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Australian university journalism graduates supposedly "Can't write, can't spell and can't find a story" (Buckell, 2002). And that, we are told is unacceptable to the editors who will decide their professional futures. Which, again supposedly, is why "theory is giving way to workplace readiness" (ibid) in professional media courses.

The multitude of issues raised in this example is not new. Forty years ago, the Martin Report (1965) on Australian higher education found that the universities of that day were not prepared for either the rising tide of numbers then lapping at their sandstone doorsteps or for the burgeoning demand for technological – by definition, applied – knowledge. Instead of reforming the universities, and encouraging them to describe and explain and justify (i.e. theorise) the world in which they lived and worked, the Menzies, Holt and Gorton governments let them off the hook by establishing institutes of technology and colleges of advanced education that were to be 'different but equal' to the universities. Thus, public policy entrenched absurd and spurious distinctions between 'pure' and 'applied' knowledge, and teaching and research and a total misunderstanding of the relationship between theory and practice.

Theory is not measured by its level of abstraction but by the extent to which it describes, explains, justifies and puts into perspective what things are and how they work. Theories are thus not necessarily truly theoretical. Practicality becomes a measure of good theory. Practice, however, is always theoretical because it invites description, explanation, justification and framing, not to mention suggestions as to how it might be done differently or better.

Australian higher education policy completely overlooked the fact that the elite faculties in the old universities were professionally focussed – preparing doctors and lawyers and engineers. It also allowed academics to pretend that those professions were somehow more important, socially and culturally, and more rigorous intellectually than teaching or business or communication and media. All of which reduced the system's capability to take best advantage of its 1989 reunification.

Nor are these issues exclusive to Australia. The social and cultural tumult in Europe and North America during the late 1960s was driven not least by conflicting ideas about the role and function of the academy. That controversy persists. And, as the Western world's former colonies have emerged into the dazzling world of national independence, they too have had to wrestle the issues of how best to position their higher education systems. Reviews of the South Pacific Commission's regional media program (Morgan, 1986), the Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development (Morgan et al, 1989) and UNESCO's worldwide Communication Development Program (Morgan, 1995) all showed the widespread need (and demand) for media professionals to be not just technically skilful but highly capable. As too did Gaunt's (1991) study of the education and training of news people worldwide.

Capability requires knowledge and skill but they are not enough (Scheffler, 1965; Ryle, 1990). Capable practitioners also have a range of personal qualities including initiative, inventiveness, imagination, persistence and worldly wisdom. They reflect not only on action but also in action – which is implicit in Buckell's "workplace readiness" but in no way reduces or excludes a need for theory.

Academic research has always been defined in terms of objects and methods. When IAMCR, the International Association for Media and Communication Research, was established in the late 1950s most of its Sections formed around research methodologies. One of the Association's goals, however, was "to improve the practice of journalism" (IAMCR, 2002) and, by extension, the other media professions such as film and broadcasting. One Section of the Association made the field of professional education its object. For nearly fifty years, it has sought to describe, explain and justify – and thus improve – the education of people for the media professions, addressing the sorts of questions that Buckell raises: what do prospective media practitioners need to learn and how best should they do so? Some of that research has extended to asking what is the role of the humanities in that education.

Some have even questioned whether editors always know best. Neumann (1992) and others have observed that media consumption worldwide is either stagnant or in decline. Kelly (1999) has deplored "the myopia of the media", socially, politically and

culturally. Ledbetter (2003) described the failure of the technically specialist media to understand what they report and discuss or even to maintain their independence and scepticism. He cited the fields of finance and technology in particular. Health, education, environment and politics could be added to the list.

Many today bemoan what they believe to be a dulling of our humanity and a dimming of the enlightenment. They see darkness abroad on the earth, shrouding the hearts of the people. They read and see and hear of war and rumours of war, and they are troubled. They fear for their health, their wealth and their well-being. And they blame the media, which they find lacking in goodness and beauty and truth – and the power to make things better. They long for what they imagine was a simpler, lovelier past when people were supposedly more humane, when they communicated more directly with one another and when the media were less pervasive.

The past, however, was not all golden. Its imagined brightness often stands in contrast to a dark that is also more imagined than real. Not just in recent days and years but throughout time. And we need to remember that history is not inevitable: today's choices shape tomorrow's history. Nor is history reversible: there is no turning back. Nostalgia overlooks those facts. It also overlooks the fact that the media, like all technologies, are human inventions – for better or for worse, part of our response to experience, part of our culture.

We, and our forebears, have invented and developed the media as a response to the world and they have become part of that world. Some would say they have created the world. So, if the media pervade our world and our lives – and they do – we need to pause and reflect on the relationship between them and our humanity. And that includes the relationship between the media and what we call the humanities.

For much of the past 500 years, the humanities – our studies of humanity – have been epitomised in the Western world by the 'classics' – the study of Latin and Greek. More recently, the humanities have been seen to be philosophy and literature and art, as opposed to the physical sciences on the one hand and the practicalities of life on the other. Mathematics distinguishes between real and imaginary numbers. We have preferred the abstract and the imaginary to the actual and the real. These oppositions, I suggest, are no longer tenable. Especially in the education and practice of media professionals. The question is therefore not about professional media education and the humanities. It is about professional media education as a humanity.

The premises of my argument are these:

- communication does two things: it defines our humanity and it measures all media practice;

- media practice is the quintessential expression and embodiment of our contemporary humanity;

- if we are to make sense of contemporary human experience, including the place of media in our lives and the intricacies of professional media practice – which includes journalism and broadcasting and other forms of media production – we need a new view of humanity; and finally,

- dichotomies, such as those between nature and culture, and technology and humanity, are false. Science and technology are central to our humanity and our culture. They are human inventions that have become a major part of our environment. Our response to the environment is what constitutes our culture. Notions of goodness, beauty and truth that do not take account of science and technology are meaningless.

Humanities And Humanity Defined

For the psalmist of old, the question was: 'What is Man…?' For us, it is 'What is Humanity?' Which is not an easy question. The evening television news, like the dark chiaroscuros of El Greco and Goya, shows us all too often and all too starkly one of the dark and dreadful truths about humanity – 'man's inhumanity to man'.

Karl Erik Rosengren (2000) has argued that the ultimate vital sign – or sign of life – is responsiveness to the environment. The dead and the inert do not react to touch or taste or smell, or to light or sound. Plants and animals and automata do – but they do so more or less automatically, mechanically, by reflex or instinct, or occasionally by training.

Humans are not automata. Instead of reacting, they respond. And their responses are generally deliberate and thoughtful. They continually look for meaning and value: for goodness and beauty and truth and so on. Not that goodness or beauty or truth are universal or constant. That is what gives life its rich and variegated texture, and its enigmatic subtlety. But nobody is completely devoid of some idea of what is good and beautiful and true for them.

For Rosengren, the great landmarks of human evolution were:

- the development of a significantly bigger brain, that enabled our ancestors to think more cleverly than other animals;

- the development of a mouth that enabled them to speak and to sing rather than just bark and howl and shriek and scream; and

- the development of a hand that enabled them to hold tools and implements between their fingers and thumbs.

These laid the physical foundations of human

communication. On those foundations, our ancestors could begin to develop the four crucial – and mutually dependent – dimensions of communication. What Denis McQuail (1994) calls:

- reception: the ability to perceive and make sense of the world around them – using their brains rather than their size and strength to hunt and gather, and later, farm and graze the earth. Later still, reception would provide us with the basis for science and art, religion and technology;

- ritual: the ability to form and maintain communities – to collaborate in groups – be they couples or families or tribes or companies or nation states – to share understandings, beliefs and values, and to pursue common interests and a common good;

- display: the ability to show themselves and their wares off to the world; to express beliefs and values and desires; and to woo and persuade others to share those things – which underpins a whole range of activities including art and advertising, politics, propaganda and PR;

- transmission: the ability – that draws on the previous three – to exchange messages with one another in a whole variety of ways, for all sorts of purposes and with all manner of results.

Initially, people had only their own bodies with which to communicate. Later they developed other technologies that allowed them to make music, to draw and paint and sculpt, to write, to send messages from afar. A thousand years ago, the Chinese invented printing. Five hundred years ago, their invention was taken to Europe. Then, during the nineteenth century, other technologies were invented, that could be used for communication – the telegraph, the photograph, the printing press, electricity and the cinema. Sound-recording, radio, television and video would follow during the twentieth century and, most recently, digital electronics and satellites and fibre optics.

Each new technology allowed the development of a new media form. It also prompted its users to learn new languages and new modes of expression. Journalists learned to write as reporters rather than correspondents. Radio broadcasters learned to write for the ear rather than for the eye. Television makers drew on theatre and film to learn to tell their stories visually instead of as 'radio with pictures' – to express ideas rather than only illustrate them (Gombrich, 1979). And website and multimedia makers are still in the process of learning how best to compose words and sounds and pictures and various activities to fulfil the 'multiplicity' and 'interactivity' of their chosen form.

The burgeoning of new technologies and new media forms also provided new opportunities for business and commerce, and the twentieth century saw a flourishing of large and powerful

media corporations. It also saw large-scale attempts by nation states to mobilise the media – sometimes to build and develop new nations, sometimes to entrench and expand old empires, sometimes to nurture democracy and sometimes to suppress it.

People dream of a golden age, now gone, when the world was supposedly a better place. Similar concerns confronted the American scholar and journalist Walter Lippmann during the social and cultural upheavals that followed the First World War eighty years ago. From our point of view, the world seems to have been simpler then. Cinema and the press had the media landscape to themselves. Radio and television and digital media were figments of a fictive and distant future.

But it was not so simple for the people of the time. Early cinema wrestled with whether to devote itself to diversionary entertainment or to critical documentation of the human condition. Journalism was still, largely, the daily reporting and analysis of events and issues for print publication. Neither technological convergence nor cultural divergence had begun to stir the waters. Yet, people wondered why journalism had not done more to guarantee personal and political freedom.

Lippmann (1922) argued that even a free communication system – what we would call 'free media' – could not guarantee truth and freedom in human society. The problem was not that the state is inherently oppressive. Nor was it the imperfection of markets. The problem lay in the very nature of news and newsgathering, in the psychology of the audience and "the scale of modern life." I wonder what he would make of the scale of human life today – as the human race turns from being rural to being predominantly urban. The question is not one of morals or politics but of meaning.

Lippmann's arguments with John Dewey (1927) over the nature of meaning are well and widely known. Can knowledge be captured like a picture or can it only be generated in conversation and debate? Exploring these questions, James Carey (1989) reminds us very clearly just how intimately our views on media and communication depend on our views of humanity.

What then do media professionals need to know, if they are to express and explore humanity – and particularly goodness, beauty and truth – in the media and thus help us all communicate more successfully?

First, like all professionals, they must know how to respond to, and deal with, the unknown. Whether they are going to work in news and information or in dramatic fiction and fantasy, media people, no less than doctors and lawyers and engineers, need to know how to respond to and make sense of the unknown. They must be curious and they must be quick. They must also know

how to surprise others with new insights, new discoveries and new realisations. They need to entertain – not just to make people laugh but more importantly to catch and hold their attention (Barthes, 1978).

Media people need to know how to recognise and how to construct a story – be it fact or fiction – that shows the narrative links – the cause and effect relationships – between events. And they must establish the characters and motivations of the protagonists. All stories are about someone doing something with or for or to someone else, somewhere or other at some time or other, for some reason or other.

Media people have to know how to form and maintain relationships – communities of belief and value, understanding and trust – with their subjects, their sources, their colleagues, their managers, their proprietors and their publics.

They must be able to express themselves clearly, powerfully and persuasively in whatever medium they choose – be it words or sounds or pictures or combinations of all three – and also use whatever technology is required to produce and publish or distribute their material and their ideas.

These abilities are essential if people are going to work in the media. Beyond them, they need also to understand the environment in which the media operate – economically, politically, socially and culturally. They need to know what is legal, what is moral and what is ethical in what they do. And they need to make what they do comprehensible and affordable.

We may well believe in freedom of expression and freedom of access to information. Media professionals – again like doctors and lawyers and engineers – earn their licences to practice through a tacit contract with the public. The price of that licence is to be honest and truthful and fair. And the same applies to their industries.

The media industries are nowhere near as powerful and omniscient as some of them pretend and some of their critics fear. They rely on ordinary people being willing to spend their time and money, effort and goodwill, to obtain and consume the goods and services that they produce. The salutary fact is that worldwide media audiences and media consumption are either stagnant or in decline. People are simply not prepared to pay what they are asked for what they are offered.

Which may help to explain Rupert Murdoch's recent mammoth losses. News Corporation's chief executive conceded that the company had made a strategic mistake. It had focussed on technology and commercial deals, such as takeovers instead of the quality of media content: better films and television programs, better newspapers and magazines, better books and better on-line

services. And better has to mean 'more communicative' – things that help people make better sense of, and better responses to, the world they live in; that help them form and maintain better relationships and communities – which is increasingly a life and death issue in multicultural societies such as those in Europe and in Australia; that helps them exchange messages more effectively and efficiently. We could say 'more humane'.

To be capable media practitioners, then, people need knowledge and skill and a range of vital personal qualities. The challenge to their teachers is how best they should learn those things. And that answer begins with research – a systematic enquiry into what those capabilities are. Film, television and radio producers, for example, have to be able not only to conceive a vision of their production projects. They must also manage the human, material and financial resources required to realise their visions. But, first they must muster those resources, something they are unlikely to learn to do if their curriculum guarantees them a budget. Likewise, the arts of media production are largely performing arts. They have to be performed within the boundaries of budgets and schedules. Again, these have vital implications for curriculum. There is a close and crucial connection between what is to be learned and how that learning is to be done.

Together with a repertoire of professional knowledge – which includes being able to work creatively and productively with increasingly sophisticated but surprisingly cheap and simple technology – aspiring media professionals need a sound knowledge of the contexts in which they will have to work. Which in a global world is becoming more and more local and varied. And they need 'to know what they are talking (or writing or making pictures) about' – an equally sound knowledge of the content that they will have to deal with.

And, if media people are to learn these things, they can only do so by doing them. None of us learns to speak or to swim or to love by only learning about them (Scheffler, 1965; Ryle, 1990). Media people must learn the arts of reflective practice – of reflecting both on and in practice (Schon, 1983) – and they must do so in practice. Thus the physical and social sciences, and the mundane practicalities of life, will be brought together with philosophy, literature and art to form a new humanity and to generate an ongoing and lively culture. ■

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