible explanations for complex events, news narratives (much like the myths of pre-industrial societies), provide stories replete with well-known cultural themes, using ‘cultural models’ (such as heroes and villains) to reflect and reinforce frames that connote the dominant values of a particular socio-historical context (or, rather, those of the ‘episteme’ — see Foucault, 1974, 1980). Newspapers ‘do not [simply] ‘tell it like it is’, but rather, [they] ‘tell it like it means’’ (Bird and Dardenne, 1988:71). As is made clear in the following two-part case study, The Australian and the SMH, despite their ostensible professional values (such as reporting ‘only the facts’ in an ‘objective’ manner), constructed frames which define the meaning of the Iraq story.

Semiotic Deconstruction Part A: Front Page News after the Outbreak of War

What, then, do the representations from the front pages of The Australian and the SMH (Figures 21.1 and 21.2) mean, and how ‘truthful’ are these texts? Turning first to the front page of The Australian (Figure 21.1) on the day after the outbreak of war, four features immediately spring forth from the text, so helping to create the frames (or the ‘maps of meaning’ — Hall cited in Bird and Dardenne, 1988:71) that contain the ‘decoding’ interpretative processes of the reader. At this unfocused level, neither narrative nor bias
are yet concerns of the analysis, as such features only become discernable in the reading of the text’s linguistic signs. Yet, already at this broad and relatively detached level of analysis, mythic meanings are being connoted, and discourses of power are evident. Perhaps the most dominant feature, quickly drawing the reader’s gaze, is the large headline proclaiming: ‘First Strike on Baghdad’. Serving the denotative function of communicating the start of the Iraq War, beyond the first act of signification this headline (larger than that adorning the front page of the *SMH* — Figure 21.2) surreptitiously draws upon the discourse of *casus belli*, or the ‘just resort to war’, framing the ontological meanings of text *vis-à-vis* the justifications for the use of state versus state violence.

Thus, this text does perhaps connote a subtle pro-war frame, articulating a discourse that posits ‘pre-emptive’ military action (or the ‘Bush Doctrine’) as a rationalised and legitimate response to an imposing and self-evident threat. This mythic act of signification is made possible through the paradigmatic choice of the ‘determiner’ ‘First’, which draws on Cold War discourses of a ‘first strike’ in response to an impending nuclear attack. In doing so, the headline becomes part of a discourse of necessary ‘pre-emptive’ action, rather than connoting the act of unwarranted military aggression. Although clearly not a strong example of an discursive frame *per se*, the headlines for both leading articles in Figures 21.1 and 21.2 are significant in highlighting the subtleties of ideological bias, as there are more neutral ways of denoting the same event: for example, ‘Coalition Missiles Strike Baghdad’, or ‘War Beginnings’, or even ‘Saddam on the Run as Missiles Fly’.


The second major feature dominating the text in Figure 21.1 is the photographic imagery, which also offers a series of mythic values, or intertextual frameworks of meaning, for the discerning reader. The smaller of these images, which is also used on the front page of the SMH (Figure 21.2), depicts a missile exploding somewhere in Baghdad. In the
non-negotiable manner of visual signs (which collapses the processes of signification, so merging the denotative and connotative function of the sign — see Hall, 1981a:226), the smaller image depicts *a reality* of the Iraq story: the consequences of defying the wishes of the administration of President George W. Bush. Yet, despite denoting the clearly negative implications of the collapse of diplomacy and the resort to war, for each newspaper this image is somewhat removed from the destructive energies of the bomb, with no evidence of human casualties or of substantial material damage in the picture. As a representation of war it is, then, rather un-confrontational, and is similar to many of the images that characterised the news media’s reportage of the first Gulf War (see Kellner, 1992). Conversely, rather than the small image of the exploding missile, it is the large photograph in Figure 21.1 that bears the greatest connotative significance, delivering more clearly the spectacle of 21st century war. Absent from the front page of the SMH, this spectacular image shows the powerful launch of a tomahawk missile from a US warship, and connotes more lucidly the power of the Western military machine: with the ferocious flames fuelling the missile’s ascent dominating the visual sign. Like the smaller photograph, it is an un-confronting image, in the sense that evidence of ‘collateral damage’ is not present. Indeed, this photograph aptly illustrates Douglas Kellner’s (2003b; 2005) argument regarding the de-contextualised nature of modern warfare (as portrayed by the mainstream news media), with the eye-catching allure of the photograph’s raw and visceral depiction of energy unspoilt (or, rather, unqualified) by the reality of its destructive impact. In short, this image is pure, unadulterated, visual spectacle (of the type used to sell newspapers around the world).
Apart from this spectacular image (where the denotative and connotative have fused with mythic force), it is the thematic news strip that stretches across the bottom of the page that is the third most salient textual feature of Figure 21.1. Consisting of both linguistic and visual signs, this thematic section of the page is rich in mythic meanings, and is intended to entice further a prospective reader/purchaser of the newspaper with insights into the day’s most ‘important’ news stories. At the denotative level, the visual signs of this section depict three profile photographs, as well as a digitalised map of the Middle East (which is overlaid by three superimposed arrows intersecting over Iraq). These pictures are largely inseparable from the text next to each representation, which help to confine and anchor intratextually the ‘preferred meanings’ that can be decoded from this text. For instance, proceeding from left to right, the first encountered profile picture contains the well-recognised image of the then President of the United States, George W. Bush. In this little photograph, President Bush sits calmly, garbed in the ‘professional’ dress of the Western world: the ubiquitous suit and tie. Beyond his demeanour and well-recognised visage, which comes with its own set of complex meanings (dependent on one’s view and familiarity with US politics), President Bush’s power and authority (by virtue of his office) is further connoted by the subtle placement of the heavily mythologised American flag in the background of the photograph.

Overall, this image connotes a confident leader, a self-assured representative of the world’s most powerful democracy. Yet it is only in conjunction with the quotation next to the image that this sign gains its full meaning and, indeed, its ideological significance, with President Bush assuring the reader that ‘this will not be a campaign of half’
measures’. Thus, the syntagmatic progression of linguistic signs intertextually reinforces the power and the authority of the world’s sole surviving superpower, helping to lay the mythic foundation for a narrative of Western military supremacy, and the coalition’s triumph.

Immediately to the right of President Bush, is the profile photograph of the Iraq Story’s chief antagonist, the (now executed) dictator Saddam Hussein. In contrast to the image of George W. Bush, Hussein’s face is dominated by thick eyeglasses, with the Iraqi President garbed in military attire rather than that of a civilian official (which he did in fact wear on regular occasions). Overall, the image has something of an ‘orientalised’ texture (see Said, 1995), with Hussein sitting (or standing) before some type of ‘exotic’ fabric background. Fundamentally, this image of the Iraqi President has an ‘otherness’ about it, and is perhaps connotative of the dictators of the Axis powers of World War II, where the fascists Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini were often garbed in military uniforms. While it cannot be determined whether this World War II mythic connotation was a deliberate intention of the creator of this thematic strip, the other images seem to support further this suggested frame.

Indeed, next to the quotation from the Iraqi President (which is a simple linguistic sign proclaiming Iraq’s ‘impending victory’) is the photograph of the smiling grandson of Sir Winston Churchill, who seems to have been included here solely on the basis of his genetic links to Britain’s heroic wartime prime minister. Quoting his famous grandfather, Winston S. Churchill tells the reader that Britain and the US once again stand ‘shoulder
to shoulder’, united against a common enemy, so mythically signifying themes of good and evil that shape popular socio-historical understandings of the events of World War II. Similarly, the digital map of the Middle East is reminiscent of many of the historic television documentaries concerning the military campaigns of the warring world powers, where the advancement of armies is often represented by the indexical signs of directional arrows. Such visual and linguistic signs (intratextually) frame the meaning of this thematic strip, with the signs corresponding with the discourse (prevalent at the time) arguing that the West could no longer afford to ‘appease’ the Hitler of the Middle East (see Couldry and Downey, 2004).

Moving from the thematic news strip, the columns of linguistic signs comprising The Australian’s front page journalism for this historic day are the fourth and final major textual feature of Figure 21.1. Due to the size of the text and the need for the reader to concentrate actively on the decoding of the linguistic signs (arguably a more cognitively active task than that required to interpret a photograph), it is likely that the article’s prose is the last element of the newspaper page to be engaged by the gaze of the reader. Yet, whereas the other elements of Figure 21.1 are quick to draw the eye (and be almost instantaneously absorbed), it is the written text that contains the most information, with the syntagmatic progression of linguistic sign after sign offering a series of different meanings. It is here in the written text of the page that the narrative becomes a defining feature of the encoded meanings, with stories conforming to the ‘cultural grammar’ expected of news discourse (Coulby, 1975, cited in Bird and Dardenne, 1988:76). Indeed, by drawing on the ‘factual’ details released by Pentagon officials and other sources, the
linguistic signs ‘intratextually’ (see Chandler, 2007:251) refer to the other communicative elements on the page (the meanings connoted by the headlines and photographs), so helping to produce a story out of the different details of the event in question (included, of course, according to the ‘news values’ of the article’s author).

Within the written text in Figure 21.1, two articles create the Iraq War story, yet they do so in different ways, employing dissimilar styles of journalism. For instance, whereas the primary article has been produced according to the traditional ‘objective’ values of the ‘serious’ press (being written from the perspective of the third person, in a dispassionate tone), the second smaller article — by The Australian’s correspondent in Baghdad, Ian McPhedran — offers a different type of news narrative, one where the subjective voice of the journalist is very much to the foreground of the news discourse, and clearly discernable in the somewhat sensationalistic/dramatic tone of the piece. Looking more closely at these articles, and focussing on the level of the syntagm and the sequential relationship between linguistic signs, it is clear that the two articles offer very different accounts of the same event. For instance, the large article (entitled ‘First Strike on Baghdad’), in the model of an inverted pyramid, articulates the story according to the traditions of the ‘serious’ news media, beginning with information regarding the coalition’s aerial bombardment before moving on to the responses and consequences of this action. Containing authoritative quotations from different sources (including statements from the Iraqi President), this article is rich in detail, providing information regarding the actions of the Australian military forces in the Middle East and details regarding the targets of the missile strikes (namely, the ‘assassination’ of Saddam
Hussein). On the surface, this article provides substantial information in a balanced manner, and is an exemplary news piece in the best tradition of ‘front page’ Western journalism.

Nevertheless, looking past the article’s objective tone, to the manner in which its narrative constructs its story, it is possible to detect certain ‘news values’ that slant the article towards a pro-war frame. For instance, despite describing the coalition’s aerial strike as a ‘missile barrage’ early in the piece, the article does not reflect critically on the meanings of the factual details, providing little evidence of deeper analysis. Instead, it merely provides information — presumable from the Pentagon — regarding the types of munitions employed in the attack, as well as statements from some of the central protagonists of this story. Although to a certain degree this information is both interesting and useful, the article fails to make the very basic contrast between the actions of the US-led coalition and the response of the Iraqis, a comparison that exposes the ineffectual status of Iraq’s military. For, despite describing in considerable detail Iraq’s launch of six missiles at coalition forces in amassed in neighbouring Kuwait (a feeble aerial attack that resulted in no casualties, with two of the missiles intercepted by US weaponry), the coalition’s so-called ‘limited’ strike, aimed at killing Hussein and his sons Uday and Qusay, consisted of over 36 missiles, fired from distant submarines and other warships stationed in the Persian Gulf (not to mention the satellite-guided bombs — of an undisclosed number — dropped by radar-evading F-117 aircraft).
In others words, the article does not question this striking difference in military prowess, nor question the extent to which such a bombardment could be used in a ‘precision strike’ against the Iraqi President and his sons (whom the CIA asserted were hiding in a private residence in southern Baghdad). The article is, therefore, not an overly balanced or fair representation of the first phase of the invasion (despite being rich in factual detail). Indeed, it does not remotely question the justifications of the coalition’s actions (or that the US and its allies might be the military aggressors in this story), nor does it clearly suggest that Iraq seems largely incapable of fighting back. Instead, this article conforms to the discourse originating from the White House — that this was not an unprovoked military action, but a necessary move that would see the liberation of the Iraqi people and the protection of Western cities from the horrors of weapons of mass destruction. It is almost ironic that the article quotes Saddam Hussein telling his people to ‘draw their swords’ in readiness for the coalition’s onslaught, as even at this early stage of the conflict, it was clearly apparent that the dictator had little beyond rhetoric and metaphors to use against his adversaries.

To The Australian’s credit, the second smaller article (the more personalised account by Ian McPhedran) is more critical in its telling of the story, helping to balance the front page. Despite being a little sensationalistic, this article transports the reader to the position of the journalist, and thus to the position of somebody living in a city now on the ‘receiving end’ of the coalition’s ‘precision strike’. Moreover, without stridently condemning the air strikes or offering political comment, Ian McPhedran (2003:1) gives
a sense of the situation faced by both the Iraqi military and the general civilian population:

Woken from my sleep in room 625 at the Meridien Palestine Hotel, directly across the Tigris River from one of the dictator’s huge palaces, it was time to scramble for war … Seven minutes after the sirens died away, anti-aircraft fire from nearby batteries filled the sky with orange streaks in a futile bid to intercept any incoming bombs or missiles. Futility is a dominant emotion in Baghdad these days, from the lightly armed and protected soldiers on street corners to the anti-aircraft gunners; you can’t help but wonder: What is the point?

Through the paradigmatic selection of linguistic signs such as ‘futility’ and ‘lightly armed’ and the syntagmatic progression of the narrative, this article provides a somewhat more critical text. This is not to say that the smaller-front page article is a superior text to the larger one situated immediately above (as it does not provide the same level of detail), yet McPhedran’s (2003) journalism is more independent of the pervasive pro-war discourses devised by the neoconservatives, and forces the reader to think not only of the spectacle of ‘high-tech’ weaponry, but to reflect on the human consequences of ‘air-strikes’. In this limited sense, it is a more ‘truthful’ — or richer — representation, intratextually helping to mitigate the deficiencies of the other features in Figure 21.1.

Turning now to Figure 21.2, the front page of the SMH on Friday 21 March 2003, it is apparent that the Fairfax newspaper offers both a number of similar and dissimilar signs.
Like *The Australian*’s front page for this day, Figure 21.2 contains several interrelated and yet separate sections that vie for the reader’s gaze. Unlike Figure 21.1, however, the front page of the *SMH* is less dominated by the ‘imploded’ acts of pictorial signification — in the form of photographs — containing only one major image, that of an explosion ‘rocking’ Baghdad (seemingly the same picture used by *The Australian* — as was mentioned above). While this image is significant for showing the explosive consequences of war, it is not as sensational as the spectacular image of the launching tomahawk missile dominating the front page of *The Australian*. It does, nonetheless, support the neoconservative discourse premising a ‘pre-emptive war’ as a ‘just war’, by intratextually drawing on the main headline for this page: ‘First Strike on Saddam’.

Indeed, in the paradigmatic choice of the linguistic sign ‘Saddam’, the headline frames the content of the picture, personifying the conflict *vis-à-vis* its causes and justifications, with the concept of the Iraqi dictator. This is not to say that this headline is a deliberate, biased distortion of the truth; for the coalition’s opening gambit was, of course, attempting an early ‘checkmate’ against the Iraqi head-of-state (rather than the mass devastation of air-strikes intend to ‘shock and awe’). It is, rather, to note that such a denoted meaning also has a connotative element, which performs a slight conceptual sleight-of-hand in removing ordinary Iraqis from the conflict, while placing the Iraqi dictator at the heart of the maelstrom. As was apparent even before the invasion and Iraq’s descent into disorder and sectarian chaos, while Saddam Hussein was feared and hated by many Iraqis, many saw the dictator as the nation’s legitimate Head of State, and
would fight and die to ‘defend’ their country (or their perceived personal interests) against coalition forces (even after the fall of Baghdad).

Figure 21.2: *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 March, 2003:1
Following the main headline and image in Figure 21.2, perhaps the next most prominent textual feature is the large advertisement for the Australian left-wing political party, the Greens (running across the bottom of the page). As was noted earlier, the state of New South Wales was conducting a general election at the time of the invasion, with the Iraq War crisis (despite being more a matter for federal politics) appearing in many of the speeches and debates of opposing politicians. Even though many conservative politicians (particularly from the NSW Liberal Party) argued that the Iraq War should not be a deciding issue for voters in a state election, the Greens (and, to a lesser extent, the incumbent Labor Government) is a party that is commonly believed to have benefited at the ballot from the Federal Coalition’s support for the invasion. As a sign, this political advertisement might reflect a strategic attempt by the Greens to use the then widely unpopular (at least prior to the invasion) Iraq War as a tool for increasing their parliamentary representation — the linguistic codes are unambiguous in denoting that a vote for the Greens was a vote against the war. It likely also reflects the location of the Green vote, which lies predominately in larger metropolitan centres, such as those serviced by the SMH.

Moving from the visual aspects of the advertisement to the linguistic text of Figure 21.2, three articles provide the Iraq stories — and thus linguistic signs, narratives and frames — ultimately used by readers in constructing an understanding of the opening military engagements of the war. Similar to the front page of The Australian, the SMH provides both ‘hard’ news stories, as well as a more personalised and ‘subjective’ account by the newspaper’s correspondent in Baghdad, Paul McGough. Overall, the SMH provides more
linguistic news on its front page than *The Australian*, and, while both newspapers discussing the same events, they differ slightly on the factual details presented (which are presumably derived from the same official military sources). For instance, in the *SMH*’s account of the opening stages of the war, the reader is told that Iraq was also on the receiving end of an ‘artillery barrage’ from US forces in neighbouring Kuwait, and that a US helicopter had crashed in the south of the country. Likewise, more details are given of the types of munitions used by the combatants, while the extent of the delayed, yet still impending, ‘shock and awe’ missile barrage is estimated to consist of 3000 cruise missiles (far more than the 36 used in the precision strike). Yet, despite this difference in the level of factual detail (perhaps made possible thanks to the greater use of linguistic signs rather than pictures), the text of the *SMH* consists of similar ideological codes. Indeed, the syntagmatic strings of linguistic signs here connote similar meanings and messages to those found in *The Australian* (albeit with some subtle differences).

For instance, looking at the lead article in Figure 21.2, entitled ‘First Strike on Saddam’, it is apparent that the *SMH* tacitly provides support for the discourse of the righteousness of ‘pre-emptive’ war, displaying disparate levels of information on the military exchanges between coalition and Iraqi forces. While this article (much like its counterpart in *The Australian*) provides a level of factual detail that allows a critical or discerning reader to perceive the large imbalances in the military prowess of the primary combatants, the space devoted to discussing Iraq’s military response to the coalition’s missile barrage seems disproportionate, and fails to make the contrast between the seemingly untouchable might of the US military juggernaut and the dilapidated military
forces of Iraq. Likewise, the premise for the attack is not reflected on in a critical light. Indeed, as is made clearer in the second article, ‘CIA Coup Put Target on Leader’s Bunker’, the information provided by official military sources is taken at ‘face value’, with the evident failure of the US military’s aerial strike failing to prompt a critical reflection on its causes and justifications. This is not to say that there are not important factual details within this text on which a reader could construct an ‘oppositional reading’ (Hall, 1980). The SMH does, for example, mention (and make credible) the deaths caused by the coalition’s ‘decapitation strike’. Yet, fundamentally, the linguistic signs of the regular news article of Figure 21.2, in failing to make clear important disparities between news events (in terms of their deeper meanings, causes and justifications), provides a certain (although limited) level of support for the discourse advocating the rightness of the war and the inevitability of the coalition’s victory.

This is not, however, to condemn Figure 21.2 as an example of untruthful representation. This newspaper page is rich in factual detail communicating valuable information of the events that took place on the previous news day. Indeed, like The Australian’s news page, Figure 21.2 also provides a personalised story from the front, an overtly subjective piece that helps to transport the reader to the streets of Baghdad, thereby helping to redeem the other intratextual signifying features of the news page — which largely impart factual details according to a subtle pro-coalition frame. The journalism of this article is, of course, not perfect: describing the coalition’s missile barrage as a ‘pin prick’ is arguably inaccurate. Yet, through the narrative and the paradigmatic choice of certain signs over others, the reader is able, at least partially, to view the news events through Iraqi eyes:
As air-raid sirens sounded ranting speeches of exhortation to fight blasted from mosque minarets, Baghdad’s anti-aircraft batteries opened fire, with the lead role in a co-ordinated, if futile, barrage taken by two stations atop the Information Ministry Building in central Baghdad. (McGough, 2003:1).

The point here is that news, as a representation of reality, can never match the exacting details, qualifications and insights demanded by the notion of ‘absolute truth’; yet journalists can present the ‘factual’ details in a manner in which the meanings of the story show not only the ‘truth’ that a potential reader might search for (such as a discourse in which Australian forces are the ‘good guys’), but as it is seen by others (as in this case of the Iraqis caught between the coalition’s military might, and the foolish pride of a ‘tin pot dictator’ too stubborn to relinquish power in order to avoid a war). In short, although the texts in Figure 21.2, and indeed 21.1, could have provided better accounts of the events that they record, they do, nonetheless, provide a fairly reasonable level of insight into the Iraq War for citizens far removed from the Middle East (as one would expect from the ‘quality’ press — assuming, of course, that what was reported was not merely propaganda circulated by the Pentagon to a waiting and dependent news media). In other words, in relation to this semiotic assessment, the respective front pages of the sampled newspapers are not biased (in the sense of being unbalanced representations), but could have provided more critical narratives of Australia’s role in a so-called pre-emptive war. In order, then, to gain a ‘semiotic understanding’ of the newspapers’ position on the conflict, it is necessary to turn to the editorial pages of these respective publications.
Semiotic Deconstruction Part B: The Editorial Line

From the semiotic analysis conducted thus far, it appears that the front page of each newspaper contains both positive and negative news features; although, evidently, there are more mythic frames in the texts taken from *The Australian* than those from the *SMH*. In order to get a clearer picture of the overall ideological stance of each newspaper, and thus insights into the political dispositions encoded into those pages that host the influential (agenda-setting) opinion and feature articles, it is necessary to turn to the editorials that directly address the issue of Australia’s involvement in the conflict. For *The Australian*, such an editorial appeared on 21 March, 2003, immediately after the commencement of hostilities (see Figure 22.1). Unlike the front page journalism analysed above, the political and ideological position of this editorial is unambiguous, with the title, ‘A War That We Can Fight with a Clear Conscience’, gave the reader a clear indication of the encoder’s stance on the question of the invasion. Indeed, as a representation of vociferous polemical opinion, this article is exemplary. Yet, this editorial is of interest not solely because of its political stance (which unsurprisingly mimics the views held by the newspaper’s founder and proprietor), but is so because of the manner in which the text constructs a powerful pro-war frame. For it is through this article’s use of paradigmatic and syntagmatic signs (which in turn produce ideological codes tied to wider socio-cultural discourses, and thus one’s interpretative schema) that this diatribe becomes a mythic *tour de force*. 
In reading this article, the narrative quickly envelops the mind, saturating the reader’s consciousness, and perhaps their conscience, with a neoconservative re-visioning of the discourse of the ‘just war’. Moreover, dissenting voices — and thus the ability to construct an ‘oppositional reading’ of this text — are rejected and marginalised by the article’s pseudo-moral discourse, which subtly goads the reader into accepting and adopting the ideological stance held by the author. For instance, turning to the first paragraph of the text, the article encourages the mind not to dwell on thoughts of civilian casualties caused by the missiles and the bombs of the US-led coalition. Instead, the text inverts the notion of ‘military aggression’ in presenting Saddam Hussein as responsible for the invasion of Iraq:

With the first volley of missiles to surgically strike at Iraq’s military command structure, Australians found themselves in a just war to disarm the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein — so despicable a regime that even men and women of goodwill who oppose this conflict have no words of praise or even apology for its deeds. No Australian welcomes this war, but by defying the UN for a decade and seeking to hold the world to ransom with an arsenal of weapons of mass destruction, Hussein created this conflict. (The Australian, 21 March, 2003:20).

Here, adjectives are used to frame, and thus influence the reader’s interpretation of, the relevant issues and events. For example, the aerial bombardment of parts of Baghdad is connoted as a bloodless, clean assault thanks to the paradigmatic choice of the linguistic
sign, ‘surgically’. Likewise, adjectives, such as ‘despicable’ and ‘even’, help to impress upon the reader that people of ‘goodwill’ are justified in their support for military action.

Figure 22.1: *The Australian*, 21 March, 2003:20
These themes are made stronger as the narrative of the article progresses, with their recurrence reinforcing the mythic conceptions of the just war. Indeed, throughout the editorial, three themes consistently re-emerge: first, that the coalition is not responsible for the situation unfolding in the Middle East (that they have no choice but to invade); second, that the invasion is morally right, and can be justified as both self-defence from a potential horrific terrorist threat and as a liberation of a brutally oppressed people); and third, that Australians should rally in support of the troops now engaged in combat. For instance:

Australians are a peace-loving people who despise bullies and passionately believe in a fair go for all. As our troops enter battle on our behalf against Hussein, can we be confident that these principles are being upheld? The Australian believes the answer is a firm ‘yes’. By committing troops, we have taken a leading position among a large group of nations who are no longer prepared to tolerate a vicious tyrant who threatens world security with weapons of mass destruction, while torturing and murdering his own people … The choice for war has been entirely and unequivocally that of Hussein: it will go down as one of his great crimes against his own people, but thankfully it will be his last. (The Australian, 21 March, 2003:20).

Here again there are many readily identifiable mythic signifiers, with the strategic use of the ‘second person’ (as connoted by the use ‘our’ and ‘we’) lending the narrative a rhetorical force. Yet this is not to argue that there was not some ‘truth’ to these pro-war
discourses. As noted earlier, Saddam Hussein was both a mass murderer and a tyrant, who might have eventually tried to use nuclear weapons against the United States, provided that he could find a way to make such an attack an untraceable crime (as was argued by White House in the months preceding the invasion). Yet, ‘evil intent’ and hypothetical scenarios (no matter their potential devastation and horror) are not the same as having committed a real act of military aggression. Of course, along the lines of the editorial’s argument, one might argue that the war was justified in order to liberate the oppressed Iraqis. Yet, this editorial frame ignores important questions, such as: at what point is such a direct military action causing more harm than good, and what precedent does it set (should Australia now involve itself in a crusade against all autocratic regimes)? Is not this stance taken by The Australian somewhat hypocritical given Australia’s history of supporting authoritarian (or ‘soft-authoritarian’) regimes among its South East Asian neighbours? Clearly, The Australian’s official position on the war was akin to that articulated by the neoconservatives (despite the spurious nature of the ‘evidence’ that was presented by the federal government in the weeks leading to the invasion). Furthermore, this passionate editorial, in so effectively constructing a text infused with myth — whereby Australian readers might feel that they needed to ‘rally to the flag’ in order to support the ‘diggers’ — amounts to carefully written propaganda, a powerful example of a pro-war frame.

Turning now from The Australian to the SMH’s editorial (Figure 22.2), it is apparent that this newspaper has a very different position on the invasion of Iraq. More sombre in its tone, the SMH’s narrative appears to reside within the pro-United Nations discourse
prevalent at the time, a position which held that Australia should not act in a unilateral manner, but rather continue to support the principles of multilateralism and its institutional forms. Far from being an anti-American polemic (as dissenting voices were labelled by *The Australian*), the *SMH* was seemingly sensitive to Australia’s longstanding alliance with traditional allies Britain and the United States, while being critical of their inability to convince the United Nations of the necessity of their military action. Indeed, although clearly not ‘pro-war’, this editorial is almost a lament for the entire morally complicated and legally dubious situation, reflecting on the growing division between ‘old’ Europe and the United States, on the weakness of the evidence presented in order to justify the conflict, and on the deaths that will inevitably result from a direct conflict:

> It should not have come to this. The international community should not have failed to disarm Iraq peacefully. The United Nations Security Council should not have failed so spectacularly. The United States and Britain should not have been left to go it alone. And when the moment of truth arrived, Australia should not have been so deeply committed to a course set by the US and Britain that it had no choice. We could only confirm the already promised support and are now in a deeply regrettable war. (The Sydney Morning Herald, 19 March, 2003:16).

Yet, despite not being anti-American, this article is sceptical of the neoconservative agenda, and it is critical of many of the claims made by the US government — claims on
which allied governments, such as that of Australia, sought to build the case for a just war:

The determination of the US since September 11, 2001, to seek out and destroy terrorists and those who harbour them and who might supply them with weapons of mass destruction is generally well understood. Many of the United States’ allies, however, do not share its belief that Iraq is connected with the al-Qaeda terrorist organisation believed responsible for the September 11 attacks. … Nor has everyone been comfortable with all the implications of the revived US interest in Iraqi disarmament. Those implications include regime change, as Mr Bush's speech yesterday made clear. The UN sanctions the disarming of Iraq, but not regime change. From the American and British viewpoint, though, the need to rid the world of a tyrant such as Saddam has became imperative. When the UN failed to achieve this, the US and Britain, justified by their interpretation of international law and their national interests, pressed on. They had no choice. The logic of their position demanded it. (The Sydney Morning Herald, 19 March, 2003:16).

Clearly, then, this editorial is not scathing in it denunciation of the Iraq War, but is more subtle in its political slant. In highlighting that some have questioned the validity of the claims made by Washington, the piece challenges the authority of the ‘WMD discourse’, with the paradigmatic use of certain signs, such as ‘belief’ and ‘implications’, building a more complicated and critical frame. Furthermore, the process of signification within the
text of Figure 22.2 articulates a more balanced position, with the ‘evil’ and ‘danger’ posed by Saddam Hussein weighed against the death and destruction inevitably wrought by war. In short, despite not denouncing the war, this text is more balanced than that in Figure 22.1, and manages to convey the sense that ‘liberating’ Iraq might not be as benevolent a ‘gift’ as ostensibly claimed by the neoconservatives and members of the Howard Government. Indeed, the article’s tone is one of reflective sadness:

Australia's military capacity, always more symbolic than strategically vital in a conflict such as this, is now committed on a distant stage. It would be better applied closer to home. Unfortunately, it is too late for that. Unfortunately, Australia is committed to this war. (The Sydney Morning Herald, 19 March, 2003:16).

In other words, although the SMH’s editorial is slightly slanted towards an anti-war ideological frame, its balanced and sombre tone is more analytical and neutral than its equivalent in The Australian. Rather than attempting to explain the military action through employing a ‘pre-emptive war’ frame, the SMH’s analyses the ‘diplomatic failures’ behind the invasion, as well as their implications for international relations. Moreover, it assesses the antecedents of the conflict, mentioning the consequences of the September 11 terrorist attacks and UN Security Council Resolution 1441 (which the US argued gave it authority to disarm Iraq). In doing so, it conforms to a more objective journalistic tradition than pro-war editorialising of Murdoch’s flagship.
Figure 22.2: *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 March, 2003:16

**Conclusion: Manifest Bias?**

Based on this chapter’s tabulations and semiotic case studies it appears that, in the days leading up to Australia joining the ‘coalition of the willing’ in their war against Iraq, *The
Australian was conforming to the outspoken views held by Rupert Murdoch, producing many articles with a pro-war/pro-neoconservative bias. Although this bias was not totally pervasive, it was not confined to the opinion and editorial pages, but seemingly seeped through to the regular news pages (although this was only clearly discernable when data from The Australian was compared to that generated from the Sydney Morning Herald). While it cannot be determined whether these findings are a reflection of the corporate culture of News Corporation (unwitting bias) or the direct result of editorial policies (deliberate bias), they suggest, nonetheless, that the quality of this publication’s journalism can be undermined when the proprietor takes a keen interest in a particular story.

These findings are of particular importance for understanding media power in Australia. As Rod Tiffen (2006:104-105) notes, in competitive newspaper markets such as in the United Kingdom (and similar nations with one dominant metropolitan centre), tabloid newspapers and ‘serious’ titles appeal to a particular ‘political tendency’ in their contest for market share. In contrast to this active partisanship, the Australian press has historically tended to be ‘more centrist both journalistically and politically’ (Tiffen, 2006:104-105). This is largely due to the demographic factors that have influenced the development and structure of Australia’s decentralised newspaper industry, with four state capitals now possessing only one daily newspaper (all of which are part of News Corporation — see Manne, 2005a:77). According to Tiffen (2006:105), in Australian cities where there is only a single major newspaper title, the ‘market logic’ is to avoid being overtly partisan in order to appeal to ‘as many readers as possible’. While this logic
might hold true for the regular news pages and the day to day coverage of political affairs, the empirical findings above demonstrate the potential for the Murdoch press to abandon their centrist position (supposedly typical of the Australian press) in favour for an agenda setting ideological role (according to their proprietors world view and his political interests).

Accordingly, while the governments of George W. Bush, Tony Blair and John Howard were responsible for the invasion of Iraq and its violent aftermath, it is important to remember the role played by Rupert Murdoch in this conflict. As was discussed earlier, Murdoch provided important media channels through which the neoconservatives could disseminate their ideas, arguably helping the loosely aligned group of mandarins and academics gain positions of strategic influence in the political public sphere of the United States. Moreover, as the findings of the empirical case studies suggest, this contribution to the neoconservative agenda was also aided, at least in some sections of News Limited, by biased, pro-war news coverage. While this thesis does not have primary evidence that demonstrates Murdoch was directly dictating editorial policy on the subject of Iraq, his history of employing executive staff who share his world view, coupled with his public statements regarding the crisis, likely shaped The Australian’s political disposition during the sampled period. Such findings highlight the continued importance of understanding the role played by media companies, such as News Corporation, in the political processes of democratic states. More importantly, such findings serve as pertinent reminder regarding the potential implications posed by media monopolies. These research implications are addressed in the next, and last, chapter of this dissertation.
Chapter 6

Democracy Must Be Defended
Chapter 6  Democracy Must Be Defended

What are the rules of right that power implements to produce discourses of truth? ... What type of power is it that is capable of producing discourses of power that have, in a society like ours, such powerful effects?

Michel Foucault


This thesis began by arguing that, in order to understand the political workings of modern democratic states, it is important to recognize the role and effects of the ubiquitous mass media. The media are, of course, only one force amongst many which impact on and shape the contours of social existence; yet these social institutions, and their technologies and cultural products, have infused themselves in the ‘everyday lived experiences’ of those who live in media-saturated societies, and become an integral part of modern politics. As a discipline dedicated to understanding the full gamut of the human experience, it is surprising that mainstream sociology has largely shied away from ‘media studies’, leaving this field of inquiry (the institutions of which clearly reside in Bourdieu’s ‘field of power’) to scholars from other academic disciplines (be they from cultural studies, media studies or communication studies). A sociological perspective — particularly one that is open to the insights of other scholarly disciplines — has much to offer an investigation of the political and social implications of the media. As this thesis has shown, in order to explore the full spectrum of media effects and influences, then researchers must move from the level of ‘the particular’ to ‘the general’ (Silverstone,
That is, it is necessary for researchers to investigate media operations and content in relation to social institutions (including the structures of government) and ideology/discourses (be such ‘ways of seeing’ originating from the fields of politics, economics or culture). As a discipline that has commonly considered itself capable of encompassing/embracing many of the other social sciences (from history and political science to cultural studies and social psychology), sociology, perhaps more than any other single disciplinary approach, has the ability to situate the media in a broader analytical framework capable of elucidating the full range of media effects, positioning such institutions within a broader conception of society, politics and culture (as demonstrated by the Triadic Model of Mass Communication discussed in Chapter 3).

While not all ‘media effects’ are of great social or cultural significance, it is important that the social sciences periodically revisit and reflect on the relationship between the news media and government; that is, the relationship between politics and representation. For, although the average ‘audience member’ might be unaware of the media’s radical power for socio-cultural change, these techno-cultural apparatuses have the ability to set the ‘policy agenda’, transferring the virtual discourses of the news text into the discursive practices of human action. In other words, governments can exploit sections of the news media in order to promote an agenda that might have adverse social or political repercussions, perhaps resulting in the curtailment of liberty or the infringement of civil rights. If the news media are performing according to their self-proclaimed function as ‘fourth estate watchdogs’, vigilantly protecting the interests of the public, then the power
of democratic government, as it pertains to acting against the interests of its citizens, is to a certain extent nullified by public opinion. Yet, when the ideologies/or interests of the media (or those who control these agenda-setting institutions) dovetail with those of government, then the balance of power is tipped dramatically against oppositional forces and alternative discourses, and so against those who might seek to offer a different (perhaps more truthful) analysis of an event. Indeed, when the interests of major media corporations align with political institutions, the media become agents of the state, thus subverting the democratic ideals of a public sphere, where ‘truth’, knowledge, and reason are dialectically constructed and articulated.

The ideal of a healthy and vibrant public sphere is of particular importance to Australian democracy. As Sally Young (2007:xxiv) notes, by international standards Australia is unusual, with compulsory voting ensuring a 94 per cent registered voter turnout at federal elections. Since it was introduced in 1924, the system of compulsory voting emphasises the importance of citizen participation in government, with the population periodically required to assess the performances of their politicians (Young, 2007). Therefore, without a factual and ideologically diverse media sphere, the notion of an ‘informed citizenry’ is undermined, rendering elections as ‘empty rituals’. Moreover, democracy is not just about voting. Most definitions of democracy emphasise that the concept includes ‘a capacity for civic or citizenship activities … the ability of citizens to have some meaningful influence over the shape and role of social and political institutions’ (Maddison, 2007:28). To participate in democratic processes requires access to the virtual agora created by the media, to the fora where ideas can be debated and public opinion
expressed. Nations that possess such a media environment strengthen the ‘democratic credentials’ of their parliaments, as political decisions and actions are seen as influenced and shaped by those who may be adversely affected by their implementation (Maddison, 2007:35). Furthermore, ‘participation itself’ [in mediated debates and democratic processes] can enhance the quality of people’s lives because it involves the exercise of distinctive human capacities and can be considered an intrinsically noble enterprise’ (Maddison, 2007:28).

‘Media sociology’ must, then, join its sister disciplines that are more familiar with the study of media texts in working to expose the manner by which journalism constructs political images and narratives that might misrepresent the world that lies beyond that of immediate experience. Such a hermeneutic critique is not naively concerned with exposing ‘the truth’ of a particular issue, in the absolute sense of the term. Yet it is concerned with revealing a more truthful account than that offer by the media product in question, an analysis that demystifies the event or issue through the presentation of a broader, more detailed and sophisticated representation (as was demonstrated by Chapter 4). Moreover, such a sociological critique of media power and politics must deduce the processes whereby certain discourses come to be ‘the truth’ of a particular issue, thereby becoming the ‘ruling ideas’ within the public sphere. Finally, a sociological approach to studying the media must seek to identify not only the ‘roots of the problem’ (the sources of the discursive practices), but should proffer solutions for a better media sector; one liberated from deliberate ideological distortions. This thesis works towards this end. What follows reflects on the key findings of this thesis, before offering a working model
of media organisation at a national level, a model that will help to ensure that democratic participation is not undermined by the coalescence of the interests of politicians, big business and media moguls; a re-imagining of the media-constituted political public sphere.

**Media Bias, the Iraq War, and the Politics of Rupert Murdoch**

In the introduction to this thesis a series of closely related, research guiding questions were asked: namely, what is media bias, how can it be identified, and, indeed, prevented. Such questions were crafted with the intent of using Rupert Murdoch and his company as a type of case study, an ‘institutional window’ through which to view the broader operations of the commercial media in relation to politics, ideology, and the nature of media power. Murdoch and *News Corporation* do, of course, provide an excellent research subject, having set the corporate agenda for other transnational media conglomerates aspiring to *News Corporation*’s global reach. More importantly, Murdoch has been a durable presence in the political arenas of Australia, Great Britain and the United States. As was discussed earlier, his political disposition has historically leant strongly to the conservative/neoconservative Right, yet he has used his news media (on occasion) to support centre-left candidates who court his favour (although the anti-conservative trend here is seemingly motivated by the desire to remove a stagnant conservative government and replace it with one that is not too oppositional to his ideological proclivities). For those politicians who meet with his approval, Murdoch does not restrict his ideological support to editorial endorsement during general elections, but will on occasion direct his newspapers to campaign strongly for certain ideas or causes.
This was the case with *The Australian* in relation to neo-liberalism (McKnight, 2003) and, as was shown in Chapter 5, also in relation to Australia’s involvement in the 2003 Iraq War.

Although it cannot be determined to what extent Murdoch helped to manufacture public ‘consent’ for the Howard government’s decision to join the United States and Britain in their ‘pre-emptive war’, he clearly played a role (however indirect) in bringing about the invasion of Iraq. In the United States, Murdoch provided support to the neoconservatives during their vulnerable ‘incubation period’, through his subsidisation of the *Weekly Standard* (a platform which gained the aspiring politicians much support, and then ‘leverage’ during the second Bush administration). Likewise, the polemically partisan Fox News also became a strongly pro-Republican force in US politics. Employing the familiar Murdoch formula of sensationalism (first used to energise the circulation figures of his tabloid newspapers in Australia and Britain), Murdoch’s Fox News became the most watched news source for Americans during the 2003 invasion of Iraq: the ultimate effect of which has been the proliferation of many misconceptions concerning the war, the events of September 11, and their causes (see Kellner, 2005; Kull, Ramsay and Lewis, 2004). Outside the United States, and particularly in Australia (where the Murdoch press has a near monopoly), his news media also championed the war, with near uniformity on the opinion and editorial pages of many *News Corporation* publications in the key weeks leading to the commencement of official hostilities (see Manne, 2005). Although the mass demonstrations that took place both in Australia and Britain prior to the war demonstrate that the media are not merely apparatuses of propaganda and
ideological indoctrination (or, rather, that audiences are not merely passive recipients of ‘the message’), it can only be speculated as to whether Prime Minister John Howard, or his British counterpart, Tony Blair, would have continued in their support for the ‘Bush doctrine’ had the Murdoch media joined other news sources in rigorously dissecting the public case for war.

Since the invasion of Iraq in 2003, much has now been written on the failure of Western media sources to interrogate what has since proven to be the dubious intelligence used to justify the war. Clearly, the news media of News Corporation were not alone in their abdication of their critical fourth estate function (see Berenger, 2004). While News Corporation was not the only information source that failed to act according to ‘watchdog’ principles, its failure is particularly instructive. For instance, the News Corporation/Iraq War case studies of this thesis demonstrate the power that news media holdings invest in an individual (provided, of course, that the individual in question has a strong editorial command over the institutional environments that comprise their company). Although the ‘all-powerful media mogul’—be he a Rupert Murdoch, a Kerry Packer, a Conrad Black, or a Silvio Berlusconi— is becoming increasingly rare in the face of bureaucratic rationality and the public company controlled by the technocrat or the ‘charismatic CEO’ (Khurana, 2002), the social structures that comprise the news media still give significant political power to those willing (or ostensibly so) to hire employees that will implement the proprietor’s political preferences. In other words, even in the period of advanced capitalism, the potential exists for media proprietors, such as Rupert Murdoch or Silvio Berlusconi (the media-magnate-come-Italian-Prime-Minister
— see Ginsborg, 2004), to interfere in the democratic workings of government, either by campaigning ‘unfairly’ against a particular candidate or party during a general election, or by seeking to manufacture popular support for a particular ideologically motivated course of action, such as the neoconservative designed and orchestrated 2003 Iraq War.

Media power is, therefore, far from an illusion — although that is, indeed, a key part of the media’s power. While the media may not be as powerful as other social institutions that have a monopoly over the use of physical force (such as governments, the military and the judiciary — Newton, 2006), the news media, through interpreting and animating the details of a particular story, have the ability to distort the ‘truth’ of a particular event or issue, which can result in the abuse of the powers of the state (or those of a major corporation) against the ‘interests’ of citizens. Of course, all news stories are subjective socio-cultural constructions, and thus interpretation is a necessary skill of the journalist (as was highlighted in the Triadic Model of Mass Communication). Yet, the interpretations of the journalist can, whether wittingly or unwittingly, fail to represent an issue in a ‘fair’ manner, creating instead a series of signified meanings that are, on the whole, more ‘fiction than fact’. Again, this is not to presuppose a simplistic notion of truth and falsity, in the absolute sense. As was discussed in Chapter 3, media representations are created from a process of socio-cultural interpretation (made possible by cognition and sensory perception), constituted (in the conceptual sense) by the discourses or ideologies through which the world is seen and understood by socio-political elites.
Thus, media texts have embedded ideological frames (encoded by the journalist and cultural defined) that serve to influence the decoding process undertaken by the reader or audience. Readers need not decode a ‘preferred reading’ of the story (in the sense of mentally classifying the decoded information as true), but they can in fact decode an oppositional reading, thereby disagreeing with the signified meanings or the articulated ‘message’ (Hall, 1980). In other words, although a newspaper may claim, with the professional authority of reporting ‘just the facts’ (what has been labelled the ‘will to facticity’ — Allan, 1995), that there are ‘weapons of mass destruction in Iraq’, this does not mean that readers will believe this assertion to be true. On the contrary, on such salient issues, where passions and opinions are inflamed, many readers will perhaps decode an oppositional interpretation, perceiving the story to be ‘biased’.

Does this, then, suggest that media bias is merely in the ‘eye of the beholder’? Obviously, a story framed according to one’s preferred ideological proclivities will be far less likely to be read as biased than one infused with oppositional ‘ways of seeing’. However, if a reader fails to perceive the presence of ideological bias, this does not mean that the researcher can conclude that bias does not exist; in any event, ‘whether the audience perceives bias is a different order of analysis to whether bias exists’ (Stevenson, 2004:30). The more important issue concerning the identification of bias lies not in the perception of the audience, but in the definition of the concept (which, like interrelated notions of truth and falsity, is a complex and epistemological fraught task). Leaving aside for the moment the question of deliberate bias, the essence of ‘unwitting’ or ‘ideological’ bias is born from the complexity of communication and interpretation. If two people on
opposite sides of a room see the occurrence of a simple action or event, such as the dropping of an object, then, despite their different, subjective perspectives, it is more than likely that they will agree on what event just took place (although they may not necessarily agree on the cause or the significance of the event in question). However, the more complicated the event — the more details, actions and issues that collectively comprise ‘the occurrence’ — then the greater the margin for conflicting interpretations. The journalist is, therefore, the ultimate pragmatist. Located ‘between reality and the representation of reality’ (Rupar, 2006:128), the journalist is forced to make the most unsatisfactory of philosophical choices based on questions such as: What views are relevant to this event or issue? Which details are important? How do I turn such details into a narrative which effectively and fairly communicates ‘the story’?

As complicated events can always be told according to a different story, there will always be competing representations regarding a particular issue, with different journalists choosing different ‘facts’ and opinions to include in the construction of a news narrative (Allan, 1995). Yet, this does not mean that one journalistic account is ‘truth’, while a competing text is a biased representation — news stories need not use the same ‘facts’, ‘experts’ and focus in order to communicate ‘the truth’ of a particular event. Rather, the

Daniel Hallin (1986:117) provides a useful model that maps a journalist’s decision to include or exclude particular voices and perspectives. Consisting of three concentric circles, Hallin’s model of ‘Spheres of Consensus, Controversy and Deviance’, highlights how and why certain political views come to be marginalised from the mainstream news media. The inner circle of this model is the ‘Sphere of Consensus’, and is defined by the common cultural values and beliefs of a particular society — the hegemonic ways of seeing the social and physical world. Here questions of balance or bias do not apply as the viewpoints characterising this sphere are considered by journalists to be unquestionable truths. The next circle is the ‘Sphere of Legitimate Controversy’, and is defined by the voices, politics and ideologies of the main political parties that dominate a particular democratic state. Within this sphere questions regarding a lack of balance or objectivity are easily explored and answered (Hallin, 1986:116). Finally, bounding the Sphere of Legitimate Controversy lays the ‘Sphere of Deviance’, which Hallin (1986:117) describes as ‘the realm of those political actors and views which journalists and the political mainstream of the society reject as unworthy of being heard’.

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validity of all news texts is dependent on their empirically verified factual content, their non-partisan reportage and analysis, and their willingness to air and engage with alternative interpretations. Although the journalist (and the audience) cannot transcend their socio-cultural schema of interpretation, by aspiring for ‘objectivity’ they make an ethical and pragmatic commitment to fairly represent the ‘truth’ (as they see it). In doing so, the journalist acknowledges that the news text can never capture the infinite complexity of reality, but must, in fact, represent the ‘essence’ of the event.

Accordingly, bias should be thought of as the ‘tipping point’ within representation, when fiction comes to weigh more than fact. To identify bias researchers must first seek out any missing factual details, before then considering the sum of the encoded meanings or messages of the text, looking for ideological frames that may distort the ‘truth’ of an issue. This latter task requires researchers to deconstruct representations in order to reveal the socio-linguistic layers of meaning and the workings of the text — the semiotic interplay of both manifest and latent content. Such analysis seeks to expose the links between the text’s ideological frames and discourses (the tacit, yet power-imbued, ways of seeing) and that of the institutional environment in which the text was produced. Such an analysis is not methodologically perfect (in the positivist sense of researchers being able exactly to replicate each others’ findings — although this should be a research-guiding principle). Yet, through rigorous assessment, based on the best available knowledge of an event, researchers can make analytical judgements regarding the truthfulness of a text (assessments which few others would dispute). From this point, the researcher can then move to focus on the broader publication or programme, seeking a
systemic pattern of bias throughout an entire news product and, indeed, corporation. Thus, the search for bias is elevated from the level of the article or news bulletin to the level of the medium, and eventually to that of the institution. ‘Media bias’ is, therefore, the result of missing factual details, the favouring of certain ideological perspectives, and a disregard for the values and practices of objectivity at the socio-cultural level of the text and that of the media institution.

In the case of major news conglomerates such as Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation, the search for bias, and thus the search for a media proprietor’s power to use his information institutions for political/ideological ends, must now take place on the transnational plane of ‘networked societies’. This is not to suggest that the political economic critique of media power should be abandoned in favour of a form of network analysis (thinking of media conglomerates as interconnected networks can take one’s inquiry only so far — see Smart, 2000). On the contrary, political economy remains the most important tool for the analysis of media power. Its strength lies, as has been noted by Graham Murdock and Peter Golding (2005:66), in highlighting three important dimensions of media culture: (1) that the social/industrial conditions of media production can determine (although not entirely) the types of cultural goods on offer; (2) that such social/industrial conditions of production have representational consequences at the level of the text; and (3) that the power relationships that structure society are manifest, to a certain discursive extent, at the level of the text. Thus the political economic critique traces the power structures of the text back to the socio-cultural context, considering both methods of production and the institutional environment, as well as the discourses that
signify meanings. In other words, political economy is capable of mapping both the institutional structure of News Corporation, a corporate hierarchy which allows Murdoch to direct his executives to take a particular ideological stance, as well as the wider socio-cultural discourses drawn upon by the company’s editorial and journalistic staff in their interpretations of the world.

The political economic approach does, then, identify and explain the three main forms of media power: ‘discursive power’, ‘access power’, and ‘resource power’ (see Street, 2001:232). The first of these three forms, discursive power, refers to the media’s control of information, and is perhaps best expressed in the adage that ‘knowledge is power’. ‘Discursive power’ is the media’s ability to shape how people think about a particular event, person, or issue (as was discussed in greater detail in Chapters 3). In its most crude form, such power is manifest in the propagandistic communication systems of totalitarian or authoritarian societies (such as Vladimir Putin’s Russia or contemporary Communist China), where the state might seek to censor certain ideas or information, else their rule be challenged by popular unrest. In liberal democracies, however, discursive power tends to take a more sophisticated and subtle form, persuading, rather than forcing, the audience to view a particular event or issue according to a preferred (discursive) schema of interpretation (as was highlighted in the Triadic Model of Mass Communication discussed in Chapter 3). Or, as John Street (2001:233-234) notes:

We do not have to assume that because newspapers support one party or ideology [that] this will directly influence the way people vote, any more
[than] we should assume that violent films will increase the level of violence in society. Some connection is supposed, but it is not a simple matter of cause and effect … Nonetheless, insofar as mass media are responsible for the circulation of particular ideas and images, and insofar as these shape thoughts and actions, the mass media are thought to wield discursive or ideological power.

In the findings of this thesis, such discursive power is perhaps best demonstrated by the dramatic shift in public opinion regarding the invasion of Iraq. As was noted in Chapter 4, prior to the commencement of the war, and despite the belligerent editorial stance of parts of the Murdoch press, a majority of Australians was clearly against the war without the conflict having the backing of the United Nations (Goot, 2003). Yet, as Australian forces joined coalition partners in the invasion, public opinion shifted as a new discourse of ‘support the troops’ came to dominate the pages of not only the Murdoch press, but other news sources that had taken a more balanced editorial stance (see Bromley, 2004).

Tacitly tied to the idea of discursive power is that of ‘access power’, which refers to the pathways and opportunities available to the public for the expression of their ideas and concerns — or who gets to ‘write’ a society’s discursive ways of seeing. Access power is, then, about participation in the media, and thus participation in the virtual agora that constitutes the public sphere of the ‘Information Age’ (Castells, 2000). At one level, access power refers to issues pertaining to media ownership, with conglomeration seen as a force militating against the diversity of public expression (as demonstrated by the
uniformity of the editorial stance taken by the Murdoch press *vis-à-vis* the 2003 Iraq War — see Manne, 2005). At another level, access power is concerned with the potential for ‘market failure’, with the cultural and political ‘tastes’ of certain audiences failing to be catered for by a commercial media sector that must chase the largest and most financially lucrative audience demographic (Street, 2001:234-235). Likewise, certain individuals or groups might be marginalised from access to the media due to a perceived lack of ‘telegenicity’ — or the failure to fit the polished archetype of the ‘media personality’. Thus ‘media-generated criteria’ regarding how one should look, talk, and act come to influence the processes of other institutional fields (such as the selection of a leader for a political party), consequently helping to determine who gains access to social and political power (Street, 2001:235).

Intertwined with both discursive power and access power, ‘resource power’ is the final major form of media power (as identified by John Street, 2001). In essence, resource power refers to the influence that major media companies (such as *News Corporation*) wield over the workings of governments and states. In the Triadic Model of Mass Communication presented earlier in this thesis (see Chapter 3), the media were collectively positioned as a ‘secondary definer’, a subordinate institutional field in the interpretative process of communication, with ‘the executive’ (politicians and government officials) and ‘the elites’ (be they academics, public commentators, or others from a news-defining profession) positioned higher in the news-defining hierarchy. Yet this arrangement of ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ news definers is not to suggest that the media are subservient to government (as is the case in authoritarian societies), but rather
reflects the media’s dependence on certain information sources (such as a government’s account of why the country needs to go to war). For while the media are a weaker force than government (in terms of setting and implementing a public agenda), they are, nonetheless, capable of influencing the processes of government through the use of data regarding public opinion or through exposing information that might be detrimental to those holding office. Furthermore, as major social institutions that employ thousands of individuals and generate much economic wealth, the media have the lobbying power of any other ‘big business’. Indeed, this lobbying power can lead to a form of ‘market corruption’, where governments might be reluctant to regulate against the commercial interests of major media conglomerates (such as introducing cross-media ownership laws to restrict the vertical expansion of established media companies). Thus, ‘resource power’ highlights the intertwined and mutually dependent relationship between governments and the media.

What, then, do these findings say about the mass media? What lessons can be learned from Rupert Murdoch’s biased support for the invasion of Iraq? Far from uniformly acting as a ‘fourth estate watchdog’ vigilantly guarding the public interest (as the common ‘liberal theory’ of the news media attests — see Curran, 2005), large sections of the media, as this thesis shows, can deliberately abdicate their critical duties in order to serve the interests of a particular ideology, slavishly acting as cheerleaders for a government or party whose core ideologies or interests dovetail with those of a media proprietor (such was the case with the Howard Government and the Murdoch media). Or, as James Curran (2005:125) notes, ‘the market can give rise not to independent
watchdogs serving the public interest but to corporate mercenaries which adjust their critical scrutiny to suit their private purpose’. Democracy does, of course, require citizens to exercise informed ‘decision making’ in an election, as part of the rule of popular sovereignty (that, for example, ‘a citizenry ought to consider in an informed way whether the killing of foreign citizens in its name is necessary or should be opposed’— Curran, 2005:134). Consequently, when the news media fail to fulfil their social/democratic commitment to the people — to provide extensive, intelligent and balanced media coverage of current affairs — then democracy ceases to function in an optimal manner. Indeed, democracy itself can be imperilled by media-generated misconceptions, fears and prejudices, with the ideal of ‘popular sovereignty’ twisted into the reality of the ‘rule of the mob’. If democracy is to be protected from the potential manipulations of ‘media moguls’, and if policy makers are to regulate the media industries in a manner conducive to the creation of an informed and reflective citizenry, then a new model of democratic media is needed: one in which values pertaining to ‘diversity of voice’ and ‘diversity of opinion’ are fundamentally enshrined. The envisioning of such a model is the final goal of this thesis.

**Re-visioning the Mass Media**

As was noted in Chapter 1, Jürgen Habermas’ (1992; 1997) concept of the public sphere is one of the most influential formulations regarding the workings of democracy and the rule of ideas. In his vision of the public sphere, Habermas argues that the media can provide a virtual agora for the exchange of ideas, where private citizens can help to bring about a ‘better world’ (or at least one freed from ignorance), through the dialectical...
evolution of knowledge. Implicit in this ideal formulation of the mass media is the argument that newspapers, along with other news media, would seek to educate, inspire, defend (protecting the public interests from the abuses of the powerful), and unite (promote national unity while preserving cultural diversity). By endeavouring to meet these ideal expectations, this form of public sphere would further the fulfilment of the promises of the Enlightenment: the liberation of humanity from ignorance and the ‘unreflective slavery of instinct’ (Connor, 2000:360-361). In revising his formulation of the concept of the public sphere, Habermas argues the need for ‘key activists’, or well-informed individuals, who would represent different socio-cultural groups and seek to identify social inequality in order to achieve its democratic alleviation, thereby helping the news media meet their role of society’s fourth estate (Curran, 2000).

However, for Habermas the liberating potential of the public sphere has largely been stolen by the hidden hand of market corruption, with the commodification of the media/culture nexus effectively standardising public expression (particularly in relation to those media institutions considered to be the core of the mass media). Implicit in this argument is the contention that the commercial media often fail to meet the ideals of a socially enriching public sphere, forced instead to chase mass audiences with inexpensive (often banal) content, cutting back budgets for the production of labour-intensive investigative journalism. In an era where neo-liberal ideology dominates economic thinking and policy formation in many Western democracies, the problems posed by the growing triviality of the commercial media are magnified as a small number of large corporations come to occupy increased space within the broader public sphere, as is
demonstrated by the shrinking collective of media owners (Bagdikian, 2004; Winseck, 2008). Indeed, the forces of conglomeration and deregulation are seeing the expansion of major transnational media corporations on a global scale, with the spread of international media seeing the proliferation of ‘Murdoch-like’ business models and content strategies, resulting in the ‘Murdochization’ of media markets where News Corporation is yet to have a direct presence (see Sonwalkar, 2002; Thussu, 1998; Thussu, 2007). Although it is important not to overstate the deficiencies of the private news media (as there are many rival commercial media corporations, some of which continue to provide excellent news services and have proven to be resilient to the ideological assault mounted by economic rationalism), the ‘rise and rise’ of major media conglomerates (and their content philosophies) does, indeed, allow for scholars to talk of a ‘Public Sphere Inc.’ (Thussu, 2008). As has been discussed elsewhere in this thesis, the implications posed by this shrinking media oligopoly — that is, the ‘privatisation of the public sphere’ — is the standardisation of voices and perspectives, and thus ideological diversity, resulting in the subversion of the mechanisms by which debate can be joined by an informed public and by which the genuine rule of ideas is made possible.

Here, then, at the end of this thesis’s exposition of media power and ideology, it is appropriate to ask one final question: given this trend towards media monopoly, and its consequences for the diversity of ideas and the functioning of democracy, how can nations militate against bias (such as demonstrated by the Murdoch news media) and work to preserve a civically enriching public sphere? The answer lies in creating a regulatory framework which seeks to preserve both content diversity and quality news
media. As James Curran (2005:122) argues, the most common conceptualisation of the media vis-à-vis democracy is that of the classic liberal theory of the ‘free press’, an ideal type which dates ‘from a frockcoated world where the “media” consisted principally of small-circulation, political publications and the state was still dominated by a landed elite’. Consequently, much policy making concerning the media of the 21st century is made in reference to a model of the press which no longer reflects the realities of the industries or their effects. Noting how current market forces can easily silence the functioning of a ‘watchdog press’, Curran (2005:139) offers a ‘working model of a democratic media system’, which he depicts as a circle, representing ‘public service television’, encased in an outer circle, which is, in turn, divided into four segments, each representing a different media sector: the ‘private sector’, ‘civic sector’, ‘professional sector’, and the ‘social market sector’.

Intended as a type of conceptual framework for the creation of media policy, Curran’s ‘ideal’ model is built on the principle that the news media are not a single institution serving a unified democratic function. Rather, Curran (2005) sees different media as having different functions within the overall democratic system of information exchange. The core of Curran’s (2005:139) model is public service television: the virtual space where different individuals and groups ‘engage in reciprocal debate’ regarding the management of society. This core sector is fed by the outer rings of the media model, three of which — namely, the civic sector, the professional sector and the social market sector — are intended to facilitate the expression of minority views and oppositional discourses. For instance, the ‘civic media sector’ supports groups such as ‘activist
organisations’, as well as community organisations, cultural groups and political parties, in disseminating their ideas to an imagined broader public. Likewise, the ‘social market sector’ consists of minority media, supported by funding or subsidies from the state, which otherwise could not compete against other (presumably American) media in the cultural market place (due to the ‘economies of scale’ which tip cultural production in favour of larger industries). Similarly, the ‘professional media sector’ refers to media that need to be protected from the vagaries of the market (through state funding and regulatory support), and would be dedicated to fourth estate content, particularly programmes devoted to investigative journalism, as well as other educational content such as documentaries, historical dramas, and other ventures that give the media producer the maximum amount of creative freedom. In contrast, Curran sees the final segment of his model, the ‘private media sector’, as performing the valuable function of balancing the politics of the other sectors through its trend towards privileging right-wing ideological perspectives and by enhancing the overall pluralism of the media system.

Although Curran’s model is admirable for its ambitious scope and its desire to cater to all communities and ideological dispositions, it is unnecessarily complex and overly dependent on state funding. However, it is possible to rework his model and its ideals for the Australian media context, without sacrificing its socially enriching features. Following Curran’s core principle of creating pathways of access for different communities, Figure 23 below offers a simplified version of the democratic media system, one which can be used by national and state legislators when considering the type of media landscape that will be of the most benefit to Australian society. Like Curran’s
model, it is not merely an indulgence in utopian thinking, but rather seeks to build on existing sector strengths, and policy prototypes, in order to achieve diversity of expression and a greater level of public access.

In essence, the ‘Public Access Model of Media Organisation’ is conceptualised as consisting of three overlapping spheres (or three circles that overlap in the centre of the diagram — see Figure 23 below). These circles collectively represent an ideal of Australia’s media-constituted public sphere; and all the utopian potential promised by the Habermasian master concept. The first circle ‘Public Service Media’ is comprised of Australia’s two existing public broadcasting companies, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS). While these two broadcasters are at present invaluable contributors to Australian culture and politics — thanks to the social values enshrined in their charters, the quality of their journalism, and their commitment to intelligent documentaries — their editorial and financial independence should be further strengthened to ensure full ‘market immunity’\(^{34}\), and that governments are not in a position to stack their respective boards with likeminded ideologues\(^{35}\). Fundamentally, the public service media sector should be concerned with providing balanced news and current affairs programming (including programmes

\(^{34}\) Public service media can maintain ‘market immunity’, while receiving revenue from the private/commercial sector, provided that certain ‘safeguards’ are in place to ensure that content creation is not influenced by market forces. For instance, the ABC arguably continues to meet its social and cultural obligations because of its charter, despite the broadcaster’s commercial operations in ‘product sales’ and ‘ABC Shops’ (which, in fact, help to further distribute the broadcasters programming). Although the SBS is perhaps more vulnerable to commercial pressures than the ABC — since the Howard government introduced a hybrid commercial/public funding model in 2006 — it, too, continues to meet its charter obligations by serving Australia’s minority cultures.

\(^{35}\) In 2009, the Rudd Labor Government established an independent panel for the nomination of potential board members for the ABC and SBS, with the intent of ending the potential for the politicisation of the board of the ABC (see Morton, 2009).
dedicated to investigative journalism), as well as other media content considered to be capable of enriching Australian society and culture.

Figure 23 Public Access Model of Media Organisation
Whereas the public service media sector would be dominated by industry professionals and ‘key activists’, the second media sector, ‘Civic Media’, is dedicated to the promotion of civic values and community participation in media production. Australia is fortunate in that it already has a prototype of this sector in the form of community radio stations (see Griffen-Foley, 2009). At present, Australia’s radio industry is divided into three sectors: commercial, public, and community radio. This model should be further liberalised and extended to other media (particularly television), so that communities desiring their own media platforms can have access to a broadcast frequency (or provided space on the new digital spectrum) and/or subsidised production equipment. Such media can be closely affiliated with the general provisions of local government, and should be based on loose criteria promoting ‘cultural diversity and social harmony’, and adhere to a ‘not-for-profit’ philosophy.

This civic media policy could take the form of a university radio or television station (broadcasting public lectures for the benefit of the local community), or a radio station dedicated to providing cultural programming for minority cultures (where the needs of such communities are not currently being met by public service media, such as the radio stations of the SBS). Likewise, grants might be made available for the production of television programming outside of Australia’s state capitals, ensuring that other communities have an opportunity to participate (if only in a modest form) in the nation’s ‘creative industries’. Such programming could be made more attractive to the commercial television networks if content regulations stipulated a need for regionally produced content. After its initial appearance, the best of such civic programming could then be re-
shown on public service broadcasting, thus contributing to the enrichment of the national culture.

The last sector, ‘Private Media’, as the name suggests, consists of the commercial media in all their forms. While the function and makeup of this sector would largely remain unchanged from its present organisation, the government should consult with commercial operators regarding the utilisation of new digital technologies. The government could, for example, review its ‘anti-siphoning’ and ‘anti-hording’ provisions regarding the televising of popular Australian sports, with commercial operators given the ability to show additional original content on their digital channels\textsuperscript{36}. Although it is still important to ensure that events of ‘national significance’ are readily accessible by the public, and not ‘horded’ by wealth media operators, new reforms might be able to further the utilisation of the digital spectrum and its technological advantages.

While it is important to ensure that the commercial media remain financially viable, legislators should re-approach this sector with the desire for facilitating access (for new entrants) and diversity (in regards to both content and media ownership). Content quotas should be maintained and periodically reviewed to ensure quality local programming is being produced for Australian audiences. At present, 55 per cent of all content on the free-to-air television broadcasters, from 6am to midnight, must qualify as ‘Australian content’ (see ACMA, 2009). Additionally, Pay-TV providers must spend at least ‘10 per cent of their total programme expenditure on new Australian drama’ (ACMA, 2009).

\textsuperscript{36} In mid-2009, the Rudd Government announced a review of the legislation regarding ‘sport on television’ and the anti-hording/siphoning policies (ACMA, 2009). Any future policy changes resulting from this review will eventuate in 2010.
Given the recent critical and popular acclaim for Australian television series such as *Underbelly* (shown on the Nine Network) and *Love My Way* (Pay-TV), more regulatory pressure should be placed on commercial operators to screen ‘quality’ Australian drama. Indeed, within the framework of the broader Australian content requirements, the government should seek the implementation of an ‘assessment system’ that rewards the creation of new ‘quality programming’ in the areas of drama, documentary, and news and current affairs.

The functioning of the commercial media might also be improved by reviewing the existing powers of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) and the Australian Communication and Media Authority (ACMA). In particular, the ACMA should be granted the ability to investigate and punish private broadcast media that can be proven to have acted in a deliberately biased or undemocratic manner, as defined by the relevant industry codes of practice\(^\text{37}\) (although the independence granted by the self-regulatory framework of the press should continue in its present form). Furthermore, the 2007 media reforms\(^\text{38}\) of the former Howard Government should be reviewed so that the ACCC possesses the regulatory authority to prevent the further conglomeration of the Australian commercial media sector (which is in danger of being further ‘Murdochised’). Although the regulation of the commercial media sector can be unpopular (particularly amongst media proprietors), and can result in unforeseen problems (such as the financial

\(^{37}\)The codes of practice developed and monitored by FreeTV Australia — the industry body which represents the free-to-air commercial television networks and promotes self-regulation — requires news and current affairs programming to be ‘fair’, ‘impartial’, and ‘factual’ (FreeTV, 2004:32-34).

\(^{38}\)The 2007 Howard Government media reforms limit cross-media ownership to six corporations in Sydney and Melbourne, five in all other state capitals, and four in regional markets. Furthermore, a ‘two out of three’ diversity test applies to all markets, which limits cross-media ownership to ‘no more than two of three regulated platforms (that is, commercial radio, television and Associated Newspapers)’ (Coonan, 2007).
difficulties that followed the Hawke/Keating media ownership reforms of 1986/1987),
the challenge for governments is to create a media sector with healthy profit margins,
dynamic creative impulses, and fair and balanced journalism.

Although the Public Access Model of Media Organisation offers no definite steps in
terms of legislative reforms, it provides an articulation and reorganisation of many of the
broad principles that have been underpinning the operations of the Australian media for
over the last 70 years (particularly the ideals enshrined in the ABC’s charter). It is, in
essence, a ‘working model’, the first statements in an ongoing discussion, and is thus
open to critique, ready for further investigation, and in need of more detail regarding its
adaptation and implementation — goals of future research projects. Indeed, rather than a
definitive solution to the problems of media power and media bias identified and
discussed in this thesis, the Public Access Model is merely the first step on the path to
realising the emancipating and enriching potential of the Australian mass media, offering
general insights into the form of media re-organisation required.

In particular, future research is needed to consider the challenges posed by the internet
and ‘citizen journalism’ to the economic model of the press (see Allan, 2006; Allan and
Thorsen, 2009). Understanding the implications of online news for democracy is an
important area for further investigation. For, while the internet’s citizen journalists are
exposing new perspectives to the public that were previously unseen (see Allan, 2006),
the economic foundations of the press — and, thus, of society’s traditional ‘fourth estate’
— are rapidly eroding as both circulation and advertising revenue decline. The
implication here is a decline in the ‘newsgathering’ resources available to newspaper publishers, and consequently the publication of fewer pieces of investigative journalism. Given that the majority of citizen journalists/bloggers lack the resources needed to establish themselves in, for example, the Canberra press gallery, they are _per se_ an inadequate institutional ‘check and balance’ to the power of the state. Moreover, with the decline of news and current affairs programming on the free-to-air commercial networks (Turner, 2005), the potential collapse of the ‘serious’ press poses significant repercussion for Australian democracy. It is, therefore, fundamentally important that future research seeks to understand how digital technologies, the internet and citizen journalists might be used to diversify voices and perspectives articulated within the media, while maintaining the expensive news gathering processes and practices of traditional journalism.

As this thesis has shown, if society is to be protected from misinformation or the potential abuses of government, or indeed those of private interests, then the news media must be sufficiently diverse, both ideologically and editorially, to ensure the vigilant scrutiny of ‘centres of power’ (Curran, 2005:144-145). The news media must be in a position to provide citizens with the best available information on which to base and exercise their democratic responsibilities. It does not matter whether this information is decoded from a television, newspaper, or the screen of an ‘Iphone’. Rather, it is the question of ‘news quality’ — as determined by accuracy, fairness, depth, and balance — that remains of central importance. If policy reformers work towards the establishment of a diverse media system that fulfils the needs of citizens for factual and unbiased information, then democratic society will be enriched by the dialectical exchange of knowledge. Moreover,
the news media will return to their dual role as purveyors of information and ‘fourth estate guardians’ of the public interest.
APPENDICES
Appendix A Methodology: Content Analysis

It was apparent from an early stage in the conceptual formation of this thesis that questions regarding possible right-wing ideological dispositions encoded within the products of *News Corporation* could only be explored through the direct analysis of media texts. Without primary research material, this thesis would be a mere summation and evaluation of existing data and arguments, and would fail to make a genuine contribution to the field of inquiry. Of course, *News Corporation* is an extensive media conglomerate with major commercial operations on five continents. Therefore, the vast size of *News Corporation*, and the potential enormous scope of this dissertation, necessitated a case study approach to the investigation of the hypothesis: that Rupert Murdoch’s ideological values and opinions manifest themselves within his corporation’s news media (which informed the creation of the research questions discussed in Chapter 1).

Accordingly, the empirical component of this thesis utilises a tripartite (or triadic) methodology comprised of both quantitative and qualitative textual research methods — content analysis, interpretative content analysis and semiotics — in order to analyse an important component of *News Corporation’s* Australian media operations: the influential, national, broadsheet newspaper *The Australian*. Content analysis and semiotics are research methods employed by various disciplines and interdisciplinary areas within the social sciences and the humanities. They are common, well-established, tools of inquiry that, when used in combination, provide both breadth and depth to textual analysis. These research methods yield large amounts of descriptive data, and were thus deemed to be the
most appropriate analytical tools on which to base the ‘interpretative paradigm’ that informs this dissertation (see Alford, 1998). Through an inductive research approach, this dissertation seeks to contribute detailed sociological data and analysis to a field of inquiry that too often lacks arguments supported by empirical evidence. What follows is an account of the research process undertaken for this thesis, with the addendum focusing first on the exposition of the quantitative and qualitative content analysis component of the methodology, before exploring the semiotic research method. Application rather than epistemology is the central, although not exclusive, concern of this exposition, as detailed histories of both research methods abound (see Berger, 2000; Bignell, 1997; Chandler, 2007; Eco, 1976; Gottdiener, 1995; Gunter, 2000; Krippendorff, 2004; Neuendorf, 2002).

**Content Analysis (Quantitative and Interpretive)**

Although the term content analysis dates back to the early 1940s (Krippendorff, 2004:3), with similar research techniques having been employed prior to this period by disciplines such as journalism, media studies, psychology and sociology, it was only during the latter half of the 20th century that the use of the research method proliferated throughout the social sciences, helping to refine and articulate its central assumptions and processes. One widely cited definition of content analysis is that offered by Berelson (1952, cited in Bryman, 2001:178): ‘content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication’. This definition clearly situates content analysis at the quantitative end of the social research continuum.

39 As content analysis and semiotics are two very distinct methods of textual analysis, it was decided that each method should be discussed in separate appendices so as to avoid the conflation of their significantly different epistemological concerns and methodological practices.
implying that messages and/or meanings within texts are both quantifiable and inherent (Krippendorff, 2004:18-20).

Although the methodology informing this thesis assumes that there are indeed elements within a text that can be coded, measured and categorised, the notion that meanings are inherent within texts is somewhat antiquated. Developments within sociology and cultural studies have helped to show that the reader brings meanings to the text that might not necessarily equate with the messages that the author of the text had hoped to communicate (Krippendorff, 2004:20). Furthermore, Berelson’s assertion that content analysis should be quantitative, a position held by other researchers such as Neuendorf (2002:14), seemingly restricts the research focus to surface content, solely a descriptive analysis, and so one incapable of exploring latent content. This is an unreasonable claim and an unnecessary restriction of the research methods use. The validity of content analysis as a quantitative method lies not in its claim of objectivity, but rather on the principle of ‘inter-coder reliability’: the extent to which the results of a particular study can be replicated by another researcher employing the same measures and processes. In other words, replication is central to the quantitative claim made by content analysis, and is the basis on which the research method claims validity.

It is, therefore, possible to design a coding scheme that moves across the social research continuum, beginning with the calculation of frequencies, and sliding towards a more thematic analysis based on ascertaining and interpreting ‘*a priori*’ (or ‘pre-termed’) ideological positions (Neuendorf, 2002:11). While the further one moves across the
social research continuum the greater the risk that ‘readings’ of a text will differ from researcher to researcher, a coding scheme that moves from the quantitative to qualitative content analysis undoubtedly increases the scope of the textual analysis and, when placed within a carefully designed methodological framework, is still capable of achieving a relatively high level of replication that counters claims of researcher bias.

Accordingly, the version of content analysis employed by this thesis endeavours to ‘access’ both manifest and latent content. Krippendorff (2004:18) defines content analysis as ‘a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the context of their use’. This was the guiding definition — and epistemology — informing the content analysis employed by this thesis’ methodology, with the researcher aspiring to be both ‘systematic’ and ‘objective’ during the research process, as proposed by Berelson. The coding process of each individual newspaper article involved two distinct processes. The first research process saw the counting and measuring of manifest content in the form of ascertaining the frequency of certain words, determining an article’s size and placement, and measuring the space given to different authoritative sources (such as politicians and academics) within a particular text. The second, more subjective, process saw the coding of articles according to one of six a priori ideological categories, deemed to be broadly representative of the common discourses that surround the chosen case study: the debate regarding the 2003 invasion of Iraq (discussed in more detail below). Both methods followed the standard empirical practice of first establishing a hypothesis (noted above), followed by conceptualisation of a methodological framework, and the designing of a coding scheme.
and rules of analysis, prior to beginning the research process (see Appendix C). Thus, in a
systematic manner, articles were read by the researcher with the frequency of certain
words and other measurements recorded onto a ‘coding sheet’ (in the form of a Microsoft
Excel spreadsheet).

Although part of the content analysis employed by this dissertation cannot, by its
interpretative nature, be considered entirely quantitative, a large portion of the data
generated by this thesis could easily be replicated by other researchers (allowing, of
course, for a certain margin of human error). This is why the results of the content
analysis are split into two, uneven categories in the results chapter of this dissertation
(Chapter 5). For, although the research methods have to a certain extent been integrated
in their application, other researchers with strongly held positivistic views on empirical
inquiry can ignore the interpretative component of the content analysis, and simply focus
on the quantitative data sets (with their higher level of inter-coder reliability). In noting
this quantitative/qualitative divide it is not my intention to undermine or deny the value
or, indeed, the findings of the interpretative component of the content analysis employed
for this thesis. It is, rather, to highlight the author’s desire to establish arguments based on
findings that are not vulnerable to the often pernicious, and specious, critiques of both
quantitative and qualitative methodologies by their exclusive proponents. From the
outset, this was a major consideration in the conceptualisation of this methodology. As
too often debates about the mass media and ideological bias (or ‘slanted representations’)
lack empirical support, it was my intention to construct a robust methodology. This thesis
is, then, primarily a work of sociological inquiry, heavily informed and influenced by
media and cultural studies, and as such it is in part an empirical endeavour and should not be confused with the many emotive polemics, or the ‘arguments by anecdote’ (Curtin, 2005), that have concerned Rupert Murdoch, News Corporation, and, indeed, the 2003 Iraq War.

This is not, however, to suggest that the numerical data and other empirical evidence collected for this thesis exist in an historical vacuum, where the analysis begins and ends with the text, removed from broader debates and/or socio-historical context. On the contrary, the selective nature of the research sample intentionally and irrevocably ties the analysis to recent events and arguments of historic significance (events re-contextualised through the historical narratives presented in Chapters 2 and 4). While content analysis generates large amounts of statistical data, such data are largely irrelevant without a historic context and a research paradigm through which they can be analysed and understood. As the eminent sociologist C. Wright Mills (1959/2000) pointed out in the Sociological Imagination, data divorced from theory is ‘abstract empiricism’, social research reduced to simply ‘number crunching’ (see Alford, 1998:50; see also Hobbs, 2009). Consequently, the data are drawn from a deliberately selective sample, one that takes into account pragmatic research constraints, such as the access to research materials and the requisite period of time needed for coding, and the difficulty of the task imposed by the hypothesis: identifying the political beliefs of Rupert Murdoch within a global media corporation.
The Sample (Content Analysis)

During the conceptualisation of this thesis’ methodology it was decided that newspapers — in a microfilm format — would be the focus of the dissertation’s empirical component. While at first glance this decision might appear odd, given the salience of debates concerning political bias and television (and, in particular, debates regarding the effects of Murdoch’s US-based Fox News), the press was chosen for a number of important reasons. For instance, in Australia Murdoch’s media operations are largely confined (although no longer due to legislation) to newspapers (with the notable exception of News Corporation’s magazine assets, a 25 per cent stake in the Pay TV provider Foxtel, and 44 per cent share in Sky Network television), with such publications readily available in the form of Micro-Film. Yet, more important than the geo-political context and the resource needs of the researcher, the press was chosen because of its socio-historical importance as a purveyor of information, and as an agenda-setting instrument of public opinion. As Julianne Schultz (1998:15) notes ‘for nearly two hundred years the idea that the press plays a central role in the management and maintenance of a representative democracy has framed debates about the media’.

Claiming for itself the title of the ‘fourth estate’, the press has historically been seen as a watchdog, protecting the rights of citizens, and serving as a check on the potential abuses of power by governments, individuals and/or corporations (see Schultz, 1998). Although the rise of broadcasting and new media have seen a decrease in the circulation figures of many newspapers, the press (and, in particular, the quality press), with its propensity for investigative journalism and space for analysis and debate, continues to be an influential medium. Indeed, although many have foretold the demise of the newspaper, the press (for
the present at least) continue to help set the agenda for much of Australia’s news media (a role that may continue into the future should newspapers successful ingrate into online formats).

Another reason for focussing on newspapers is because of their prominent place within *News Corporation*’s Australian operations: a dominant market position that provides Murdoch with considerable political power. For instance, the ‘Murdoch press’ dominates the national newspaper industry, with the company’s Australian subsidiary, News Limited, accounting for over 60 per cent of the total readership figure for all major national and metropolitan newspapers (see Figure 24 below). In a number of Australia’s smaller capital cities, *News Corporation* owns the sole daily newspaper, while in Australia’s two largest cities, Sydney and Melbourne, Murdoch controls (respectively) the most widely read newspapers, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Herald Sun* (see Manne, 2005b:84; and Figure 24). Beyond the success of News Limited’s tabloid operations, Murdoch controls Australia’s only generalist newspaper with a national circulation, the influential broadsheet, *The Australian*. Accordingly, Murdoch’s dominance of the Australian press has been a major source of revenue for the corporation since its inception in South Australia, and has provided the financial basis on which *News Corporation*’s global operations were launched. Factors such as these helped to determine the focus of the dissertation. Any anti-democratic consequences, such as right-wing ideological bias, resulting from Murdoch’s monopoly ownership of the press would be at their most concerning in Australia, and, thus, in greatest need of study and exposure.
With regard to the specific newspapers chosen to comprise the study’s research sample, two broadsheet newspapers were ultimately selected: News Corporation’s The Australian and the Fairfax Media’s the Sydney Morning Herald. While The Australian has a relatively low daily circulation, it was deemed the most important political element of the ‘Murdoch press’, and, thus, the most appropriate newspaper for this empirical investigation. For The Australian is widely seen as the flagship of News Corporation’s Australian media operations, due to its prominence as the sole daily broadsheet newspaper with a national audience. It is also an influential newspaper, as was confirmed in 2001 by the Australian Broadcasting Authority’s (now the Australian Communications and Media Authority — ACMA) research report, Sources of News and Current Affairs, which noted that ‘The Australian along with the Daily Telegraph were perceived as the “dominant agenda setters in the daily news cycle”’ (cited by McKnight, 2005:56; see also...
Pearson et al., 2001). Interestingly, the newspaper is also something of an anomaly in the history of News Corporation, for, although Murdoch has purchased many established newspapers (closing some underperforming publications), he has only ever founded The Australian: a publication that did not make a profit for over 20 years (McKnight, 2003:350). Murdoch’s support of The Australian has been a source of interest for both biographers and academics, with David McKnight (2003; 2004; 2005; 2009) believing that Murdoch’s motivations for founding and supporting The Australian were political, rather than strictly economic, arguing that the newspaper has had, and continues to possess, a strong neo-liberal/conservative bias.

Like the decision to focus on The Australian, the choice of the Sydney Morning Herald as the newspaper through which to provide a comparative sample was far from random or arbitrary. The Sydney Morning Herald is Australia’s oldest newspaper, having been in operation for over 150 years, and is The Australian’s major commercial rival for the quality news market in Australia’s largest city: Sydney. It, too, is considered to command considerable ‘political clout’, with the media academic Trevor Barr (2000:52) claiming that the Sydney Morning Herald remains one of Australia’s most ‘analytical and influential’ newspapers, with the publication contributing to the setting of the ‘political agenda’. It should be noted, however, that the Sydney Morning Herald was not chosen with the intent of establishing a simplistic ‘good newspaper’ versus ‘bad newspaper’ dichotomy; the Sydney Morning Herald does not have a history free from criticism, and has in the past compromised journalistic ethics in order to serve the company’s
commercial interests (see Rowe, 1991:298-299). Essentially, it was included due to its common reputation as being both a ‘centrist’ and ‘quality’ publication.

Although there are many reasons why scholars should study the events and arguments that surround war, the choice of the 2003 Iraq War as the case study of this dissertation was due to three important ‘Murdoch factors’: his perceived media power, access to politicians, and outspoken views regarding the invasion of Iraq. Murdoch is seemingly drawn to politics, politicians and political parties. As was noted earlier in this thesis, he was once famously described by one of his executives, John Menadue, as a ‘frustrated politician’ (McKnight, 2003:348). Indeed, like a modern day ‘courtier’, it is common to see Murdoch dining with the world’s most powerful political leaders. Given Murdoch’s perceived (media-based) power, one would assume that his views are listened to, attentively, by politicians and their staff. With such access to political leaders it is hard to imagine that governments could fail to be aware of Murdoch’s outspoken support for the invasion of Iraq. As the political scientist Robert Manne (2005a:76-77) argues (and as was noted in Chapter 4):

To Murdoch’s credit, he does not even pretend that the editors he employs are allowed to exercise independent judgement when it comes to questions of serious importance to him — like war. As he laconically explained to an ABC journalist at News Corporation’s final shareholders’ meeting in Adelaide in October 2004: ‘With our newspapers we have indeed supported Bush’s foreign policy. And we remain committed that way’.
Accordingly, given the historic significance of the 2003 war with Iraq, and Murdoch’s outspoken support for the presidency of George W. Bush (especially during its first term), it was appropriate to use the conflict as the focus of this data sample. For, when it comes to the media’s power to ‘manufacture consent’ (Herman and Chomsky, 1994), the implications of presenting ‘justifications’ for war in a distorted or partisan manner are profound. Accordingly, this dissertation examined 1550 articles, painstakingly located by reading microfilm copies of the studied newspapers. ‘Iraq’ and ‘War’ were the control terms used to identify and define the article sample, with these words needing to appear within the written text of a news article for it to be included in the analysis. The notable exception to this methodological practice was the decision to included ‘letters to the editor’ and news ‘Update’ columns (sometimes called ‘News in Brief’), which may not have mentioned both key terms yet nevertheless referred to the developing Iraq crisis.

Like all the other aspects of the sample, the dates that define the parameters of the case study were also deliberately selective. While there have been many events and arguments that eventually led to the invasion of Iraq, it was decided that the month leading up to the war was the most appropriate for this study, as this was the period in which arguments, both for and against the conflict, reached ‘fever pitch’ as politicians attempted to make alliances and justify actions. Defining the parameters of a study in such a selective manner is not without precedent. As Alan Bryman (2001:182) notes in his book Social Research Methods, ‘sometimes the decision about dates is more or less dictated by the occurrence of a phenomenon’. Consequently, all newspapers of The Australian and the
Sydney Morning Herald between 21 February and 21 March, 2003 were subjected to content analysis.

The Research Process (Content Analysis)

Having determined the focus of the dissertation’s empirical component, it is necessary to define the ‘units of analysis’, and the accompanying ‘coding guidelines’, that would define the coding scheme and direct the content analysis. As noted earlier, the research process employed for this dissertation aspired to be both ‘systematic’ and ‘objective’, along the lines of a quantitative (somewhat positivist) tradition of content analysis, while also incorporating an interpretative component. Accordingly, the majority of the ‘units of analysis’ were defined *a priori*, with the exception of some minor alterations during the first few days of the research, such as the addition of *Jihad* to the indexical words list and adding the *Washington Post*, *The Guardian* and the *New York Times* to the authorship category (oversights that quickly became apparent). As the validity of content analysis lies in ‘inter-coder reliability’, the design of the coding scheme — which consists of both a coding sheet (sometimes called a coding schedule) and coding guidelines (rules/instructions that operationalise the key terms and units of analysis) — is a crucial stage in the research process. The depth of the analysis is a pivotal concern, but must be tempered by the need for replication. Thus, a good coding scheme is characterised by simple ‘units of measure’ and mutually exclusive categories into which data can be recorded (see Bryman, 2001:87-194). Although it is not necessary to discuss here all the decisions behind the formation of the coding scheme employed for this dissertation, some insight into its structure is offered to explain and defend the methodology of this thesis.
Using Microsoft Excel as the computer programme into which data could be entered and tabulations formulated, the coding sheet (a basic spreadsheet) contained all the categories listed in the coding guidelines (see Appendix C). The first third of the coding sheet is dedicated to basic details of each article. ‘Newspaper’, ‘Date’ and ‘Page Number’ are perhaps the most banal of these details, and were included for obvious organisational reasons, and contributed little to the results section of the dissertation (beyond showing an overview of the total coverage that each newspaper devoted to the Iraq War). What was hoped would yield more data are the next three basic ‘units of analysis’ listed on the coding sheet: ‘Newspaper Section’, ‘Authorship’ and ‘Article Size’. ‘Newspaper Section’ refers, of course, to the part of the newspaper in which a relevant article was located, and was included so as to obtain insight into which types of coverage each newspaper was giving the debate for war. For example, were the economic concerns of the conflict discussed more often on the ‘Business’ pages of the Sydney Morning Herald than The Australian? Which newspaper provided more opinion pieces or editorials on the conflict? Likewise, categories concerning authorship and article size also allowed important questions to be explored. Did, for instance, the Sydney Morning Herald rely on syndicated material from international newspapers with an alleged left-wing leaning, such as The Guardian? Was more space, in terms of words, given to ‘conservative’ or ‘liberal’ commentators, or rather to pro-war or anti-war politicians (and to other media pundits)? Although simple in their conception, these are important questions and measurements and, when coupled with each other, they generated quantitative data that mapped the overall conservative or liberal leanings of each newspaper (according to the
classical conception of a political continuum of Left and Right); and to what extent each paper was privileging either a pro-war or anti-invasion thematic frame.

Moving down the coding sheet, the next set of the ‘units of analysis’ is the ‘indexical words’ (or ‘keywords’). In essence, this component of the content analysis was included to establish the frequency of certain, significant words. The term ‘indexical’ is borrowed from the American semiotic tradition, in particular Charles Sanders Peirce’s ‘trichotomy of the sign’, in which he split all signs into three types ‘Icons’, ‘Symbols’ and ‘Indexes’, the last of which Peirce believed contained a particular ‘cause and effect’ meaning (such as the sign ‘smoke’ which denotes ‘fire’ — see Berger, 2000: 38-39). The term ‘indexical’ is used in this content analysis simply to draw attention to the actions and beliefs that are connoted by words, and not according to a strict replication of Peirce’s method (indeed, as is discussed in greater depth below, the semiotic analysis conducted for this thesis is derived more from the European tradition of semiology, first articulated by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, and extended by Roland Barthes, than that of C. S. Peirce). For example, ‘indexical’ words in the context of this thesis are simply words potentially heavy with ideological connotations, such as ‘dictator’, which connotes a particular sinister conception, and the word ‘liberation’, which has a more positive ‘cause and effect’ connotation: both of which are suggestive of an article’s latent ideological content.

This is not, however, to confuse or overlap the qualitative and quantitative research methods employed by this dissertation (the semiotic analysis was conducted after having
completed the content analysis). Despite using the term ‘indexical’, this component of the coding process was rudimentary, and consisted of counting words that (based on cursory explorations of newspapers) seemed to be frequently employed by the different discourses debating the possibility of war. Such numerical measurements are *per se* indicative only of manifest content, allowing inferences regarding an article’s focus (for example, ‘oil’ and/or ‘terrorists’) to be drawn. However, as is illustrated in the results chapter, it is possible to focus on the latent content of an article by reflecting on the frequency of certain words, such as using ‘invasion’ as opposed to ‘liberation’, and by analysing words in the context of other words, such as ‘coalition of the willing’, ‘freedom’, ‘liberation’ and ‘tyrant’ (see Bryman, 2001:184-185). Such juxtapositions of numerical data can provide the basis for a thematic analysis (discussed in greater detail below).

Moving further down the coding sheet (see Appendix C), the next group of ‘units of analysis’ were the identified ‘Authoritative Sources’. In essence, this section sought to measure two key elements of an article’s text. First, it endeavoured to determine how often certain sources, such as politicians belonging to the Howard Government (all of whom publicly supported the war), might be directly quoted in a particular article. Second, it measured the space, in terms of lines, given to the chief ideologues and protagonists debating the potential invasion of Iraq. Such measurements facilitated questions such as: who is given more unedited space (in terms of direct quotations) in each newspaper, was it US President George W. Bush and his allies within the Republican Party or his political opponents within the United States, be they Democrats
or ‘renegade’ Republicans? Was the Federal Coalition Government of John Howard given disproportionate space compared to the other Australian political parties? Were military spokespeople given more unedited space to air their views than protestors or academics? By constructing tabulations that explore questions such as these, it is possible to identify the socio-linguistic mechanics used in the production of ‘news’ (as well as the cultural creation of discursive structures), for it is possible to see how certain individuals/groups are drawn on more frequently, both as a source of news and as ‘evidence’ to support and help articulate the ‘story’ (Bryman, 2001:184). Furthermore, from the comparison of such measurements, the amount of space, or lack thereof, that is available to competing discourses becomes apparent. These patterns, of course, shed some light on how ‘balanced’ each newspaper was in its coverage of the ‘emerging Iraq crisis’.

Moving further down the coding sheet, the next data set comprised the interpretative component of the content analysis. As discussed above, such a method cannot be considered quantitative in the strict sense of the definition. Nonetheless, interpretative content analysis is an important component of the empirical investigation conducted for this thesis, and allowed the exploration of seemingly unambiguous questions regarding the ideological ‘frames’ of each article. ‘Inter-coder reliability’ was still a guiding methodological principle here, with considerable care taken during the coding process to ensure that only those articles with conspicuous signs of pre-defined pro-war or anti-war themes were included in the classification process (thus the vast majority of articles of the hundreds analysed from the sampled period were excluded from this data set).
Essentially, nine categories were created to ascertain the common frames/ideological positions employed by exponents during the build-up to the Iraq war:

1. Pro-war (with the intent of helping the Iraqi people)
2. Pro-war (with the intent of protecting Australia and/or the national interest)
3. Pro-war (combining the above two pro-war themes)
4. Pro-war (with different themes from the above two)
5. Against the war (with the conflict seen as an unwarranted invasion)
6. Against the war (without the support of the United Nations)
7. Against the war (combining the above two anti-war themes)
8. Against the war (with different themes from the above two)
9. None of the prelisted frames or clearly discernable ideological position.

In addition to these categories, to help strengthen the validity of any findings a further coding clarification was employed. Those articles that possessed one of the above ideological themes were marked with an asterisk (when entering the data into the coding sheet) if the frame/ideological position was not polemically overt. Such data were later given the numerical score of 0.5 (as opposed to the full score of 1), when generating the statistical tabulations. This was a necessary clarification, for although some articles, such as those on the opinion and editorial pages, were conspicuous in their ideological stance (thus well deserving of the numerical score of 1), a number of the articles throughout the newspapers had more than one ideological theme, with some containing seemingly conflicting stances (more often the case for some of the larger analytical, ‘feature’ pieces than regular news articles). This distinction between what could be called strongly pro-
war or anti-war articles diatribes, and those articles that (while still being clearly pro-war or anti-war) were more complex in their discussion, allowed the tabulated numerical scores better to reflect the broad, overall pro-war or anti-war dispositions in either newspaper.

The final set of the ‘units of analysis’ endeavoured to record the placement of each article by splitting the pages of the studied newspapers into six sections. For example, if an article was situated in the top left-hand corner of a page then it was coded as belonging to Section One, while those articles that overlap multiple sections, such as an article that stretched across the top of a page (Sections One and Two), were coded accordingly. Unlike the research measures discussed above, this is not a research technique usually employed by content analysis. It was included in this research design in order to explore the common belief that critical articles and/or those articles expressing a left-wing/liberal ideological position are generally placed on a relatively obscure section of the page, one that discourages the reader from lingering on the text (such as the bottom right hand corner). Indeed, the aim here was to provide insights into editorial decisions, and their ideological significance. Unfortunately, however, the generation of graphs from such data proved to be problematic, as there were too few relevant articles that were clearly situated in the pre-defined sections of the news pages. As such, this data set was eventually abandoned as an independent source of information, and was retained merely to help in the classification and location of material that was deemed to be particularly appropriate to detailed qualitative analysis (in the form of a series of semiotic case
studies). It is to this qualitative ‘science of signs’, and somewhat controversial research method, that this exposition now turns in Appendix B.
Appendix B Methodology: Semiotic Analysis

Whereas the previous appendix explored the methodology and application of content analysis, this addendum investigates the epistemological philosophies and use of ‘semiotic analysis’, the final research method comprising the thesis’ triadic method of textual analysis. Semiotics (or semiology, as it is sometimes called) is, of course, more than merely a method of analytical inquiry. It is a philosophy, dense in it specialist terminology, used for explaining and analysing the communication of meaning (Chandler, 2007). As communication is made possible due to socio-cultural phenomena in the form of sounds, gestures, and/or images — labelled ‘signs’ by the semiotician — semiotics, in the first instance, is the study of the ‘nature of representation’ (Gottdiener, 1995:4). Semiotics does, then, analyse sign systems, such as languages, as well as images (such as photographs) and other ‘texts’ (be they clothing, billboards, foods or other cultural artefacts) that communicate particular ideas, concepts, messages and ideologies.

Like qualitative content analysis, semiotics is concerned with the deeper meanings that are potentially present within a text (the latent ideological content) and seeks to describe the manner in which sign systems communicate ‘cultural codes’ (Gunter, 2000:83): the ideologies/discourses that conceptually structure an individual’s understanding of the world. The nature of the method is thus descriptive, and is appropriate more for case studies that explore a small number of texts than the longitudinal research-capabilities available to content analysis. Hence it was decided that this thesis could deploy a semiotic analysis to examine only a small number of texts, and would focus on media indicative of recurring themes.
The term ‘semiotic’ is derived from the ancient Greek word ‘Sêmeion’ (Bignell, 1997:1), and stems from the medical practices of Greek physicians who studied the symptoms, or the ‘signs’, of disease (Gottdiener, 1995:4). Thus the ‘study of signs’, before it became a ‘science of signs’, has been an element within the work of many thinkers throughout history, from the ancient Greeks (in particular, Plato and Aristotle) to the philosophers of the Enlightenment (such as John Locke — see Eco, 1984). Yet, despite its recurring significance within the tradition of Western philosophy, it is only with the advent of the 20th century that the study of signs was transformed from a loosely defined field of inquiry to something approaching an analytic research method, with modern semiotics emerging concurrently, and coincidently, on two continents. In Europe, Ferdinand de Saussure called for the creation of a new science, to be called ‘semiology’, which via the study of signs and the ‘laws that govern them’, would ‘throw new light on the facts’ of ‘rites and customs’, explaining the social world and its practices through a semiological prism (Saussure cited in Berger, 2000:34).

In the United States, Charles Saunders Pierce, independently of Saussure’s work, developed ‘semiotics’, an approach born more from a desire to study the metalanguages of systems of logic, in essence seeking to understand how people think, rather than the mechanics of communication per se (Gottdiener, 1995:9-10). In both cases their work was published posthumously by students and other followers, and has led to the proliferation of scholars concerned with the roles and the processes of ‘semiosis’ (or ‘signification’ — the communication of meaning). Indeed, as Gottdiener (1995) notes, it is largely impossible to understand the debates between ‘modern’ and ‘postmodern’
scholars within the humanities and social sciences unless one understands semiotics. For example, the work of many influential postmodern theorists, such as Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard and Michel Foucault (and their now respective schools of thought), are developed on what can be called ‘post-Saussurean’ understandings of sign systems (Gottdiener, 1995:4). In other words, at the heart of the great epistemological divide that has split the social sciences since the 1980s, resides a debate regarding the communication of meaning and the representation of reality.

As this chapter is primarily concerned with the research process rather than epistemological debates, what follows is by no means an exhaustive account of the different models and conceptual developments that have impacted on the study of signs since its modern inception in the 1920s (for information here see, in particular, Chandler, 2007; Eco, 1976, 1984; Gottdiener, 1995; Hodge and Kress, 1988). Instead, what follows seeks to explain the research method employed by this dissertation, through exploring the key concepts of the three semioticians widely considered to be of fundamental importance to the study of signs — Ferdinand de Saussure, C.S. Peirce and Roland Barthes — before reflecting on the implications of post-structuralism and postmodernism for semiotic critique.

**The Structuralist Semiology of Ferdinand de Saussure**

In his preface to the second edition of *The Blackwell Campanion to Social Theory*, Bryan S. Turner (2000) constructs a critique of the quasi-social science discipline of cultural studies. Based on his analysis, Turner argues that much of contemporary cultural studies
has abandoned its more practical, sociological, roots, and is now largely concerned with the ‘deconstruction’ of cultural texts, of positing philosophical ‘idealism’ (the notion that reality only exists as a conceptual construction) before empirical understandings of social relationships. Indeed, Turner (2000) sees the proliferation of cultural studies literature, and the seemingly surreptitious replacement of the ‘social’ with the ‘cultural’ (the latter of which does not extend to the material bases of social organisation), as dangerous to both the truth aims of the social sciences, and to the abilities of such disciplines to help bring about better, more just, societies. To combat the increasing pervasiveness of the ‘decorative theory’ of cultural studies (namely, textual analysis), Turner (2000:xvii-xviii) advocates a return to the ‘systematic empirical inquiry’ that once characterised the human sciences, in which theory is not a neutral ‘spectator’, but is both ‘analytic and engaged’. Such an approach, a re-orientation from the ‘reading’ of society as a text, necessitates a return to the problems and questions that drove the founders of the sociological enterprise: (broadly) a concern with the social nature of order, meaning and change. In relation to the exegesis of this dissertation’s semiotic method, this is an appropriate point of departure. For, although semiotics is obviously intimately tied to cultural studies — taking texts as its subject matter and having spawned many of the postmodern forms of textual analysis that Turner considers to be ‘decorative theories’ — at its distant roots the research method was born from the sociological canon, germinated from the systems theories of Herbert Spencer and Émile Durkheim (see Boyne, 2000).

This is not to say, however, that semiotics is directly derived from the work of Spencer or Durkheim. It is, rather, to note the link between the linguistic structuralism developed by
Ferdinand de Saussure (widely considered the founder of French linguistic structuralism) and the theories of social order conceived of first by Herbert Spencer (1961) in the 19th century, and later refined by Émile Durkheim (1964) at the turn of the 20th century (see Lechner, 2000). Indeed, there are several important ideas common to the work of both Spencer and Durkheim that are reproduced in the theories of Saussure. For instance, in seeking to understand the difference between ‘primitive’ and ‘complex’ modern societies, Spencer employed the analogy of an organism (Spencer cited in Boyne, 2000). From this perspective, as a community’s population grows, a more complex society (like an organism) evolves, one characterised by ‘integration’ and ‘differentiation’: with the former term referring to the internal cooperation of the separate parts of the whole, and the latter referring to the division of labour (Spencer cited in Boyne, 2000:161). This ‘systemic’ approach was continued by Durkheim (often considered the founder of structural-functionalism), who saw modern, ‘organic’, society as a ‘distinct reality’ that shaped and controlled human behaviour (to a certain extent) through a pre-existing social structure in the form of social laws (or, rather, what he called ‘social facts’ — see, in particular, Durkheim, 1964, 1971, 1982).

Such a theory of society and culture is reflected through much of contemporary sociological theory, and informs some of the ideas of Saussure (1960) (who was teaching in France around the time of Durkheim), and who like Durkheim saw individuals as born into a pre-existing social matrix, replete with organising (or behaviour shaping) social structures. As a linguist, it is perhaps unsurprising that Saussure (1960) considered language to be the quintessential structure of social life. Yet, what was ‘revolutionary’
about his work was that he showed that language systems, and indeed communication in general, was only made possible through its structural relationships, with meaning created through the sequencing of culturally specific signs (see Saussure, 1960). Furthermore, Saussure proposed that, as there are no labels or words inherent within the human mind at birth, the system of language in to which one is born provides and defines the conceptual framework through which reality is made available to that individual (Bignell, 1997:6). The implication being, ‘we cannot think or speak about something for which there are no words in our language’ (Bignell, 1997:6).

In defying conventional wisdom that reality exists as a material phenomenon ready to be discerned by human sensory perceptions, Saussure’s arguments highlighted the importance of language systems in limiting and shaping an individual’s understanding of the world. In essence, Saussure’s critique took place on two levels, with the linguist looking at both the structures and rules shaping the act of communication, as well as the components that comprise the individual units (or signs) of a particular system of language. In relation to the second of these two levels of semiological critique, Saussure argued that the signs used in communication (the sounds or images used ‘to stand in’ for an object or concept) are specific to a particular culture, the meanings of which are not intrinsic, but ‘arbitrary’, and are established over time by convention within a particular community (Chandler, 2007). Such signs, grounded in a particular cultural context, are vehicles for meaning and can be broken down into the categories of the ‘signifier’ and the ‘signified’. The ‘signifier’ refers to the actual sign, for instance, the sounds that the human mind decodes as ‘c’-‘a’-‘t’ (or the symbols read as producing the sound ‘cat’).
The ‘signified’ is the concept stimulated by the sign (in this case, the mental image of a small mammal commonly owned as a domestic pet). These categories, the two layers that together comprise a sign, denote a ‘referent’ (in this case an actual living creature), and perform the communicative act of ‘signification’. For Saussure, both sound and thought (or the signifier and the signified) were ‘intimately linked’, with ‘each triggering the other’ upon being heard and decoded by the mind (Saussure cited in Chandler, 2007:17).

Moving from the micro-level of the composition of the sign to the more macro realm of language systems, Saussure found that languages may differ from one socio-cultural context to another, yet the units of meaning within such languages — the signs — operate according to similar rules necessary to the facilitation of communication. For instance, Saussure argued that the linguistic sign must reside within a language system (or ‘langue’), which determines the rules for its use as a communicative act (‘parole’). Furthermore, the meaning of a linguistic sign is defined by a series of ‘surface level’ structural relationships, with signs gaining meaning through their conceptual, or paradigmatic, differentiation: thus ‘cat’ is defined by what it is not (such as ‘dog’ or ‘bat’). This paradigmatic differentiation (or the selection and use of certain signs as opposed to others that would likewise fit the syntax of a sentence) can be seen to form a type of intersecting axis, with a Y-axis running horizontal across the syntagmatic order of the act of communication (the X-axis). Hence, the communicated meaning or message of a set of verbal utterances (or written words) is defined by both the selection of certain signs (as opposed to others that would fit the syntax, such as ‘cat’ rather than ‘dog’), and the linear procession of other signs (the meanings of which are dependent on the
meanings of those signs which both precede and follow them: for example, ‘the cat is asleep on the mat’). In altering the paradigmatic aspects of a sentence — analogous to the spinning wheels of a poker machine — different meanings are created (for instance, the ‘cat’ might be a ‘dog’, which rather than falling ‘asleep on the mat’ may have performed an entirely different action).

From this basic exegesis of Saussure’s semiology, it is relatively easy to see why he is considered the father of French linguistic structuralism, with his concepts demonstrating the manner in which ‘language divides up the world of thought, creating the concepts which shape our actual experience’ (Bignell, 1997:12). Indeed, Saussure’s work had repercussions far beyond the discipline of linguistics, residing at the heart of Levi-Strauss’ (1972) ‘structural anthropology’, Jacques Lacan’s further development of psychoanalysis, and Roland Barthes’ sociology of culture (see Boyne, 2000:176). The Saussurean semiological enterprise has, however, waxed and waned in the recent era of post-structuralist thought, due in large part to the philosophical deconstructionism of Jacques Derrida (1976) (discussed further below), and is thus insufficient (at least per se) for use as a methodology. Nonetheless, as a methodological foundation, Saussure’s (1960) concepts are still useful and can be built on by the ideas of other semioticians, such as C. S. Peirce (1960).

**The Semiotics of Charles Saunders Peirce**

This notion of wedding some of the theories of C. S. Peirce to those of Ferdinand de Saussure is, of course, not without precedent. Indeed, in responding to the post-
structuralist critique of semiology, many of the most recent books on the practice of semiotic analysis (see, for instance, Berger, 2000; Bignell, 1997; Chandler, 2007; Gottdiener, 1995) draw upon Peirce to provide a more practical (and, in some cases, a less idealist) extension of Saussure. As Peirce’s model of ‘semeiotics [sic]’ and his taxonomies of the sign were developed independently of Saussure’s work (whom he did not know), the American logician and pragmatist philosopher provides an understanding of sign systems born of a different intellectual heritage; one concerned less with the linguistic communication between individuals than the ‘metalanguages of logic systems’; such as those found in the natural sciences (Gottdiener, 1995:9). Peirce was concerned with the manner in which meaning is conveyed, seeing language as a somewhat problematic purveyor of truth (Gottdiener, 1995:10). As Peirce believed that meaning only arises ‘through language when an idea or concept can be related to by something else already existing in the mind of the interpreter’, his model of semiotics sought in part ‘to establish conditions for the success of truth claims’ (see Gottdiener, 1995:9-10). In particular, Peirce’s typology of signs, more complex than Saussure’s ‘closed dyadic model’ (see Chandler, 2007:30), is considered to be of central importance in the study of non-linguistic signs, such as photographs, images and symbols (see Bignell, 1997:14-16).

Whereas for Saussure signs are a unit composed of both signifier and signified (or word and concept), Peirce’s (1960) model of the sign was ‘triadic’ in the sense that it was comprised of three parts: the ‘representamen’, an ‘interpretant’, and an ‘object’. The representamen refers to the form which a sign takes (labelled the ‘sign vehicle’ by some theorists); an interpretant does not refer to an interpreter, but rather to the ‘sense made of
the sign”; while an object in the Peircean model of the sign is the equivalent of the referent from the Saussurean approach (Chandler, 2007:29). In the Peircean model, the representamen has a similar meaning to Saussure’s signifier (sound, word or image), whereas ‘the interpretant is roughly analogous to the signified’ (the concept — see Chandler, 2007:31). However, there is one important distinction between Peirce’s interpretant and Saussure’s signified. Peirce, being concerned with how people think, believed that the interpretant becomes manifest as a ‘psychological event’, taking the form of an equivalent or a more developed sign within the mind (Gotttdiener, 1995:11). This mental sign is called the interpretant of the first sign (Peirce in Chandler, 2007:31), and facilitates the meaning of the communicative act by way of contrast (Gotttdiener, 1995:11). Hence, ‘the meaning of the sign is the sign it can be translated into’ (Roman Jakobson cited in Chandler, 2007:31).

Although at first glance the notion of signs referring to other signs seems a simplistic, and not a particularly revolutionary, extension of Saussure’s theories, this idea has a troubling implication. For it is in the Peircean semiotic model that the extent of mediation involved with the communication of meaning (or, indeed, the interpretation of reality or truth) clearly becomes apparent. For instance, as all signs, including those within an individual’s mind, are constructed from the interaction of the triadic components of the sign, then the act of ‘semiosis’ (signs referring to other signs) can regress ad infinitum. Although Peirce reined in his logic in this regard, taking the epistemological standpoint that, in the end, the individual must confront the reality of the ‘absolute object’ (that reality is inescapable in a person’s daily experience), postmodern thinkers such as Jean
Baudrillard and Jacques Derrida employed this idea of ‘*regressum infinitum*’ to argue that ‘true meaning’ (or truth) is infinitely deferred, existing only in the eternal semiotic interplay of signs. In Baudrillard’s (1983) universe, for example, society is trapped in a ‘hyperreal’ world, where objects or referents no longer matter as they are defined by the endless circulation of images referring to other images (the creation of ‘empty signifiers’), much like the endless reflections and refractions of an object caught between two mirrors (although without a referent, of course).

Semiotic researchers, however, do not need to push this logic through to its hyperreal (and idealist) conclusion. Nor is the notion of signs referring to other signs cause for discarding Saussure and the embracement of Derrida’s concept of deconstructionism. As Umberto Eco argues, infinite semiosis is prevented by the socio-cultural context, for signs belong to semantic fields which serve to anchor and define their meaning (Eco in Gottdiener, 1995:24). Otherwise, the act of communication would be impossible (this point is discussed further below). In terms of this thesis’ methodology, Peirce’s model of the sign, being similar to Saussure’s, makes only a modest contribution of returning the object (or the referent) to the process of semiosis (a missing feature of Saussure’s intentionally dyadic model, where the referent was conceptually ‘bracketed away’ from the act of signification). While Peirce’s point regarding the psychological manifestation of signs is useful for providing more detail and complexity *vis-à-vis* the act of signification, his triadic model is more difficult to operationalise and incorporate within a practical methodological framework. The operational complexity of Peirce’s approach explains (at least in part) why the terminology of Saussure has been retained by most
contemporary semiotic critiques — including this thesis — whereas Peirce’s triadic relationship of the ‘representamen’, ‘interpretant’ and the ‘object’ is less prevalent.

However, Peirce’s contribution to modern semiotic analysis lies less in his model of the sign, and more in his typology of signs. As Daniel Chandler (2007) notes, Peirce’s work on the types/modes of the sign extends the semiotic critique beyond de Saussure’s primary concern with the linguistic sign, to the world of natural signs and non-human languages. While there is a certain amount of conceptual slippage between the classifications of Peirce’s typology, his ‘modes of the sign’ opens the closed structural framework of Saussure’s semiology, making the research method far more flexible and adaptable to different types of communication (Chandler, 2007). Chandler (2007:36-37) offers a useful definition of the three most important (and widely used) categories of this typology:

1. **Symbol/symbolic**: a mode in which the signifier does not resemble the signified but which is fundamentally arbitrary or purely conventional — so that this relationship must be agreed upon and learned: e.g. language in general (plus specific languages, alphabetical letters punctuation marks, words, phrases and sentences), numbers, morse code [sic], traffic lights, national flags.

2. **Icon/iconic**: a mode in which the signifier is perceived as resembling or imitating the signified (recognisably looking, sounding, feeling, tasting or smelling like it) — being similar in possessing some of its qualities: e.g. a portrait, a cartoon, a
scale model, onomatopoeia, metaphors, realistic sounds in ‘programme music’, sound effects in radio drama, a dubbed film soundtrack, imitative gestures.

3. **Index/indexical**: a mode in which the signifier is *not arbitrary* but is *directly connected* in some way (physically or causally) to the signified (regardless of intention) — this link can be observed or inferred: e.g. ‘natural signs’ (smoke, thunder, footprints, echoes, non-synthetic odours and flavours), medical symptoms (pain, a rash, pulse-rate), measuring instruments (weathercock, thermometer, clock, spirit-level), ‘signals’ (a knock on a door, a phone ringing), pointers (a pointing ‘index’ finger, a directional signpost), recordings (a photograph, a film, video or television shot, audio-recorded voice), personal ‘trademarks’ (handwriting, catchphrases).

From these examples of the different types/modes of the sign, it is relatively easy to appreciate the important contribution made by Peircean theories. For with signs such as photographs the signifier has a much closer relationship with the referent, and is not the ‘arbitrary’ product of a particular socio-linguistic context (Bignell, 1997:14-15). This type of sign, where the signifier closely resembles the referent, is an ‘iconic sign’, which in effect merges the signifier, the signified and the referent together. In other words, it is more difficult to comprehend that the components of a photographic sign are, in fact, three separate elements in the process of signification. It is because of this implosion of the elements of signification that Bignell (1997:15) believes ‘that the photographic media seem to be more realistic than the linguistic media’. Accordingly, any semiotic analysis that deals with visual signs as well as the linguistic variety (such as this thesis) must
incorporate Peircean theories on the modes and types of signs into the methodological framework.

**Roland Barthes: Denotation, Connotation and Myth**

Perhaps even more important than the contribution to semiotics made be C.S. Peirce is that made by French cultural critic, Roland Barthes. Helping to pioneer the sociology of popular culture, Barthes produced two of the most important books of 20th century structural semiotics, *Mythologies* (1973) (originally published as a series of individual essays on different aspects of French culture: from the ‘World of Wrestling’ to ‘Striptease’) and *Elements of Semiology* (1964) (a detailed treatise on Saussure’s structural linguistics). In these texts, Barthes extended Saussurean semiology, taking it from the basic structures of language to the ‘metalanguage’ level of objects situated within ideological codes. These codes Barthes (1973) labelled ‘myths’, arguing that such ideologies are an integral part of the communication of different meanings. As such, Barthes (1973:117) believed that ‘myth is a type of speech’, one that operates on a second, higher order of signification. Looking at Saussure’s model of the sign, Barthes argued that his predecessor’s structural linguistic approach was useful for revealing only the ‘denotative’ function of the sign. That is to say, the signifier names (or makes clear) the particular object to which it refers (Gottdiener, 1995:15). Yet Barthes believed that objects, and their textual/linguistic representation, communicate information beyond the level of denotation, arguing that they also ‘connote’ meanings peculiar to one’s social milieu. Hence, a ‘cat’ may only be a pet in contemporary Western societies, but in the historical context of ‘ancient Egypt’, for example, such creatures (as well as the signs
used to denote them) communicated very different set of socio-cultural values (as cats were sacred to the Egyptians — ownership of them was an indication of one’s social standing and religiosity).

‘Connotation’ is, then, the second order of a sign, which signifies a cultural value, such as status or social capital (Gottdiener, 1995:15), whereas myth refers ‘to ways of thinking about people, products, places, or ideas which are structured to send particular messages to the reader or viewer of the text’ (Bignell, 1997:16). For Barthes, sign systems articulate with cultural values (or ideologies) as connotative codes, producing ‘richer structures of meaning than was assumed by de Saussure’ (Gottdiener, 1995:15). Like C. S. Peirce’s theories on the infinite regress of meaning, Barthes showed that, through connotation, certain signs are capable of building upon other signs (and so on) ultimately to connote cultural and political values. For such ideologically loaded signs, this higher order of signification feeds upon itself, with the connotation becoming its own referent, communicating now at the level of myth (Gottdiener, 1995:15). Such signs, rich in connotative meaning, can condense an entire ideology into a single word or image. For example, an image of a Rolls Royce will denote an automobile, yet at the connotative level it will draw upon the myths of an interpreter’s social context to communicate ideologies of wealth, prestige, social status and power (Bignell, 1997:16).

Barthes believed that myths are an integral part of the ideologies that make certain aspects of society appear ‘natural’ or ‘normal’, effectively erasing the historic processes leading to the development of certain social structures and beliefs, and thereby validating
the existence of the status quo. In his famous essay Myth Today, which concludes his seminal work Mythologies, Barthes (1973:55) argues:

What the world supplies to myth is an historical reality, defined, even if this goes back quite a while, by the way in which men [sic] have produced or used it; and what myth gives in return is a natural image of this reality … [M]yth is constituted by the loss of the historical quality of things: in it, things lose the memory that they once were made … The function of myth is to empty reality: it is, literally, a ceaseless flowing out, a haemorrhage, or perhaps an evaporation, in short a perceptible absence. It is now possible to complete the semiological definition of myth in a bourgeois society: myth is depoliticized speech. [original emphasis]

Having opened the semiotic method to the study of ideologies as cultural forms (what Foucault would later label discursive formations), Barthes essentially reoriented semiotics to its distant roots in theories of social order. He argued that myths are powerful forces in social organisation in that they build (at the second order of signification) the ideological ways of seeing (or the discourses) which permeate social practices and cultural beliefs (an observation similar both to Karl Marx’s arguments concerning ideology and Èmile Durkheim’s concept of collective representations — see Gottdiener, 1995:16). Indeed, for Barthes semiotic analysis was a tool for the ‘demystification’ of reality, whereby commonsensical ideologies would be exposed to the light of critical reasoning. For instance, through focussing on everyday texts such as
magazines and clothing, Barthes (1973:138-140) exposed how the image of an African (colonial) soldier saluting an (unseen) French national flag connoted complex myths of the ‘naturalness’ of French imperialist rule (at a time when many of France’s colonies were fighting for independence). Similarly, drawing on Marxist social theory regarding fetishes, Barthes (1983[1967]) showed how the linguistic signs used to discuss clothing appropriate different cultural values in order to connote messages about one’s status in a particular social milieu. Such a ‘social semiotic’ approach to understanding the uses and communicative properties of words and objects clearly influenced the work of many social and cultural theorists (including the less radical work of the ‘early Baudrillard’), and helped to pave the way for the ‘epistemological correction’ from the rigid structuralism of Saussure, to the more flexible post-structuralism of postmodern ‘thinkers’.

**Postmodern Semiotics**

Whereas Barthes’ (1964; 1973[1957]; 1983[1967]) early structural theories of semiology — those written before his more ‘post-structuralist’ works such as *Empire of Signs* (1989[1970]) and *Death of Author* (2006[1968]) — were to have a major impact within the humanities and social sciences throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the ascension of postmodern paradigms in the early 1970s appeared to undermine the epistemological validity of his early work (see Trifonas, 2001). However, the rise of postmodern theories of language and culture did not entirely discredit the more structural emphasis of the ‘early Barthes’. Indeed, Barthes’ idea that objects are encoded with social functions that, simultaneously, act as a ‘sign function’ (thus connoting mythic values), was to give rise
to the theories of a number of postmodern thinkers, such as the late Jean Baudrillard. For instance, the early (structuralist) semiology of Barthes — in particular, that concerned with ideology, myth and the fashion system — is manifest in the early (more empirical) and sociological work of Baudrillard, who in *The System of Objects* (Baudrillard, 1996[1968]) argued that, as mass consumption has become tied to the cultural/mythical values inscribed into things by the ideologies of advanced capitalism, the signification processes of consumer products ‘commodify everyday life’. Likewise, Barthes’ later post-structural theories are evident in Baudrillard’s more controversial work on hyperreality. For instance, when Baudrillard argues that the systems of signs — and hence the process of signification, from referent to signified — has in fact broken down, with signs now merely referring to other signs rather than to reality *per se*, his argument is running parallel to some of the conclusions of the ‘later Barthes’. Indeed, Baudrillard (1983) is drawing upon Barthes’ (1989[1970]; 2006[1968]) post-Saussurean/post-structuralist realisation that signs have no fixed (or transcendental) meaning, and that interpretation and ‘polysemy’ (or multiple meanings), are, in fact, key features of signs, texts, and the processes of signification.

Polysemy (sometimes referred to as the multi-vocal aspects of the sign), is a concept that acknowledges that both ‘circumstance and context’ play integral roles in a communicative act and, as such, that meanings are always ‘volatile’ (Gottdiener, 1995:20). In other words, polysemy is born out of the ‘epistemological crisis’ resulting from one text producing multiple messages and meanings for different readers, and thus offering competing truth claims (Gottdiener, 1995:19). For example, the statement ‘the
cat is sitting on the mat’ is a simple linguistic illustration of what Saussure referred to as meaning being created by a string of progressing signs. Provided that one is from the same socio-cultural context as the author of this statement, the meaning of the sign is unambiguous. Yet, if the statement was ‘the cat is happily sitting on the mat’, then the problems posed by polysemy begin to emerge, as different observers of the referent producing the sign (the cat) might disagree regarding the interpretation of its level of happiness. This problem of interpretation is, of course, magnified according to the complexity of a text, and is essentially the philosophical conundrum that spurred much of the work of C. S. Peirce and his search for the conditions in which language can unambiguously impart knowledge (see Gottdiener, 1995; Hodge and Kress, 1988:14; Jensen, 1995:20-25). Yet, much the same as Peirce’s epistemological standpoint that, in the end, one must confront the ‘absolute object’, Barthes’ believed that polysemy, although raising the problem of misinterpretation, did not by itself undermine the reading of signs: as communication takes places, clearly there are forces (such as the ‘semantic field’) reining in the potentially absolute volatility of meaning (see Eco, 1976, 1984).

However, the epistemological issues let loose by the ‘discovery’ of polysemy were not so easily dismissed. The failure of Saussure to deal with the problems posed by polysemy, along with the concept’s emergence in the work of the anthropologist, the late Levi-Strauss (perhaps the 20th century’s most famous structuralist), further contributed to the erosion of the epistemological bedrock of structuralism. In particular, the critique of Saussure by French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1976), who, like Baudrillard, would go on to have his own school of postmodern adherents, helped to ‘bury the structuralist
enterprise’ (Gottdiener, 1995:19). Drawing upon C. S. Peirce’s notion of infinite regress, Derrida (1976) argued that the Saussurean model of semiology tacitly assumed the existence of a ‘transcendental signifier’ that could circumscribe the signifier. Or, in other words, that there was ultimately a referent at the heart of a signifying system that possessed a stable and absolute meaning independent of the system used in its interpretation (Chandler, 2007:263). For Derrida, such a notion was specious. Just as polysemy and Peirce’s idea of infinite regress both suggested multiple signs and meanings, for Derrida (and likeminded scholars) the semiotic enterprise was far too fallible, based on philosophical (and metaphysical) fallacies (Jensen, 1995:9). Derrida was not, of course, just attacking the work of Saussure; he was critiquing all Western philosophy, which he believed ‘had substituted writing for knowledge’ (Gottdiener, 1995:19). Essentially, Derrida argued that Western thought had committed the transgression of the ‘metaphysics of presence’, whereby scholarly disciplines throughout academe had hitherto assumed that their texts could ‘stand in for reality’, and as a result had failed to question the relationship between the mind, modes of representation and the ‘real world’ (Gottdiener, 1995:20). Accordingly, for Derrida (1976) reality was not reflected in the writing of scholars, as texts are merely modes of representation. Thus, Derrida, running parallel with Baudrillard’s notion of hyperreality, polemically and provocatively argued that ‘there is nothing but [or “outside”] the text’ (Derrida cited in Gottdiener, 1995:19).

Derrida was not, of course, denying the existence of a ‘real world’ beyond the political and cultural configurations of the text (Fuery and Mansfield, 2000:63). Rather, like
Baudrillard, he sought to draw attention to the text’s political power. In the place of Saussurean semiotics, Derrida offered the world ‘deconstructionism’ (a conceptual approach that would eventually convert the ‘later Roland Barthes’ in the 1970s — see Gottdiener, 1995:21). Reflecting on culture and politics, deconstructionism (much like semiotics) seeks to expose and disassemble the rhetorical structures within texts, and in practice is used:

[T]o search out binary oppositions, such as between black and white, male and female, East and West, and to challenge their internal hierarchies and blow apart the false claims from one of their sides for exclusive access to some implied moment of presence (the ‘whiteness’ of civilisation, the leadership and protection of the male, the rationality of the West). (Boyne, 2000:186-187)

Derrida’s (‘poststructural’) deconstructionism does, then, challenge the biases present within texts by exposing their arbitrary oppositions and hierarchies (see Chandler, 2007:300). Yet, deconstructionism is, in essence, a philosophy of consciousness and does not consider symbolic interaction or other defining elements of the material and social world (Gottdiener, 1995:25). Being situated within the confines of cultural texts, Derrida’s deconstructionism is limited in its critical scope. For, although Derrida and Baudrillard adopt C. S. Peirce’s notion of infinite regress (ignoring his pragmatic confrontation with the ‘absolute object’), they overlook the ‘contextual’ basis to truth claims (see Rorty, 1998). In other words, they ignore that the meanings of the sign are anchored and contained by the rules and conventions governing the use of language and
by the ‘semantic fields’, or the conceptual schema employed by the individual in the process of cognitive interpretation (or by what Stuart Hall 1980:134 has labelled, one’s ‘maps of meaning’). As Mark Gottdiener (1995:24-25) argues in his book *Postmodern Semiotics: Material Culture and the Forms of Postmodern Life*:

[D]espite the dilemma of polysemy, there are constraints to meaning that rein in the free play of signifiers, and perhaps the most formidable of these is the presence of the material world itself. In this sense, deconstructionism and Baudrillard’s idealism are opposed by pragmatism. Or, as Lenin suggested many years ago, if you doubt the reality of the automobile, if you think it only hyperreal, then lie down in its path.

For Mark Gottdiener (1995), and others such as Hodge and Kress (1988) and Jensen (1995), the semiotic enterprise is far from over; it has rather evolved as new ideas have emerged to help refine the critique. Indeed, Gottdiener, Hodge and Kress, and Jensen all offer types of ‘social semiotics’, which situates the text within the parameters of culture and society. These ‘post-linguistic turn’ versions of the semiotic method are pragmatic approaches that ensuring that the research technique remains committed to understanding the signs and sign systems that help to texture and shape the social world.

**Final Notes on the Application of the (Post-Postmodern) Semiotic Method**

This thesis does, then, employ what can be considered a ‘post-postmodern’ semiotic analysis (see Mirchandani, 2005). It does so on the epistemological basis that semiotics
(when used with caution) can be an appropriate (although imperfect) method for researchers seeking to understand cultural texts as products of a social world modulated and shaped by human agency and power (following Gottdiener, 1995:25). The discussion above is intended to highlight not only the strengths and weaknesses of the research method, but to provide the definitions of the key terms used in the empirical chapters of this thesis. In essence, the semiotic analysis used for this dissertation can be summarised as follows:

1. The search for how meaning is communicated and framed through the use of images and narratives; the latter of which is identifiable through the syntagmatic structuring of signs, with particular attention paid to the rhetorical and structural device used in creating a news story (Bird and Dardenne, 1988);
2. The search for the ‘binary oppositions’ that shape meaning, reflexively critiquing the hierarchical layers of power present in such binary categories;
3. The identification of the different layers of meaning within a text, from referent through to the signified, then from the denotative to the connotative;
4. The identification of the ideological codes present within a text in order to expose the myths used to communicate and reinforce particular ontological perspectives.

Much like the semiotic work of Roland Barthes, this dissertation acknowledges that polysemy poses epistemological problems, especially when it comes to the replication of research findings. Yet, such problems are clearly surmountable, with multiple meanings
failing to stymie textual analysis, much like the manner in which the problematisation of ‘truth’ does not mean ‘the end’ of inquiry (for more on the ‘problem with truth’ see Rorty, 1998; Rorty and Engel, 2007). As Stuart Hall’s (1980) seminal work on ideological codes showed, texts communicate either preferred readings (where the reader accepts the ‘truthfulness’ of a particular text), negotiated readings (where the reader accepts some aspects of the author’s interpretation but rejects others), or oppositional readings (where the reader rejects or dismisses a text as entirely untruthful). Yet, despite this potential for conflicting interpretations by different readers, polysemy is not the same as pluralism, as the author of a text intentionally (and unintentionally) inscribes, or rather encodes, preferred meanings (Hall, 1980:134). In other words, regardless of how a text might be read by its audience, it is the goal of the semiotic critique to expose the ideological assumptions and messages that have gone into its creation, thereby revealing any manifest or latent biases (regardless of how such bias might be read by the audience).

Finally, it should be noted that the texts that collectively comprise the ‘semiotic sample’ are included as a result of an active, rather than a random or arbitrary process of selection. Indeed, as was noted in Chapter 5, the texts analysed for this thesis were chosen because they were broadly indicative of the coverage provided by both newspapers, during this period. Clearly, then, it is possible to find other texts from within the sampled publications that do not neatly match the findings of the semiotic analysis (although such examples would be the exception rather than the rule). Thus the findings of the semiotic analysis are not (strictly speaking) ‘empirically quantifiable’, or capable of describing the nature of the sampled publications beyond the topics covered for this
thesis. Yet it is hoped that the validity of this thesis’s semiotic critique is established through the manner in which complex cultural meanings were elucidated and tied to the socio-cultural world beyond the text (the ‘meta-schema’ of the national context of Australia). Accordingly, rather than merely providing more of what Bryan S. Turner (2000) considers to be ‘decorative theory’, this thesis — through its empirical analysis — aims to aid in the re-contextualisation of the studied events, and in the understanding of the relationship between media, politics and social power.
Appendix C: Content Analysis Coding Guidelines

Articles are to be coded according to the following numerical units

**Newspapers** (to be recorded as Initial and Numerical allocation)
Articles in *The Australian*  A + N
Articles in *The Sydney Morning Herald*  S + N

**Date**  (as listed)

**Page Number**  (as listed)

**Newspaper Section**
- Front Page News Article  1
- Front Page Opinion Article  2
- National News  3
- International News Article  4
- Opinion  5
- News Feature (or equivalent section)  6
- Editorial  7
- Letter  8
- Business  9
- Other  10

**Authorship**
- In-house Journalist  1
- Australian Associated Press (AAP)  2
- Reuters  3
- Associate Press (AP)  4
- Syndicated from within the same company  5
- *The Guardian*  6
- *Wall Street Journal*  7
- Other (such as AFP)  8

**Article Size**
- 0-200 word  1
- 200-500 words  2
- 500-800 words  3
- 800+ words  4

**Indexical Words and their frequency per article** (e.g. A x B = Frequency)
- Weapons of mass destruction (WMD)  1 x F
- Liberation (liberate, liberator)  2 x F
- Invasion (invading)  3 x F
- Collateral damage/casualties  4 x F
- Civilian casualties  5 x F
- Al-Qaeda (or equivalent spelling)  6 x F
- September 11 (denoting the terrorist attacks against the US)  7 x F
Terrorists (terrorism) 8 x F
Oil 9 x F
Freedom 10 x F
Islam (or Muslim) 11 x F
Coalition of the willing 12 x F
Dictatorship (or dictator) 13 x F
Democracy (or democratic) 14 x F
Protest 15 x F
Opportunity 16 x F
Military action 17 x F
Jihad 18 x F

Authoritative Sources and their frequency per article (e.g. Ax B = Frequency)
An Official of the US Republican Government 1x F
A member of the US Government opposing the conflict 2 x F
An Official of the British Labour Government 3 x F
A member of the British Government opposing the conflict 4 x F
An Official of the Australian Coalition Government 5 x F
A parliamentarian that does not belong to the federal Coalition Government 6 x F
A official military spokesperson 7 x F
Social Scientist/Academic 8 x F
Conservative Commentator (that does not fall into the above categories) 9 x F
Liberal Commentator (that does not fall into the above categories) 10 x F

Authoritative Sources and their space per article (e.g. A x Lines) (quotes only)
An Official of the US Republican Government 1x L
A member of the US Government opposing the conflict 2 x L
An Official of the British Labour Government 3 x L
A member of the British Government opposing the conflict 4 x L
An Official of the Australian Coalition Government 5 x L
A parliamentarian that does not belong to the federal Coalition Government 6 x L
A official military spokesperson 7 x L
Social scientist/academic 8 x L
Conservative Commentator (that does not fall into the above categories) 9 x L
Liberal Commentator (that does not fall into the above categories) 10 x L

Overt Ideological Themes and Positions
Pro-war (with the intent of helping the Iraqi people) 1
Pro-war (protecting Australia and the national interests) 2
Pro-war (combining the above two pro-war themes) 3
Pro-war (with different themes than the above two) 4
Against the war (conflict unwarranted invasion) 5
Against the war (without the United Nations) 6
Against the war (combining the above two anti-war themes) 7
Against the war (with different themes than the above two) 8
None of the prelisted themes clearly discernable 9

Article Placement (page broken into six sections)
Top Left 1
Top Right 2
Middle Left 3
Middle Right 4
Bottom Left 5
Bottom Right 6
Where an article crosses more than one section 7

Notes on quotations: YES/NO and the page number of the journal on which the quotation will be recorded.
## Appendix D: News Corporation: Key Assets and Holdings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Filmed Entertainment</th>
<th>Television</th>
<th>Cable Network Programming</th>
<th>Direct Broadcast Satellite Television</th>
<th>Magazines &amp; Inserts</th>
<th>Newspapers &amp; Information Services</th>
<th>Book Publishing</th>
<th>Other</th>
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</thead>
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<td>United States</td>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>United States</td>
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<td>Fox Broadcasting Company</td>
<td>FOX News Channel</td>
<td>SKY Italia</td>
<td>New York Post</td>
<td>News Corp Europe, New Zealand and Australia</td>
<td>News Corp Europe, New Zealand and Australia</td>
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<td>MyNetworkTV</td>
<td>FOX Business Network</td>
<td>• Sky Sport</td>
<td>Community Newspapers Group</td>
<td>HarperCollins Publishers</td>
<td>News America Marketing Group</td>
<td>Dow Jones Post</td>
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<td>• Fox 2000 Pictures</td>
<td>Fox Television Stations:</td>
<td>Fox Cable Networks:</td>
<td>• Sky Cinema</td>
<td>The Wall Street Journal</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Los</td>
<td>Dow Jones Newswires</td>
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<td>• WNYW — New York, NY</td>
<td>• FX</td>
<td>• Sky TG24</td>
<td>Dow Jones Indexes</td>
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<td>Angeles, CA</td>
<td>Factiva</td>
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<td>• WOR — New York, NY</td>
<td>• Fox Movie Channel</td>
<td>British Sky</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• WFLD — Chicago, IL</td>
<td>Marketer</td>
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<td>• KTTV — Los Angeles, CA</td>
<td>• Fox Regional Sports Networks (12 owned and operated) (b)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• WPWR — Chicago, IL</td>
<td>Dow Jones Information</td>
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<td>• Fox Soccer Channel</td>
<td>Artsworld</td>
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<td>• WTXF — Philadelphia, PA</td>
<td>Dow Jones Solutions</td>
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<td>• WFLD — Chicago, IL</td>
<td>• SPEED</td>
<td>• Sky News</td>
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<td>• KDFW — Dallas, TX</td>
<td>Dow Jones Client</td>
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<td>• FUEL TV</td>
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<td>• WAGA — Atlanta, GA</td>
<td>• Fox College Sports</td>
<td>• Sky Movies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• WJBK — Detroit, MI</td>
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<td>Fox International Channels</td>
<td>Sky Deutschland 38%</td>
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<td>• KBIV — Houston, TX</td>
<td>SmartMoney 50%</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• KTXH — Houston, TX</td>
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<td>• KMSP — Minneapolis, MN</td>
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<td>• KOUF — Minneapolis, MN</td>
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<td>National Geographic Channel — Domestic 67%</td>
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<td>• WFMX — Atlanta, GA</td>
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<td>• WUTB — Baltimore, MD</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• WOGX — Gainesville, FL</td>
<td>STATS 50%</td>
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<td>• WOGX — Gainesville, FL</td>
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</table>
XING KONG
STAR CHINESE MOVIES
STAR MOVIES
STAR GOLD
STAR NEWS 26%
STAR ANANDA 26%
STAR MAJHA 26%
CHANNEL [V]
CHANNEL [V] THAILAND 49%
ESPN STAR SPORTS 50%
PHOENIX SATELLITE TELEVISION 18%
STAR Jupiter 81%

Australian and New Zealand
Premium Movie Partnership 20%

Latin America
LATAPY 55%
Telecine 13%
Fox Telecolombia 51%

Australia and New Zealand
FOXTEL 25%
Sky Network Television Limited 44%

Australia
Almost 150 national, metropolitan, suburban, regional and Sunday titles, including the following:
• The Australian
• The Weekend Australia
• The Daily Telegraph
• The Sunday Telegraph
• Herald Sun
• Sunday Herald Sun
• The Courier-Mail
• Sunday Mail (Brisbane)
• The Advertiser
• Sunday Mail (Adelaide)
• The Mercury
• mX
• Sunday Tasmanian
• The Sunday Times
• Northern Territory News
• Sunday Territorian
delicious
donna hay
Vogue Australia
GQ Australia
Alpha

Asia
The Wall Street Journal Asia
The Far Eastern Economic Review

Asia
STAR DEN 50%

Fiji
The Fiji Times
Sunday Times

Papua New Guinea
Post Courier 63%

NOTE: Data correct as of June 2009

Source: News Corporation’s Annual Report 2009
References


New Zealand Communications Association Conference, Brisbane, 9–11 July.


