

RHODES JOURNALISM

Review

SPECIAL FOCUS
The Internet



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This issue

KEN OWEN, in our interview in this issue, makes the point that "a helluva fight is brewing" over the freedom of the press. This will come as no surprise to most journalists, many of whom simply could not believe their luck after 2 February 1990. Even in those post-speech days, when the National Party went into reform hyperglide, journalists spoke openly of a window of opportunity across which, the assumption seemed to be, the state would eventually draw the curtains.

The ensuing brushes between the press and our democratic representatives have been warning enough that press freedom will have to be safeguarded. Surprisingly, as Guy Berger notes, the media have been remarkably slack in discussing the future basis for this. Coverage by the press on the constitutional debate, as it pertains to press freedom, has been scant. And the draft constitution ignores the well-researched Conference of Editors' submission made at the Constitutional Assembly.

Part of the fight revolves around ownership and affirmative action. Both issues have been bubbling for many years — and arguments have reached a refined summation. The media have always been (to resurrect a 1980's phrase) a site of struggle and much of government criticism of the fourth estate uses ownership structures and the racial composition of the print media as a basis. It is clear, after reading Thami

Mazwai and John Patten on this, that the issues are more complex than many players will admit to. But, complexity aside, the time may come, hints Moegsien Williams, when the government may legislate against the press — and the law will go through.

But, while some of our editors and politicians concern themselves with such weighty matters, working journalists have to get on with the myriad day-to-day decisions that face media on deadline. One such was how far to go in covering the Chris Hani shooting. In a world of multi-deadline days this assassination, in its full-colour-gory-page-one detail, is history. However, with the old adage about those who fail to learn from the past etc in mind, Cathy O'Dowd's interviews with those involved in the editorial decision-making process are a thoughtful study of South African newsroom ethics.

And, although politicians may be focused on print media it would appear, at least if you agree with Richard Calland, that the reverse is not true. His charge that the press is not doing its job in covering parliament — refuted by Kaizer Nyatumba — lays even the centuries-old claim to the role of societal watchdog open to criticism.

Even if editors are right and the public really doesn't give a damn about parliamentary pontifications, there can be few who doubt their interest in radio. Canadian Keith Watt, who has done some work with the SABC, remains unimpressed with both that organisation and the IBA. The latter is isolating the

SABC from its audience while the programming on AM Live is "arid", he claims. SAfm's falling listenership figures suggest Watt is close to the truth. Not only has SAfm failed to establish a rapport with keen radio listeners, but it has succeeded in driving them in their thousands to local radio stations — which the IBA wants sold off. That said, it is worth remembering that SAfm (even a successful SAfm) is small fry in terms of listenership, a point Franz Kruger makes in describing the accomplishments of other stations in the SABC.

Review's focus on the internet is apt, given that Rhodes University pioneered the superhighway in southern Africa. The deep history of the internet is perhaps worth recounting. The original gateway used by Rhodes, and thus the whole of the country, was a computer in the garage of Randy Bush, a United States consultant and long-standing friend of this university. The entire news and mail feeds to South Africa flowed through his home and it was only recently that he ceased to act as the FidoNet gateway between the United States and the rest of the world. For those who have the toys, the Internet Focus is also available (courtesy of Roland Stanbridge of Stockholm University) on: <http://www.ru.ac.za/departments/journ/review/index.html>. The electronic version offers you wondrous trips into, to borrow Neil Jacobsohn's description, "the wired blue yonder".

Charles Riddle — Editor

SA PHOTOJOURNALISM CONFERENCE

The Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University is hosting the SA Photojournalism Conference from 30 June to 3 July 1996.

We see this exciting conference as an important event that will bring together photographers and academics from different media organisations and educational institutions to share their vision and experience.

As we move into a new era — a new country, extensive new technology, new demands on teaching curriculum — it is time to stop and take stock of the state of photojournalism in South Africa today, and where we hope it will be moving in the next century.

The Conference will cover areas of Copyright, Photojournalism Education, Ethics, Community Photojournalism, New Technology (digital) and Documentary Photography.

Speakers confirmed include top South African photojournalist, Jurgen Schadeburg; Web publishing expert, Paul Velasco from Southlight Photo Agency; copyright expert, Kurt Buchman (who is also the World Council of Professional Photographers board member on copyright), and Denis Farrell of Associated Press (SA).

Overseas speakers include Professor Rich Beckman, chair of the Electronic Photojournalism Workshop section of the National Press Photographers Association (USA) and Roland Stanbridge, from the Digital

Media Unit of the University of Stockholm, an expert on the Internet and publishing on the Web.

Lecturer Montgomery Cooper is organising the conference as part of his portfolio in his newly appointed capacity as chairman of the photojournalism subcommittee for the World Council.

The conference's main sponsor is Kodak SA.

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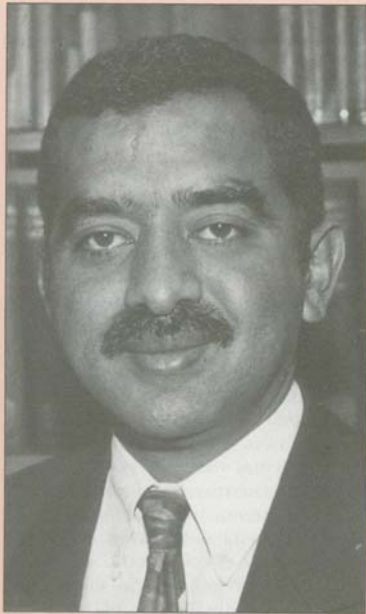
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30 June - 3 July 1996



Guest Editorial

Moegsien Williams, on the need for a new vision in the media.

SOUTH AFRICA'S MASS MEDIA has helped change our world, but internally, it has done too little about changing itself. Now we sit with the problems.

We have a profession wracked by differences, and a media skewed in terms of representivity. Political parties are using these problems for public point scoring.

THE SINS of the fathers are borne by today's journalists. But it would be wrong to say that we should therefore bury the past and simply move ahead. Likewise, however, it would be wrong to dwell on the past.

We must acknowledge the past, agree that the way things look now is precisely because of the mistakes of the past. And we need to ensure that our profession conducts its own transformation.

That means a lot more than making Moegsien Williams editor of *The Cape Times*. It means more than effective affirmative action and training in our media.

Transformation must cover the creation of career paths for messengers and receptionists; it must enable black economic empowerment in ownership. And transformation must include our journalism.

OUR WORK NEEDS TO CHANGE.

Reporters today are being required to do five or six stories a day. Quality suffers in the process. Simply, we don't have the staff to chase every ambulance going down the road.

So, we need quality, not quantity.

We need journalists to spend time cultivating stories and getting close to sources.

Transformation also means our white colleagues must finally realise that the social pages should cover more than Sea Point weddings.

What about those with majority white audiences that don't want to have black people in "their" media? The issue is whether journalists are going to try and shift these audiences or not.

You may successfully go for building audiences in the white community in the short-term, but what of tomorrow? History is in danger of overtaking some of us.

TRANSFORMATION will mean there may be those who are asked to give way to journalists better placed to serve the new audiences. That does not make you redundant: without your skills, who will mentor the new generations of journalists?

Transformation must redefine the news. That means developing mechanisms whereby editors and reporters begin to get better feedback from readers, listeners and viewers.

White journalists historically have been distanced from the lives of most black readers. Today, many black journalists have moved into formerly white suburbs and are losing their daily contact with the townships.

On the *Sowetan*, we tried to deal with this by ensuring that reporters went to every local meeting in a given community — taxi associations, stokvels, school committees, etc. People in the community began to co-determine content, and it worked.

At the same time as ensuring news close to communities, we need to be forthright with our audiences. We should tell them that we are trying our best with limited staff, tell them that we need their help.

Transformation means we must engage our audiences, point out that it is incumbent upon them to support a free press and diversity for developing this democracy.

Journalists have no need to be defensive; they are needed to act as leaders — serving communities, linking

communities, creating new communities, and serving democracy.

Transformation also goes for our editorial organisations, which can no longer continue as before.

We need a new vision for South African journalism — one that cuts across the Conference of Editors and Black Editors Forum, one that spans different companies, and one that covers both print and broadcast media.

It must be a vision that covers ownership, training, affirmative action — and press freedom. I believe there is not that much that divides us, and that even where there are areas of continued difference, there will be common principles to stand by.

JUST THIS ONCE, we should take a leaf out of the politicians' book — and talk, talk, talk until the stereotypes fade and polarisation gives way to finding common positions.

Now is not the time for bloody-mindedness, grandstanding or the dissolution of organisations. We need the existing bodies to work through and to meet through. We need them to talk to the owners of our media, and we need them to help engage our audiences and staffers in the process.

The challenge is to stop seeing one another as part of the problem — and, rather, to try to make people part of the solution.

There will not be a shotgun marriage, but a resolution is necessary. The alternative is a nightmare scenario which goes something like this: it is 1998 and the government legislates against the press. One group supports the move, another opposes. The law goes through.

We need one voice to speak on behalf of the profession, and with credibility and authority.

Too little was done in the past; let history judge us differently.

Moegsien Williams is editor of The Cape Times

Grit, silk and rum

It's one of those days when death wish and karma are in a rare and trenchant cosmic harmony, the day I interview Ken Owen. I've been asked as an independent journalist to write this piece, but for the past month or so, I have been working on contract for the *Sunday Times*, which Owen edits. It was, I reflect as I trundle down the long corridor that separates my own seedy corner of the newsroom from the holy of holies, indeed in a moment of foolish bravado that I accepted the commission.

You're meant to feel that kind of thing as you locomote through the hierarchical geography of the *Sunday Times*: Out from the democratic sprawl of the newsroom past the subs room and the second secretary; you come in due course to the private offices, belonging to the Assistant Editors, and then the Deputy Editor. With each door the atmosphere grows more rarefied. By the time you turn the corner to the suite of The Editor — appropriately buffered by the Editor's Secretary and overlooked by glum portraits of Eminent Predecessors — the carpeting is

imperceptibly plusher, there are different patterns on the walls.

Meanwhile: my jeans have just split at the knee. Though I don't know it yet, when I pull out my pen, it is going to spit out great gobs of ink all over the coffee table. The batteries in my tape recorder — the batteries I changed that morning — are going to be flat, because I have left the rewind button on in my anxiety to get everything just so in readiness; I am going to have to borrow Ken Owen's for the occasion.

That kind of day. I've been working at the *Sunday Times* for just on a month, but this is the first time I've actually met him face to face. The Editor functions at some remove from the running of the newspaper. His words are carried down the corridors of the *Sunday Times* by deputies in hushed tones, passing out nuggets of praise here, grenades of blame there. Every second or third week, the Editor himself storms into the newsroom on a Saturday and, seemingly randomly, throws back a page just before the paper is scheduled to go to bed.

Ken Owen is nothing like the august setting and the omens would lead you to expect. One's first impression is of a somewhat awkward, self-deprecating (though not infrequently abrasive) shyness. His demeanour is almost insistently that of the common, no-nonsense, man on the street. The journalist editor, constitutionally somewhat at odds with the world of money and management, not the type that is to the cigars, port and wood panelling born, all social skills and business lunches and let somebody else write the editorials.

In point of fact Owen was born on the wrong side of the tracks. His father was a male nurse who later became a farmer and his mother a domestic worker of sorts. And he did come up the hard way, climbing through the ranks with nothing on his side but his skill as a writer — and though it was equally a burden, causing him to be fired on more than one occasion — his pugnacity.

But Owen has mellowed somewhat in recent years. While admittedly, he meets with senior staff almost daily, his hand is seldom directly felt in the day-to-day running of the newspaper.

"There are two reasons," he says. "One is that my health began to falter and I had to start protecting myself. I've had more and more symptoms from my heart in the past few years. The other is, of course, I'm getting ready to bale out and I will not have succeeded if it doesn't

sail on without a wobble when I leave. I've progressively shed responsibilities to other people over the past seven years. When I first got here I swarmed all over the place all the time. I still have a reasonable amount of control. I'm the only editor who knows what is happening on the sports pages, I'm the one editor who can tell you what to watch for in the ballet performance."

But it is pretty clear he also doesn't exactly hate the awe and fear his more distanced persona tends to inspire.

"There's a marvellous story that Wessel de Kock tells when he was working for the *Rand Daily Mail* in the sixties and he was covering a court case," Owen remembers. "One evening Rick Sowden [then editor] — who used to come to the office in the evening in a dinner jacket and black bow tie — came into the newsroom. This was a very rare occurrence, and all the journalists sort of stood around. And Dick Sowden looked a bit bewildered and he said: 'which one is De Kock?' So all the reporters pushed him forward. Rick Sowden looked down and said: 'The editor is pleased'. Then he walked out. Nowadays that kind of mystique has largely gone out of newspapers and maybe the fact that I'm a bit remote recreates that — though I don't do it deliberately."

You can believe that last disclaimer or not as you like. The thing is Ken Owen has always bulked somewhat larger than life. There are all those stories about his punching colleagues and hurling typewriters down stairwells or out of windows, about getting fired for brawling and for abusive drunkenness. That scar on his nose is the result of a knife fight it is said. Most of these stories are apocryphal, of course, or at best only half true. But in a way that is exactly the point: in the world of journalism, Owen has undoubtedly attained the kind of status where his memory is fitted out with the deferred truth of mythology.

One story that is at least in part true is the one about his being dismissed as founding editor of *Business Day* in 1985 — only three days after the title was launched. Management had lost confidence in his leadership. Owen was given the option of resigning — an option he exercised while Saan managing director Clive Kinsley, who moments earlier had fired him, was suavely eulogising Owen's wonderful contribution to the fledgling newspaper.

A year later, so the chronicle duly records, he was back at the helm on *Business Day*, for his third stint as an editor. According to some, the reason was that the board needed somebody to go down with what appeared at the time to be a sinking ship — and Owen, having edited the *Sunday Express* through the throes of its dying, was thought to possess the requisite credentials.

Whatever the reasons for his appointment, Owen did the impossible, turning the title around, raising readership to the niche market levels it needed in order to thrive in the market place — and, though this might have seemed secondary to those who gave him the job, making it, in many ways, the classiest and most credible newspaper act in town.

"My objective was no longer simply to produce a newspaper," Owen says, "but to try to rehabilitate South African English journalism. I could have produced in some ways a better newspaper, certainly one that would have done my own standing less harm, if I had not been determined to force people to become journalists."

It is a theme to which he returns from various angles, notably in tilting against Independent Newspapers' new *Sunday Independent*. "I'm striving towards better journalism because I think South African journalism is so appalling," he says. "The problem is to try to raise the level of writing, to make it more lucid and graceful and elegant. Shaun Johnson has taken the other way, he clips them out of British newspapers and puts them in. They read like silk, but it does nothing for South African journalism... and a hell of a little for the readership. They can pick up 30 000 people who used to live in Earl's Court and are nostalgic about British newspapers, you can always do that. But, really, is that here or there? It doesn't live in the same country that I live in and it doesn't face the same issues that I face."

The real challenge, Owen believes — despite the obvious relish with which he snipes at the *Independent* — lies at the other end of the spectrum.

So, Owen has gone out of his way to nurture and promote writers that do live in the same country. One of these is Mike Robertson, who, under Owen, has swiftly risen from political reporter to Assistant Editor responsible for political coverage, and who — despite the relative youth of his 30-something years — is generally believed to be the successor Owen would have chosen had the board displayed any real interest in his opinion on the succession. (It didn't of course; instead it approached Frederick van Zyl Slabbert of rent-an-expert, surely the least incendiary writer on the planet — who duly declined.)

Another, curiously enough since her style tends rather towards shimmering wit than the Owen trademark gravitas, is former *Weekly Mail* Arts Editor, Charlotte Bauer, recently given her own current affairs column and, at the time of writing, scheduled to take over a regular flagged page in the *Sunday Times*.

But despite the obvious relish with which Owen snipes at the *Independent* and his own concern with excellence in journalism, he understands well enough that the real game is being played on different terrain.

"If you look at the market, then one Sunday newspaper is exactly where it should be and that is *City Press*. That's where the growth is going to be. You can go downmarket and fight with *City Press*, which means that you're going to have to have a black editor and you change the product to account for the lower literacy and you lose all your white readers.

"The alternative is to redefine the market for the *Sunday Times* and run across all race groups and try to hold an elite market. That implies in each community an elite readership... I think there is a market there and it's a permanent one. It may shrink a bit and I took that risk when I started out."

Actually the *Sunday Times*' readership grew substantially after Owen took over in 1990, peaking at 568 000, then gradually dropping into the 400 000s — a more comfortable level, he insists, high enough for advertising, but avoiding excessive losses on cover price and distribution.

His real pride though is in people: "When I was appointed, they just had me, they didn't have any choice. When Joel Mervis left it was a choice between Johnny Johnson and Tertius Myburgh, there had been no development of people. Both on *Business Day* and here what I've set out to do is to create a set of people. Now as

I leave, there are half a dozen prospective editors who could take over from me."

Perhaps. But in another way they certainly couldn't. The stamp of Owen's journalistic personality is as powerful as it is eccentric. You have to travel great distances to find a professional journalist who doesn't admire the man's writing, who doesn't envy his command of language and the force of his argumentation. You have to travel just as far in the other direction to find somebody who usually agrees with what he is actually saying. Everybody though reads the weekly column he has been writing since his time on *Business Day*. In truth Owen's viewpoints are frequently as bizarre as they are occasionally refreshing. He is for instance not above suggesting the entire Arts and Culture and Science and Technology ministry should be dissolved — mainly, it would appear, on the grounds that those who want to see opera do not deserve subsidy, they should be paying for it themselves. There is no acknowledgement of any problems associated with redistribution of resources or any need for cultural development, or anything that one would expect a responsible commentator at least to nod at. By the same token, it should be noted, he allowed his newspaper to publish a long interview with Minister Ben Ngubane in which his views on the subject were systematically trashed.

Owen has also been guilty of pursuing incomprehensible vendettas in print. One such was against the late Joe Slovo at whom he tilted week after week with all the enthusiasm of a Don Quixote charging at a windmill — and to about as much purpose. Joe Slovo was riding the gravy train because he possessed a Health and Racquet Club membership card. (Never mind that it was Joe Slovo who single-handedly prevented the pre-elections Transitional Executive Committee from leaving aside all other business to deal with the really important thing: voting immediate and substantial pay rises for TEC members.) Red Joe was speaking with forked tongue when he rejected communist centralism because... well just because Ken Owen knew he was.

But then, by his own admission Owen's writing is geared to "sharpening the conflict, making it as rum as I can.

"Then I get clobbered back and that is okay. Somebody asked me: 'do I enjoy getting clobbered?' and no I don't enjoy it, but I can stand it. To me the worst column is the one that everybody ignores, where it doesn't get any letters, it doesn't make anybody angry."

But does he actually believe the stuff he writes? If, six months after it was published, he reads his own copy, does he still agree with what it says?

"No of course not!" Owen practically exclaims. "No, although I'm sometimes impressed with myself. I sometimes say: 'Hell I used to be able to write'. But sometimes I think: 'Jeez that was bloody stupid'."

You can't quite get him to say this but it is all part of a culture of debate and criticism that lies at the heart of Ken Owen's very special version of "liberalism".

"I read, in the *Wall Street Journal*, a piece by Irving Crystal," he recalls. "He claimed that the neo-conservatives had recreated in the United States the word capitalism, they'd rehabilitated it. At that time I'd just read Nadine Gordimer's comment that liberalism on South African campuses was as dead as a dodo. And I thought,

► overleaf

► *previous page* I wonder if you could rehabilitate liberalism in South Africa."

The answer was "obviously not". The history of liberalism in South Africa, at least since the days of Alan Paton's Liberal Party was, at the time that Owen was wanting to revive the notion, one of mealy-mouthed double standards, of salving a public conscience while, so to speak, not rocking the boat wherein rested the goose of apartheid that laid the golden egg.

So Owen went ahead and did it anyway. "Maybe I could pull it off," he remembers thinking, "in the context of one hell of a fight." Under the white flag of liberalism, and as reinstated editor of *Business Day*, he went for the collective jugular defending individual liberties against the collective, the free market against all arguments tending to affirmative action, the right to freedom of speech against all censorship — all with about as much liberal

tolerance as you could expect from an attack-trained Rottweiler.

"That became the fight, that became the thing that gave *Business Day* an identity and a label and made it relevant to people other than stockbrokers. People began to talk about it, it actually saved the newspaper."

It did more than just that though. It also created or at least imaged a muscularity in the traditionally flabby South African political middle ground. We tend to forget this now, but it was neither easy nor fashionable in the mid-1980s to position oneself as an independent individualist in South Africa. The battle lines were drawn and the struggle was being waged on mythological as well as practical fronts; it was a time which presented itself as demanding that one take sides. And in the ever-sharpening conflict around versions of reality, journalism was increasingly an activist pursuit. You either excused and sought to prop up the old regime or you sought to bring it down: truth was at less of a premium than the essentially propagandist usefulness of information in the service of the particular point of view.

Against the grain, Owen's critical liberalism stridently reasserted an alternative — usually conservative to be sure, but nevertheless possessed of a force, conviction and integrity that made it appear to be of a different order from the polite and uncommitted liberalism characteristic of the mainstream English language press at large. It would be too much to claim that Owen's journalism either galvanised or has given voice to the motley lobby of dissent in South African affairs.

Still, on *Business Day*, and later, as he pursued the same agendas on the far more powerful *Sunday Times*, the democracy of Owen's dislikes has incontestably contributed to sustaining a climate of dissent and debate in our changing society. As the political lines have been redrawn, as the traditional "left" of the ANC takes on the mantle of government, it is increasingly at the centre that the voices of dissent are most stridently to be heard; the committed liberal humanists — like Ken Owen and his one-time arch enemy Archbishop Desmond Tutu — are the ones who bark as watchdogs of morality and value — and occasionally growl.

It was this uncompromising public identity which made Ken Owen in many ways — his protestations of being the only possibility aside — a curious choice as editor of the *Sunday Times* in the first place. Under Tertius Myburgh, his immediate predecessor — who left, it should be remembered, with the intention of taking up a senior position in the old National Party government — the newspaper had developed a deserved reputation for (at best) a craven kind of conservatism, alternating sleaze, salaciousness, pro-government apologies, and very little else.

Under Ken Owen it has, gradually, become something different, still sensationalist to be sure, but backed by solid political analysis and — though largely by default — more likely these days to break important stories than any other newspaper around. It has also grown distinctly ill-mannered towards those in power — to the point where national leaders, from

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"My objective was no longer simply to produce a newspaper but to try to rehabilitate South African English journalism. I could have produced in some ways a better newspaper, certainly one that would have done my own standing less harm, if I had not been determined to force people to become journalists."



Nelson Mandela to Gauteng Premier Tokyo Sexwale, have paid the highest compliment politicians can to its independence: they have complained of "negativity" and anti-government bias.

Like many another observer of the media, Owen believes that a "helluva fight is brewing" over the freedom of the press. There is much talk in the air these days about "constructive" journalism and of rapprochement between government and the media. There is also a good deal of uneasiness expressed at intervals about a perceived disproportionality in the economic and editorial power still exercised by whites in the media sector. Conversely there is much reference these days to the supposed need for affirmative intervention by and on behalf of black interests and perspectives.

In short, the portents are accumulating of imminent government intervention in the functioning of the press in the post-elections society. It is unsurprising that this should be the case. There certainly exist elements within the governing ANC who remember with fondness the control effortlessly exercised over the press in places like Zambia. It also needs to be acknowledged that many of the ANC's leaders, accustomed to the adulation of the world and to something like leasehold on the moral high ground, are proving noticeably thin-skinned in the hurly burly of media criticism.

Such considerations aside, however, it remains true that whites do exercise disproportionate power in the non-statutory media. Bluntly, the mainstream media continue to be owned and effectively controlled by an economic establishment that flourished under apartheid, and they continue to be, if not actually hostile to the ANC-led government, at least deeply suspicious of its bona fides.

"The ANC needs its own mouthpiece," Owen notes. "But the danger is there are moves to hijack existing titles with working infrastructures."

To use his own word, the situation grows increasingly

rum. Owen responded at first characteristically — by getting ready for a fight.

"I almost withdrew my retirement," he says. "I thought I needed to see the fight through to the end.

"Then I realised it was a young man's fight and I must let the younger editors take it on board... people like Anton Harber, I have faith they will see it through."

There is real poignancy in the disclaimer of responsibility for the future. Nor is it only the fuzzy sentiment that lights up the scene where the old fighter finally accepts mortality and hangs up his gloves. There is also a starker underlying truth. Editors of mainstream publications are tainted from the outset in the eyes of the new society. They will not be free of the perception that they did too little to resist the depredations of the apartheid regime, that they never stopped being "white" in their perspective and the way they looked at South Africa. Certainly among black politicians, the sense is that the mainstream press failed to register with any conviction or authority during the 1980s the realities of the townships or of black life; they failed signally, in the words of the *Star's* unfortunate slogan to tell it like it was. Instead papers like the *Star* and the *Sunday Times* tended to write to a white readership, they tended to believe the National Party government's version of events and, perhaps more importantly, they tended to embrace the perspectives of the suburbs rather than those of the townships.

There will be accusations — indeed contemporary history is writing them in the trial of the generals as I write to the effect that, either through simple ignorance or willed blindness, the mainstream press failed in the dying years of the apartheid regime to see the obvious.

Week after week the independents, notably *Vrye Weekblad* and the *Weekly Mail*, came up with allegations around dirty tricks in the war against the ANC and more specifically around collusion between agents of the government and the IFP — both on the Witwatersrand and in KwaZulu Natal.

Week after week the mainstream press either ignored the evidence or seemed intent upon trashing the articles that ran in the alternative press.

"I was convinced that in Natal both sides were equally murderous," Owen says. "What seemed to me was that the ANC was moving in on local Inkatha members and I wasn't surprised when they fought back. Whether you saw it as part of a Third Force as it later became known or whether you saw it as part of a murderous battle, I think was a matter of perspective.

"It was that vision that actually blinded me to the conspiracy that came. So sure there's an historical judgement of failure to be made on this, but I don't think it was a contemptible failure."

Nevertheless, as the Truth Commission sits, as the Trial of the Generals unfolds, as the Eugene de Kock trial draws to its conclusion — as the society revisits its suppressed and unwritten past — the fact of the failure will loom as the important thing. The credibility of the mainstream press in those years will certainly be called, seriously, into question. I do not believe that anybody would seriously accuse Ken Owen of collusion. After all, he is on record as the first journalist to pick up on the Info scandal, working at it for close on a decade before it finally broke, under another journalist's byline. So too, as editor of the *Sunday Express*, he presided fearlessly over almost monotonously regular exposes of government corruption.

No, this is not the point. The point is simply that, like nearly all of his generation's press, he did not see or would not believe what was going on. He was still part of the white world's press, and so too was the liberalism he espoused part of the old South Africa's moral firmament.

And, yes, he is right, it is a young man's fight. Many of the moves, though — the body blows, the hooks, not to mention the odd headbutt — will have been learnt from tapes of Ken Owen's fights.

Ivor Powell is a freelance writer working under contract on the Sunday Times

The media and parliament:

“Media coverage of parliament is scant to put it politely; diabolically indolent to put it more accurately.”

Richard Calland

THESE WERE THE WORDS that IDASA Public Information Centre Director Dr Mamphela Ramphele used when addressing an informal gathering of SABC Radio's political team and government Media Liaison Officers (MLOs) in August. She was not wrong, especially, although not exclusively, with regard to the print media. No South African newspaper has a page or section devoted to parliament. None informs its readers as to the schedule of parliamentary committee meetings that particular day or week, let alone the subject matter or import of the meetings. Apart from a one-page piece in the *Mail & Guardian* in the spring of 1994, no newspaper has to this writer's knowledge tried to explain the parliamentary committee system or put it in any sort of comparative or theoretical context, notwithstanding the fact that it is in the committees where the real action is now to be found. Nor has there been any systematic attempt either to de-mystify the process of legislation-making or to evaluate the performance of individual parliamentarians.

This is just to mention a few of the more serious gaps in the reporting of parliament. Where there is coverage, the quality is unhelpfully and painfully poor and superficial. Even the weeklies, with the exception of the *Mail & Guardian* which regularly seeks to cover at least one parliamentary issue in greater depth and is prepared to make space for some detailed assessment of the institution, fail badly despite the fact they have time on their side. The *Sunday Independent* is a particular disappointment. It is a strange and unsatisfactory state of affairs to discover that it is *The Citizen* newspaper that has the widest coverage of parliament, if only by virtue of its enthusiasm for running column after column of SAPA copy. The other dailies need to examine their performance critically.

The best and most exasperating example of the poor coverage of parliament is the reporting of the so-called "grave train". It has become apparent that there is a Gravy Index which may be of use to media analysts: the poorer or lazier the political journalist, the greater the dosage of "grave" in his or her reporting. It attracts the unskilled and/or the lazy because such stories require little contextual understanding and only meagre research. In short, they are easy to churn out.

The reporting of the Melamet Commission in May 1994 set the tone for the year. The new salaries did sound high. But which correspondent troubled to put them in the context within which they must necessarily fall,

namely, of a working MP who, if he or she is doing their job properly, will have substantial outgoings, given the current rules concerning allowances and expenses, and the appalling lack of administrative and research back-up in parliament itself?

The Sunday Times is one of the worst offenders. On 10th September 1995, for example, they splashed their front page with the "revelation" that MPs were planning to "vote themselves more gravy". What the report failed to make clear to the reader was that the extra R3000 a month allowance that was under consideration was to be a constituency allowance to be paid directly, and only, to a person employed at the MP's constituency office. What does the *Sunday Times* want? MPs who can adequately attend to their constituency duties or not?

Thus was the ground sullied, with possible serious consequences. So too in relation to MPs' outside earnings. If one argues that MPs should not have second or third jobs, as they currently can, and are likely to be able to continue to have, then the quid pro quo is that their basic salary be sufficiently high to allow for this. It is doubtful if that can now be achieved because it is unlikely that public opinion would either contemplate or permit a significant rise in MPs' salaries. Hence, MPs will improve their financial position by other means. Is that desirable? What are the main or possible consequences of that fact? Did the editor or political correspondent of any of the newspapers that ran such stories take this into account or even have any remote understanding of the wider and more profound considerations?

All of this helps explain why the newspaper that we produce fortnightly during parliamentary session — the *Parliamentary Whip* — has been so popular both in parliament and elsewhere. It seeks to cover parliament in a comprehensive, in-depth, entertaining, yet balanced way, putting the issues that arise into a more profound context. A diverse range of people and organisations appear to rely upon it. The *Whip* was born into something of a vacuum and so to a large extent its success was inevitable, but this in itself reflects badly on the print media's own coverage and approach.

South Africa is not unique. Elsewhere around the world in the so-called established democracies coverage of parliament has become thinner and thinner. The following exchange from the evidence heard by the Nolan Commission in Britain is of wider interest and relevance:

● **Tom King MP (former Tory Cabinet Minister)**

to Simon Jenkins, former Editor, *The Times*:

If you look at your own newspaper, or the one which you previously edited, that used to have a full page of Parliamentary report. It now has nothing. It now has Matthew Parris writing most engaging and very entertaining articles, but of a sketched, somewhat caricature nature, which certainly form their part and

I certainly enjoy them enormously, but on many days that is the only report of what is happening in Parliament. Do you think that is right?

● **Jenkins:**

Yes, I took the decision to stop it. I stopped it because I couldn't find anyone who read it apart from MPs. We are not there to provide a public service for a particular profession, or, for that matter, for a particular legislative chamber. Newspapers are about providing people with news.

● **King:**

But you think, therefore, it is a responsible position for a newspaper to take — a journal of record — I mean, I am not talking, obviously, about tabloid journalism which works by rather different rule, but the major newspapers of the country — to give no reporting whatsoever factually of what happens in parliament on the grounds that people don't read it?

The exchange raises an important question — and an important challenge — for newspaper editors and proprietors: to what extent do they have a duty to play their part in protecting and enhancing democracy by covering parliament irrespective of the popularity of the coverage?

There are three points to be made:

● Firstly, newspapers which aspire to the epithet "quality, serious" should regard it as their duty to inform people about what is happening in the elected legislature. Information is a key ingredient in empowering people. If the supply is cut or reduced then the gap between the elected and the electorate is widened. Only a fascist or a 19th century Whig paternalist would want that. The gap has already widened: people simply do not know what is happening in their parliament. They feel out of touch. The issue for South Africa's print media is this: does it wish to be an accomplice in this process or not? Given its own (generally) inglorious part in the apartheid conspiracy one would have expected the media to be anxious to play an empowering role now. It is, therefore, a question of conscience as well as principle.

● Secondly, Jenkins misses the point: what happens in parliament is news, even if it does not necessarily come ready-packaged in sensational form. What Jenkins means is that news about parliament does not conform to the new concept of news which the media has allowed to develop by act and omission in recent years; a concept of news which is based on the superficial, rather than the profound. The "grave train" obsession is the principal example in this context. In any case, South Africa is a million miles from Britain. The politics here represents a kaleidoscope of colour compared with the dull shades of grey of Britain. What is happening in the new parliament is unrelentingly fascinating, the people and the occasions full of fertile texture, and with virgin territory constantly being explored. There are stories aplenty. And only a

do we need to thicken the gravy?

relatively small number of journalists to chase them. In so many ways, a nirvana for political journalism. So why the paucity of quality coverage?

• Thirdly, the assumption that proper coverage of parliament would not be popular is misplaced: our evidence suggests otherwise. When we take copies of the *Parliamentary Whip* to township areas, to taxi ranks, to rural areas, people have at times literally fought to get their copy. People are hungry for information. They want to know about the politicians they put into parliament. They want to know what those individuals are doing now that they are in power. They want to know about this place in Cape Town, from which they were so long excluded. As things stand their desires are in this important respect unrequited; they are being starved of the information to which they are entitled and which they have a legitimate expectation that the media will provide.

There is some mitigation for the parliamentary correspondents. Although some are plainly flabby in both the mind and the spirit, most — not all — work hard. But there is a huge amount of ground to cover. There are now 60-odd parliamentary committees of various sorts, sometimes as many as 12 will be meeting at any one time. Because, shamefully,

and increasingly inexcusably, there is no Hansard — verbatim — record of the committee hearings, it is impossible to catch up: either you are at the committee hearing yourself or you miss out. Thus, the lobby is completely over-stretched: even the biggest newspapers have just two correspondents in the lobby and SAPA has only five or six. Additionally, it has been a sharp learning experience. It must be recognised that the transformation of parliament from cynical rubber-stamp to an active place of work, and the speed of that transformation, has presented itself as a huge challenge for the Fourth Estate.

What has been most disappointing is how few of its members, editors and owners have simultaneously recognised it to be a great opportunity. To take that opportunity specialism, energy and creativity were required. There has been very little. As Tom King intimated to the Nolan Commission, witty, even erudite, parliamentary columns are no substitute for substantive coverage (not that there is exactly a surfeit of wit or erudition to be found). Few editors or proprietors appear to realise that complex current affairs demands specialist journalism (By the same token, it is worth noting in passing that government would also be well advised to see that complex policies require specialist MLOs with genuine

enthusiasm for, and depth of knowledge in, their field, not generalist, centralised "communication services", and that such people are far more likely to attract the sort of positive reporting that Mr Mbeki is demanding.)

Specialism requires investment, in time and money. As Dr Ramphele put it in August: "Let us be clear: our criticism of many in the media not only extends to, but is especially directed at, the owners, executives and senior editors of the media, the print media in particular. Decent coverage of complex issues requires resources, whether it be the recruitment of specialist journalists or their training, or else the page space or air time that such issues need if justice is to be done to them." If the print media are serious in wanting to meet the needs and interests of its readership and in playing a full and constructive part in the democratic transition, then they must review their policy towards parliamentary coverage. They must do so urgently if South Africa's emerging democracy is not to be stunted by the inadequacy of its press in this most critical area of democratic activity.

Richard Calland is the head of the Parliamentary Information & Monitoring Service (PIMS) at the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA)'s Public Information Centre in Cape Town.

But journalists are doing the best they can...

Kaizer M Nyatumba

PARLIAMENT. Until about five years ago the word used to have something about it that inspired awe, respect, fear and even loathing, depending on one's political leaning. Although it then denoted an unrepresentative institution from which all the nefarious and odious laws which governed our daily lives were made, the word "parliament" nevertheless had some ring of respectability about it.

I still remember only too well my first visit to parliament three years ago. Although then less important in our fast-changing politics than it used to be in the past, the institution was still a potent symbol of white hegemony over the African majority.

I remember feeling singularly unwelcome at the place, from the very moment I arrived. The police officers manning the entrance leading to the parliamentary press gallery were rude and unfriendly to darker-hued individuals seeking to gain entry into the building; there was a strict dress code for both parliamentarians and those who worked there as well as for visitors; and parliament itself was a very structured — and perhaps well run — organisation. It was also much easier for the press to cover.

Since the advent of the new South Africa, however, a lot has changed in the new bi-cameral parliament. The strict dress code has gone; there are many more MPs than

used to be the case; there are two important houses of parliament, the 400-member national assembly and the 90-member senate supposedly representing the nine provinces' interest; and there are more than 30 parliamentary portfolio committees, which are more powerful than their predecessors used to be, and whose meetings are open to the public/press. Clearly, then, covering parliament in this era of political transparency is much more difficult than it used to be in the past. Added to the complication of having to cover two houses and the 30-plus parliamentary committees, there is also the constitutional assembly (CA), the body charged with the responsibility of writing the country's final constitution. It consists of a joint sitting of the national assembly and the Senate.

How do the media cover parliament? Obviously not exhaustively, for it is not possible to do so, but well enough to give the public some idea about some of the major legislation being debated and passed by parliament.

There are at least two reasons for this inability to cover parliament comprehensively: the acute lack of adequate resources and the sheer volume of information flowing from the august institution. A paper like *The Star*, for instance, has one person in Cape Town, the political correspondent, whose brief is to cover the important developments in parliament. He cannot possibly monitor debates in the national assembly and the senate simultaneously, be at all the parliamentary portfolio committees's meetings and cover some of the press briefings usually given by ministers.

But that does not mean that there are important things happening in parliament that we do not cover because we have only one person there. Although on the major political developments of the day we use stories written by our own political correspondent, on the many other stories we do not hesitate to use other political correspondents employed by our sister newspapers in the Independent Newspapers group as well as copy from SAPA and Reuter, for which services we pay handsomely. But once we have all these stories available to us in Johannesburg, the next problem is placing them in the newspaper. Space is always at a premium, and inevitably there are stories which then get hacked and used as fillers and those that are not used at all. This is not a problem peculiar to *The Star*, but applies across the board to all newspapers — except for *The Citizen*, which has no advertising worth speaking about and therefore runs the entire SAPA service — and the electronic media. The result is that the South African public cannot claim to be fully conversant with either the parliamentary process or the developments taking place there. This is a problem which will persist for years, and to which no solution is possible. Even if parliamentary debates were to be televised throughout the day, this would still not account for the parliamentary portfolio committees' meetings.

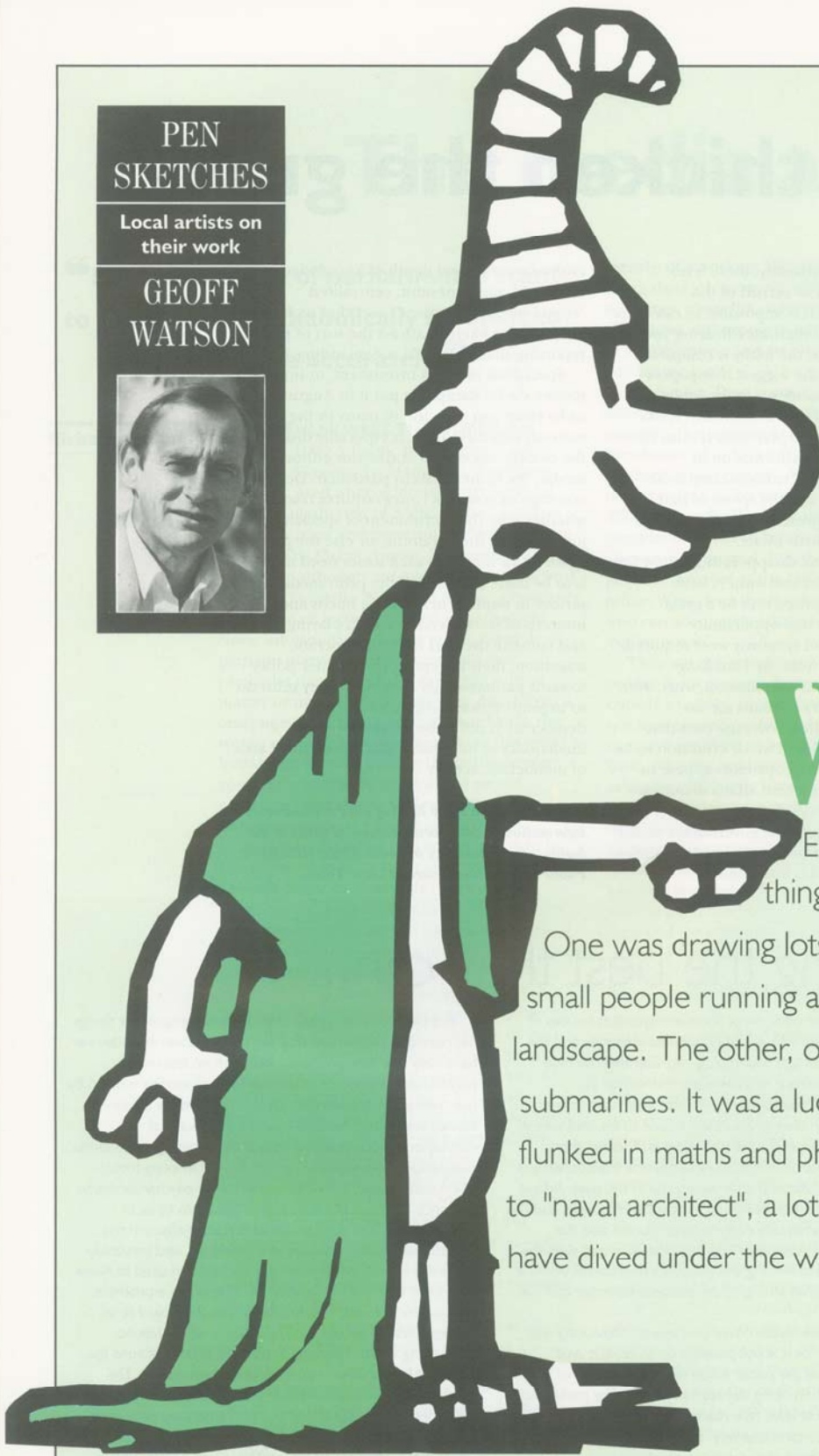
The media, therefore, can only do the best they can, by ensuring that the public is reasonably informed about, at the very least, the major developments taking place in parliament and the decisions taken there.

Kaizer Nyatumba is the Political Editor of The Star.

PEN
SKETCHES

Local artists on
their work

GEOFF
WATSON



W

HEN I was a kid in
England there were only two
things I was ever interested in.

One was drawing lots and lots of identical, very
small people running around aimlessly over a barren
landscape. The other, of all things, was designing
submarines. It was a lucky day for submarines when I
flunked in maths and physics. I think if I'd ever made it
to "naval architect", a lot of very bizarre vessels would
have dived under the waves, never to be seen again. ►

Watson's World

MURPHY'S LAW

BY GIM



Undeterred, and with the single-mindedness of the true devotee, I chose the next closest thing to naval architecture — just plain "architecture". An obvious change, involving as it did merely the deletion of one minor word from the title. I recommend architecture as a very interesting career — and also as a very good way of staying clear of actual work for about six years until you qualify. I managed to prolong this idyllic life for a further two years, doing "town planning". Fortunately for the civilised community, I never actually did any work in this sphere.

I once did work as an architect for a while, however, drifting aimlessly in and out of jobs and designing funny-looking buildings in even funnier places. One drawing office was a converted brothel in San Francisco, followed by a "converted" date factory in Algiers — run by the Algerian army, would you believe? So there I was, running around pretty much aimlessly over the Sahara Desert. There was also the dubious privilege of designing no-cost housing on Gibraltar and, equally impossible, hooligan-proof pubs in Glasgow. And various other mad-cap schemes that never got built. Except a bank in the middle of Soweto.

I finally realised, of course, that submarines were my true niche in life, but as this was out of the question, the other pre-occupation came to mind, with funny little men running around a desert. And so it was not a great leap from there to King Tutt, and here we are again, back in the good old "tried and tested" infancy at

the age of 50.

My stuff doesn't have much relevance to anything really, outside of the odd social comment now and again. And anyway, hardly anybody in South Africa prints my work anymore. (I always knew that this country had more class than anybody gave it credit for.) Well done, editors! Keep up the standards!

King Tutt and Murphy's Law go almost exclusively overseas and are handled by agencies in London and Rome. King Tutt has been in continual daily print internationally for 15 years, and appears in such diverse publications as *The Manchester Evening News*, *The Straits Times* of Singapore and *The Star*. In southern Africa, Murphy appears in publications in Namibia and Zimbabwe.

Seffrica was commissioned by *Sidelines* magazine and does not appear anywhere else. (South Africa being "flavour of the month" I had hoped it would sell abroad, but so far, it hasn't.)

The Great Ratts has only recently been produced. I have great hopes that once I can get a few disciples properly motivated, it may become a new world religion. We could call it "The Deity of the Golden Ratt", with tabernacles at every major rubbish dump. I envisage weekend sabbraticals with hordes of Ratter-day Saints reciting the *Desideratta*. "Go rattily amongst the mice, and haste..." etc.

The essence of both humour and tragedy is that something happens that wasn't supposed to happen. You either burst into tears or laugh 'til you cry. I like the definition by Arthur

➤overleaf



SEFFRICA



SEFFRICA



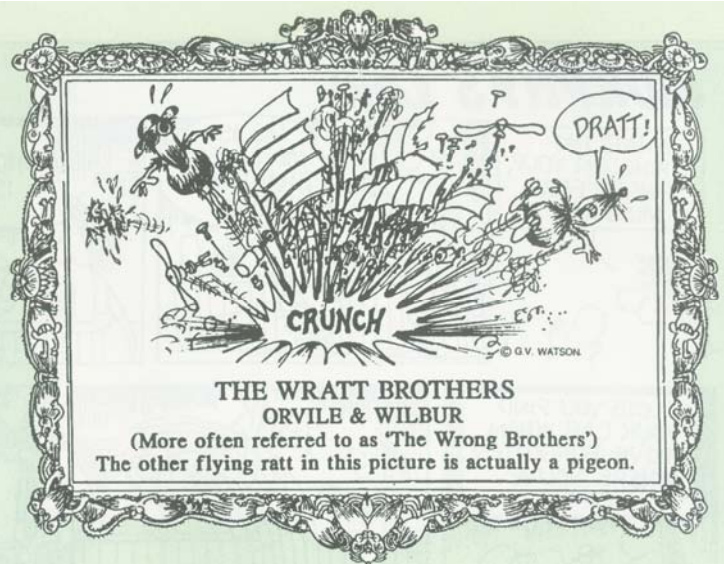
"The essence of both humour and tragedy is that something happens that wasn't supposed to happen. You either burst into tears or laugh till you cry."

MUTTER GRUMBLE MUTTER



SEFFRICA





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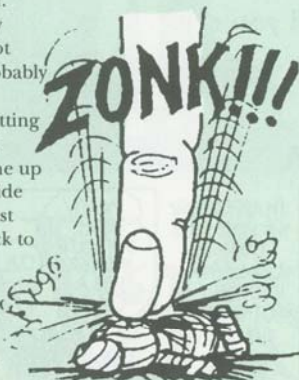
Koestler that goes something like this: "When a person laughs, the sound effect is very similar to a person crying, particularly in women. The facial expressions are very similar too."

Of course, humour isn't always sad — only half of it is at any given time. The trick is to use only one brain cell at a time. Always reserve the other one for when you need to really experience the difference. It has been my experience that people who use both brain cells simultaneously get very confused and tend to walk around with a stiff expression on their faces: up on one side, and down on the other. You've probably seen them in most walks of life, walking around in circles, another side effect.

Those amongst us fortunate enough to either use only the right-hand brain cell or the left, know here they are going, thus giving rise to Politics. And that is where the political cartoonist comes in. You've got to juggle those brain cells and try to puncture either or both of them. Something like two little balls with a prick in between them.

Personally speaking I prefer my humour to live in a vacuum i.e. not involving either brain cell. It's probably significant that one or two of my cartoons are about little nitwits getting pissed and falling off bar stools. It takes a lot of field research to come up with the authentic touch that I pride myself on. In fact, the clock has just struck five, and it's time to get back to the office. Happy Hour waits for no man.

PS I finally built a submarine, too. It's just over one metre long and is collecting dust on top of my wardrobe. Offers welcome.

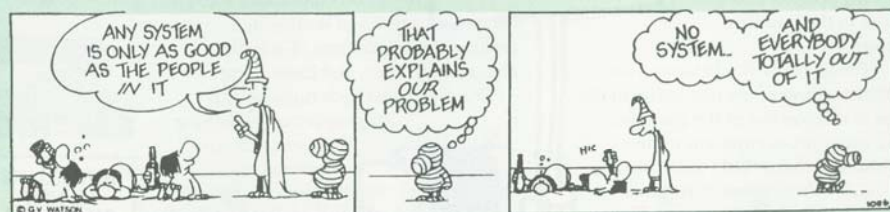


"Of course, humour isn't always sad — only half of it is at any given time. The trick is to use only one brain cell at a time. Always reserve the other one for when you need to really experience the difference."

KING TUTT



KING TUTT



Geoff Watson can be contacted at (021) 7883945

Will IBA changes leave SABC Radio with enough tools to survive in the new South African broadcast environment?

Keeping the strong state broadcaster thriving

Keith Watt

THE CHANGES are dramatic even since my last visit to South Africa (January 1994). South African Broadcasting Corporation programmes try to reach a wider audience. Newly licensed community radio stations pop up like toadstools on a wet lawn.

Private broadcasters vie for lucrative commercial radio licences just ahead.

The radio landscape in South Africa has begun to change, and after almost 60 years of monopoly by the SABC, the "Voice of Apartheid" is trying to find a new home on that landscape. The next five years will see more transformation in the sounds South Africans hear on their radio than they've experienced in the past 60 years of broadcasting history.

What will radio sound like in five years in this country? How will these changes affect the SABC, the major source of radio journalism in the country? And how will the newly unveiled Independent Broadcast Authority's plan to reshape the radio environment influence the SABC?

The SABC was born amongst a legion of colonial state broadcasting agencies cast in the image of the British Broadcasting Corporation in the 1930s. At that time governments were aware of the growing power of broadcasting in democracy, something we take for granted today. At that time, politicians all over the globe realised broadcasting would have as powerful an effect on society as Gutenberg's printing press in the 15th century. They scrambled to get a piece of the action, or to control all the action themselves.

Canada formed the CBC in 1932. Australia followed soon thereafter. The South African Broadcasting Corporation joined the chorus in 1937. The only major nation to resist the tide of state broadcasting was the United States. Even there the government has always kept close control over the broadcasting environment through the Federal Communications Commission.

All state broadcasters had some assumptions in common. They were founded on the recognition that broadcasting had a vital role to play in the evolving state. In Britain, the BBC was given a mandate to be the source of all broadcasting, and that mandate found a significance in its public educational role. In Canada, the CBC was founded to forge links in

an enormous country with a very small population, and to counterbalance a strong US cultural bias in broadcasting. The South African experience followed the British model: that the SABC was to be the source of all broadcasting, and thus the regulator of broadcasting. It was to make, and to carry out, all broadcasting policy in South Africa.

Other European nations followed the same path: they formed a large monopoly state broadcaster that regulated all broadcasting in the state. It served as both a source of entertainment and a vehicle for some form of government policy mandate — to educate, to inform about government activity, and, very quickly, to propagandise. The rise of the Third Reich in Germany coincided with a centralisation of all radio under the Ministry of Propaganda. Radio became the engine of German fascism.

One by one, under the pressure of private capital and the increasing ability of broadcast signals to cross international borders, these state monopolies fell. Germany, Italy, France, and finally the BBC lost control of the airwaves. The arrival of television following World War Two accelerated the erosion of the monopolies. Gradually these broadcasting jurisdictions moved towards the Canadian experience — a strong state broadcaster at the centre of, and influencing, a diverse private broadcast sector. As the 20th century draws to a close, and as all governments in the developed world experience their first contraction in the post-World War Two era, keeping that strong state broadcaster thriving and at the centre of the broadcast environment is increasingly the task at hand.

Which is exactly where South Africa finds itself in the mid-1990s. The SABC was the last of the great state monopoly broadcasters when, in the early 1990s, the National Party began to liberalise the broadcast environment. This year the South African radio environment finds itself undergoing in 18 months a transformation that has taken most state-dominated broadcast environments a quarter-century to achieve. The task faced by the IBA, envisaged in the IBA report released in August of this year, is how to allow private broadcasters onto the airwaves without gutting the public broadcaster.

Unfortunately, there's not much comfort in the IBA report that they won't do exactly that — gut the public broadcaster. More specifically, there's little comfort they won't burden the

SABC with so many contradictory roles, and change the conditions under which it operates so dramatically, that the SABC will find it harder and harder to figure out what it is supposed to do, and to carry out that duty in a fragmented and turbulent radio spectrum.

Indeed, the IBA recommendations on the radio environment create a very confusing and complicated picture, and I fear they may ultimately become a self-defeating attempt at regulating what should be considered a vital tool of social policy, the state radio broadcaster.

The IBA envisions a radio environment with three main players — a state broadcaster operating on the national level, serving the 11 major language groups from a centralised broadcasting network; a layer of independent commercial broadcasters operating what are very profitable stations bought from the SABC and already operating in major markets around the country; and hundreds of tiny community radio stations staffed by volunteers, operating on a not-for-profit basis and serving a community development role for the local area they reach.

Several problems arise here. First, that the SABC has operated, at least from a news and current affairs point of view, as a centralised national network, is an aberration in international broadcasting. As state monopolies fell, and as radio broadcasting environments the world over have developed, radio has increasingly become a local medium. In Britain, the major influence of the end of the BBC radio monopoly, both within the state broadcaster and in the private broadcast environment, has been the rise of local radio. In Canada, the major transformation within CBC Radio in the half-century since the end of the World War II has been the growth of regional radio. Even in the United States, post-television radio growth has been explosive, and it has all been in local radio. The US joined the state radio movement in 1967 with the formation of National Public Radio, perhaps the most decentralised public radio network in the world.

All over the developed world, people turn on the television to find out what the politicians in the nation's capital are saying, and what the war- and weather-devastated villages that make the world headlines really look like. They turn on the radio to find out whether they need to take an umbrella to work, and if the weather will be fine for the weekend braai. So to confine the

SABC's activities to the national broadcast sphere, to sell off the seven successful regional SABC stations, as the IBA report suggests, could spell disaster for the SABC.

Increasingly, listeners who want a blend of entertainment and local information will flock to the private stations, especially if the private stations get smart and produce decent local newscasts, leaving the SABC national stations to cover the sterile political debates and economic

forecasts that make up the majority of their current coverage and leave very little room for listener interest except among a narrow band of business leaders and political junkies.

On top of the narrowing of the SABC audience base, the IBA is overlaying hundreds of community stations in every region where there is enough community support to staff a station. The stations that are on the air now are largely doing educational radio, and, as they

evolve, that mandate to produce public affairs programming in their home community will likely become more urgent. Thus, the IBA is isolating the SABC from another potential audience — people genuinely interested in local and regional public affairs.

These moves could dangerously segregate the SABC from radio listeners across the country. Indeed, that isolation was already evident to me when I visited South Africa in August and September this year. There is a painful lack of communication between the regional and national radio services. The new flagship radio programme, AM Live, was a dry blend of analysis and overview information, with little of the passion and visceral coverage that can be so compelling on radio, largely because it confined itself to "national" coverage. In the drive to find stories that will be of interest to a national audience, they avoided the dramatic local stories that were happening all over the country.

One weekend I was visiting a friend who works in the SABC newsroom in Cape Town. As we were chatting in the newsroom, a very powerful local story was breaking in the Cape Flats area. Students who were part of the Azanian student's movement had driven white teachers from one of the local public schools because they alleged the teachers were taking jobs from blacks. The newsroom had dramatic tape from one of the teachers who described how she felt at being stoned by her students. They also had tape with the Azanian student group, and with some ANC-affiliated students who vowed to escort the teachers back into the school on Monday morning.

It was very potent radio. My friend was busy preparing the material for broadcasts on all the local SABC stations. I suggested that AM Live would be interested in some of the tape. He said he was too busy to send them anything, and, besides, every time he'd approached them with a good local story, they had said that it was too local for them. The following Monday, AM Live carried nothing on the confrontation at the Cape Flats high school. Instead they had an interview with a British academic who had done a study on the psychology of "streakers" — people who take off their clothes and run through crowded public places.

In fact, during my eight weeks in South Africa, waking up to AM Live every morning, I was struck by how many British academics were interviewed. I was also struck by how arid the programming is. There is a distinct weakness in the elements that can make public affairs radio a powerful and compelling medium — good field tape, passionate speakers, and eyewitness reports. There is rarely any actuality used in newscasts. The programme has very few reporters in the field. They interviewed few real participants in the stories. Instead I got a steady diet of politicians facing accountability drillings from poorly briefed hosts, and analysts giving a bit of intelligence on the latest national or international political dispute. Morning after morning it made for very barren listening.

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How many **squares** in your ceiling?

A guide to power and status inside the SABC.

WITH ALL THE turbulence in the South African Broadcasting Corporation ranks, it is sometimes hard to tell who's on the upswing, and who should start negotiating for a package. So in the interests of reducing the level of anxiety at Auckland Park, we have compiled a primer on how to measure status in the SABC.

The first and most customary measurement of a person's status is if they have a secretary. People in the organization say having a secretary had nothing to do with how much work you do, but everything to do with keeping up appearances. A cursory tour of SABC offices offered glimpses of many women who seem to spend a great deal of time doing their nails. Of course that's a superficial and obvious examination.

A deeper penetration of the facade of efficiency shows an inordinate preoccupation with the size of office, as in "how many squares in your ceiling?" One senior SABC executive, when kidded about the size of his office — clearly enough room for half a dozen people to work — responded that he didn't need that much space, but if he didn't take the office, then his voice wouldn't carry as much political weight in inter-departmental meetings.

That is, his peers wouldn't respect him because his wasn't as big as theirs was.

Another SABC official says a sure measurement of your status is how many times your car is washed in the parking lot. He joined at a senior position in the past year and was astounded to find his car being washed up to three times a day.

Perhaps the strangest story of status came from a black man who joined about two years ago. At first he wasn't even given an office, and had to operate out of a diary he carried around the halls. Eventually his boss gave him a very small office and he set himself up for business. He worked hard and was clearly making some headway. One day his boss called him into his office and told him what a good job he was doing. He was told: "It's time for you to get a painting."

Now, this was a huge jump in status, and he and his boss set off for the SABC art vault deep in the



bowels of the Piet Meyer Building. They were ushered into a huge warehouse filled with paintings, and the boss encouraged our man to "pick anything you like". He examined several paintings and eventually settled on a rather attractive still-life with an ornate 18th century frame.

A cloud settled over the face of his boss. "I don't think that's quite

right for you," he offered, the clear implication being that the painting was of a higher status than he was. Not to be put off, our man demanded that this was the painting for him. The boss relented, and the painting made its way over to adorn one of the bare walls in his tiny office, clearly a tribute to breakdown of barriers in the New South Africa.

achieves audiences even in a diverse and competitive private radio environment, is radio that captures the emotion of stories and stimulates the listener's imagination in the way those stories are told. That is radio that can only be produced at a local level, where reporters can go out and capture the tape that tells the story, and the passion that is as much a part of the factual framework of the story as the numbers and analysis are. That radio will not be produced by a national broadcaster whose regional stations are sold off, which is competing for listeners with a bevy of community stations doing decent local coverage of issues, and which is increasingly isolated in its national mandate.

What SABC Radio needs to develop, and what the IBA should be giving them the tools to develop, is a fully-integrated network that can move material from the extremities to the centre as efficiently as it moves material from the centre to the extremities. What SABC Radio should be doing is beefing up its local stations, not selling them off. The SABC needs strong regional radio stations to provide strong regional coverage, so it can effectively compete for listeners with profitable and powerful local commercial radio stations, and committed community radio stations.

The example of CBC Radio is instructive. When I turn on my radio in the morning here in Canada, I get a three-hour morning programme that originates from the city in

which I live. It includes actuality and interviews on breaking local stories. It also includes inserts from the national newsroom. I get a complete news package that competes with anything on the private radio spectrum, as well as the growing bevy of breakfast television shows, in providing me with what I need to know to make my way in my city and my country that day. This programme is replicated in 26 major centres in Canada. This product is very competitive in this market, consistently drawing the second largest audiences in our area out of the 20 or so radio stations that clutter the radio bands. It is also a consistently better product, both journalistically and radiophonically, than AM Live, partly because a mixed radio environment has forced CBC Radio to create very lively public affairs programmes, and partly because access to local stories, and having more reporters on the street, give CBC Radio programmes more actuality and emotional texture to build the sort of story treatments that engage listeners.

AM Live doesn't have to be arid. In my visits to SABC stations in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, and even Radio Ciskei in Bisho, I saw the same level of resources that I see in CBC Radio stations across Canada. It's not staff that is in short supply. It's co-ordination between the regions and the national programmes, and the determination to make really engaging public affairs radio.

That's what the SABC needs to do to survive in the new broadcast environment: focus on

providing the best public affairs radio in the country. It needs to build a network that puts the resources where they're needed to fulfil that mandate. And it needs to integrate its national and regional broadcasting to bring the best possible local coverage to each region, along with high quality national and international news. Unfortunately, there's little evidence either the SABC or the IBA realise these necessities.

All over the world, with governments in retreat following a half-century of expansion, people view government agencies with a great deal of scepticism. But state broadcasters of the stature of the BBC, the CBC, and the SABC, are major triumphs of social engineering. Whether the electorate or the politicians realise it, these are institutions worth preserving, and worth retooling for news tasks in a changing social environment. To deal harshly or hastily with the future of these institutions is to deny our children and grandchildren the benefits that we have enjoyed from them. And if we lose them, because we don't spend enough money on them, or because we don't handle their transformation very carefully, we will all be poorer.

Keith Watt is a Canadian radio documentarist and educator. He taught radio journalism at Rhodes University in the winter of 1995.

In the last edition of *Review* former Agenda executive producer, George Mazarakis, painted a grim picture of his days at the SABC. In an adjoining piece he also launched a scathing attack on the new SAfm. Here former colleague Charles Leonard, who is now executive producer on SAfm's Live Current Affairs, reacts.

Live broadcast

from hell

Monty
Python
on bad
acid doing
Kafka

Charles Leonard

IT'S JUST AFTER 7.30AM and Studio P9 is alive with the sounds of current affairs going out live. The telephone rings in the AM Live processing area. It's Cyril Ramaphosa. Oh hell, the reader might think here. I have to brace myself for another tale of battle-weary SABC staffers like the gruesome one George Mazarakis told us in the last edition of *Review* about his tough time in the SABC. But, rest assured, this is not another eyes-a-rolling, palms-a-sweating they're coming to get me tale from inside hell.

"Sorry to bother, but what was the name of that band you've just played?" asks Cyril. "I unfortunately missed it."

In this piece I hope to correct some of George's wrongs, agree with him on some of the very valid points he made and give my insider's view on what it's really like being inside the belly of the beast at the moment.

Despite the fact that George is working in television at the moment I find his assessment of radio in his critique of SAfm more valid, less clouded and more helpful than his meanderings about TV. Maybe it is because he is now even further removed from real journalism at Carte Blanche where he is actually doing *Huisgenoot* TV and/or in terms of radio he has a more solid background.

I say without fear of contradiction that the journalism on AM Live and PM Live has improved immeasurably compared to the old Radio Today. There is no comparison. Many respected journalists who have switched from the tabloid 702 to our shows will bail me out here. Not only have we all the local top political players across the board on our programmes on a regular basis, but we also bring our listeners foreign news beyond the Anglo-American axis.

Talking of 702, I concede to George. Their news bulletins make ours sound decidedly, well, like the old Radio South Africa's. Not only SAfm, but the whole of the SABC have still for

some reason been unable to get simple soundbites regularly on their bulletins.

Let me explain structure here. We don't have our own reporters. We have to rely on our 200-plus colleagues in the nine different regions and on the political, economics and sports desks to provide us with items. I will understate by saying it is not a perfect system.

Another system that was also not made in heaven is our interaction with the news bulletins that appear on our shows. Listeners might rightly wonder whether we have any link with the people who write the bulletins and those who read them. Again, an understatement here, in that the writing and reading of these bulletins happen two floors away from our studio, and as they say in the classics, it seems that ne'er the twain shall meet. Hopefully this will be solved, but the wheels still turn v-e-r-y s-l-o-w-l-y in the SABC.

When George claims that the shows are weak on contextualising and lacking in critical questioning, I'm not sure that he has actually listened to them. These two characteristics are the shows major strengths! I hope he is wrong where he suggests that Radio South Africa had a niche which should be retained. SAfm is the first attempt at non-racial radio in our country and it is a major risk being taken.

What I certainly don't agree with him about is that the original white listenership of Radio South Africa should have been smoothed into the new society. What makes them so special? You're actually doing them a huge disservice by not "introducing them to the broader South African picture", as George so euphemistically describes it.

I can't imagine that someone with such eurocentric tastes as our George would be a Radio Metro listener, but he goes on a panting rave about them: "...excellent talk radio, brilliant current affairs...". Huh? Metro has good talk radio with Tim Modise, but they do not have current affairs! But George is right where he says that the majority of Metro's staff

are black and I agree fully that because this is not the case on SAfm as a whole, that "there is still a lot of racial exclusion on the station". (To score a few gender brownies for our two shows though, both in terms of race and gender, we're tipping the scales in favour of black people and women. But this wasn't done out of PCness — it was because they were the best people for the jobs.)

So what's it really like inside the SABC at Radio? It is both exhilarating and depressing.

The teams on AM Live and PM Live are cohesive, young, ambitious, creative, talented, committed, progressive and always self-critical. There is the continual buzz you will find in a place where people have a common goal (excellence), work on something completely new (true journalism is something rare in the SABC) and have a common enemy (Big Bra).

At the same time the tide has turned for us on AM Live and PM Live after the initial outcry — we've been getting positive responses from our listeners for the past five months literally on a daily basis. It is not only "fan mail", but also communication about issues. What more can any serious journalist ask for than getting your listener/viewer/reader entering into debates with you and one another?

The SABC is one of the more frustrating and weird places — Monty Python on bad acid doing Kafka — to work in and we often marvel that we manage to get good programmes on the air in spite of the hostile environment. Despite what the boss types say, the SABC is still top heavy with bureaucrats with far too much say and power. Maybe that will change one day. We hope so, but as natural born cynics, the journalists inside the SABC have their doubts.

Radio is an exciting place to be at the moment because there is a lot of room for new ideas. Let us hope that the politicians inside and out of the SABC don't spoil it for us.

A new agenda for SABC radio news

Franz Kruger

RADIO IS STILL South Africa's Cinderella medium, generally ignored and belittled. But we in the SABC's Radio News department are not waiting for a fairy godmother to wave her magic wand, we'll be earning our place at the ball. Radio News has the potential to become a major force in setting the news agenda for the new South Africa. Consider our size: while newspapers count their audience in the tens, perhaps hundreds, of thousands, we have a daily listenership of some 18 million. With a staff of over 400, we produce in the region of 670 news bulletins every day, and current affairs programming two to three times a day.

Overwhelmingly, radio is the major source of information for South Africa's people. It hardly needs to be added that marginalised communities are particularly dependent on radio.

It's about a year since a new leadership took over in Radio News, and the question inevitably arises: how much have we done to earn listeners' respect? I suppose the short answer is: something, but not nearly enough.

The first major area of concern is around questions of resourcing and infrastructure. We inherited an organisation with huge imbalances between the white and the black stations. In Pietersburg, for instance, one person was alone responsible for current affairs programming on three stations, Radio Lcbowa, Venda and Tsonga. By contrast, current affairs programmes on English and Afrikaans services each had a staff of around 12.

There was a desk in Johannesburg called African Language Services (ALS), whose editors were all white and which supplied copy to all the African language stations. (In a magnificent lapse of logic, this desk also wrote bulletins for the English-language station Radio Metro). The copy — in English — was simply translated and put to air by presenters on the various stations. The purpose of ideological control was well served by this arrangement. It also meant that there was very little independent editorial capacity on the various stations: staff were simply translator/presenters.

The other spinoff of this imbalance is that there was only a very inefficient system to distribute news tapes to the regions. It simply didn't matter if the African language services broadcast items that were out of date. And so our current affairs programmes often ran stories that were 18 hours out of date.

So what have we done about all this? I'm happy to report that the ALS desk is now only a memory. Most bulletin desks on the African language stations have been significantly beefed up, so that they can now write their own news. Staffing on current affairs programmes has also been improved: the lone producer in Pietersburg who ran shows on three stations has been joined by 12 others, so that each show has a team of four. Still fewer than on English and Afrikaans, but a substantial improvement.

In addition, transmitter splits have been launched in several provinces. This means that listeners get regional programming for an hour and a half a day.

All of this — the initial upgrading of the African language services, and the first transmitter splits — cost in the region of R24 million. Some 120 new staff were employed by radio news, overwhelmingly for the African language services. This has increased our complement by almost half.

Progress on a better distribution system has been slower. We're hoping that we will have a state-of-the-art digital editing system in place in the new year. The system will be networked, which means reporters will be able to store soundbites and voice reports at any terminal country-wide, and anyone else will be able to access them immediately from any other terminal.

The second major area of concern has been this: we inherited a very antiquated approach to the use of radio. What we had was newspaper-style news, read on air. There was little sound, little live material.

So, for instance, journalists were never expected to be able to broadcast. The work process was strictly divided: reporters gathered the news, writers wrote it, and then broadcasters read it on air. The structure reflected this division. Radio News was divided into three sub-empire: news (also referred to obscurely as output), input (reporting), and

audio news, which included what we now call current affairs programmes.

We have tried to make it clear that on radio, all our news should be audio news. In other words, bulletins should include voice reports and sound bites. This has not yet been a resounding success, for a range of reasons. It is an important priority to get this working, so that our bulletins sound more lively and immediate.

Recently, the first research ever to be focused specifically on radio news revealed a surprisingly high degree of satisfaction with changes being made. Listeners said they found news that was augmented by soundbites and reporters' voices much more credible and interesting.

We have also tried to redefine audio news as current affairs, meaning that these shows need to take the news a little further than the bulletins, giving background and colour where the bulletins concentrate on the hard, breaking stories. Despite all the criticism, I believe that programmes like AM Live have been successful in this regard. They are lively, well presented and much more sharply focused in their journalism than their predecessors. They contain much live material, and some really excellent packaged pieces. Some, but not enough: we still have too many pieces that are simply edited versions of the "minister said" stories.

And there are other success stories: on Radio Zulu, for instance, whose coverage is generally not reflected in the print media, stories are broken daily in their pacy, intelligent current affairs shows.

Much of our energy over the past months went into addressing the structure. We are setting up newsdesks in each region, replacing the old input, output distinction and bringing the reporting and bulletins closer together. Much more needs to be done to make this organisational arrangement a functioning reality.

The last major area of concern is also the most intractable: the culture of journalism. Our news agenda still hasn't changed sufficiently. Our daily diaries are dominated by media conferences, and we're still caught in the attitude that it's only news if it's been said by an official.

Our mission statement commits us to questioning, investigating and challenging. We will tell the story of South Africa and the world in all its richness, it says. There are flashes of real excellence, but they are still too few. Old habits die hard.

Finally, there's the issue of language. We've inherited radio stations for each language, so in some ways it's easier for us than for television, who have to go through all sorts of contortions to accommodate 11 languages on three channels.

But the stations were set up to serve cultural identities defined by apartheid: one homeland, one radio station. We're saying we want to use those languages as vehicles to speak to listeners about the whole country and the world, not to lock them into a particular cultural identity. So Radio Venda needs to redefine its news values radically, to cover Bosnia and the Middle East as well as local issues. It's a shift of considerable subtlety, and radical implications.

Working out ways of serving all these languages equitably is no easy task. Radio News now has a fully multilingual team in Parliament, under political editor Pippa Green. Although every language is represented, we don't want to confine the reporters to little language boxes. Every day, there's a complex balancing act between making sure that each language gets the major stories covered, the desire to cover as many different stories as possible.

In many ways, the political team is a microcosm of Radio News as a whole. It highlights the difficulties of serving the different languages fairly, while resisting a drift into language "ghettoes".

But it also highlights the possibilities.

Radio News has the potential to play a major role in setting the news agenda for the new South Africa. As the African language services are beefed up, we're experiencing a demographic shift unparalleled in the South African media. This has to impact on our news priorities. If we can manage it properly, the language spread will become a rich source of creativity and energy, and will allow us to develop a new news agenda, appropriate to the new South Africa. Then we will be able to fulfil the promise of our mission statement, and earn the respect of our listeners.

Franz Kruger is the national editor: news & current affairs.

Truth or taste

The depiction of the Hani murder

Catherine
O'Dowd

Just how much **reality** can readers take before they stare horrified, **marmalade** slowly dropping from their toast onto the **news photograph** before them, as they reach for the telephone to **cancel** their subscription?

As **editors** across the country debated the pictures before them — the body, **blood spilling** over the bricks around the head, tongue caught between the teeth, **bullet hole** visible in the jaw — they were wondering **how much** could they show?



IT WAS EASTER SATURDAY, 10 April, 1993. The body was that of Chris Hani, secretary-general of the South African Communist Party, ex-chief of staff of Umkhonto weSizwe and considered by many to be the one voice the radical black youth would listen to. He had been shot four times in his driveway by a right-wing white.

Sowetan chief photographer Robert Mgwase, who lived a few houses away, was the first photographer to arrive at the scene. "There was a stampede once we were allowed in," he said. "People were falling, the media people were pushing the cameramen. Photographers were pushing each other for angles."

Star photographer Alf Khumalo said "I remember I was using a zoom lens and I closed in on the face. It was traumatic, especially since I had seen him the week before that... He was telling me how happy he is, everything is going well, and the next thing he is dead." Khumalo took a variety of pictures. "If it wasn't him I wouldn't have shown the face. I normally just show hands, the legs... But it's different with a leader of that calibre and a lot of people reacted to that."

Once the pictures reached the news desk editors were left debating how to walk the narrow tightrope between news and sensation, between reality and tastelessness.

United States journalism academic Sue O'Brien has pointed out that on a limited range of stories, fairly firm policies guide editors. Identities of sex-crime victims and most juveniles are protected; bodies are seldom shown; victims are not identified until families have been notified. "But there is no consensus on the question of degree: How much blood or pain is too much? Is the moment of death less objectionable than its aftermath?"

WEEKEND WINNERS
ALL THE LUCKY NUMBERS: PAGE 12

Sunday Times
THE PAPER FOR THE PEOPLE
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HANI: THE AWB LINK

Riddle of car driven by arrested immigrant

ANC calls for calm

Blacks taunted in street

Point blank shots fired at lifeless body

By DEBORAH BLOW

Chris Hanu was shot dead in a car on the morning of the 1992 riots in Johannesburg. The car was driven by an arrested immigrant.

ANC leaders called for calm after the shooting. Blacks were taunted in the street.

Point blank shots were fired at the lifeless body of Chris Hanu.

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HANI IS DEAD

COMMENT: Laid down his life for peace

Suspect held within minutes

Mandela calls for calm

By DEBORAH BLOW

JANUZZI, a 48-year-old Polish-born immigrant worker, was arrested in Johannesburg after Chris Hanu was shot dead in a car.

Mandela called for calm after the shooting.

Chris Hanu was shot dead in a car on the morning of the 1992 riots in Johannesburg.

O'Brien suggests that such questions are generally simply subjected to a utilitarian balancing: does an image's social or news value outweigh its violation of prevailing standards of compassion and taste?

The news value of this event overrode any unwritten rules about no bodies on the front page. "If this had been Joe Soap hit by a train, this [picture] would not have gone as far as even the subs desk," said Charles Mogale, *City Press* news editor. "But then this was Chris Hani and this sort of thing happens once in a lifetime."

So this was a body that was to make page one in most newspapers on Sunday and Monday. But how much were readers going to be allowed to see of the gruesome details? Photographic critic John Berger suggests that gruesome pictures "remind us shockingly of the reality, the lived reality, behind the abstraction of political theory, casualty statistics or news bulletins". Such photographs serve as "an eye we cannot shut".

But how much can you show readers before they will take no more? And especially on the front page. Rick Wilson, editor of the *EP Herald*: "From a marketing point of view, you use the front page and the picture for impact. But you don't want to shock people so that they actually turn away. You want them to buy the paper."

Two factors were to divide editors within and across newspapers. One was Hani's face. The other was his blood.

Hani's mouth was open, the tongue caught between the teeth and a bullet hole visible in his jaw. Blood was splattered over mouth and nose. Only two newspapers of the 17 surveyed chose to show the face. The others selected

pictures showing the body from behind the head.

Most editors agreed that the face was just too gruesome to bear. Perhaps if the face had been composed, they said. Mgwase of the *Sowetan* said he had taken a photograph of the face, but rejected it as "too terrible to use". He felt the blood and the mouth being "wide open" made the photograph a "bit much". You don't want the picture to look like "a morgue shot", said Jim McLagan, *Argus* picture editor.

Evelyn Holtzhausen, night editor at the *Cape Times*, explained that the viewer can become a voyeur, indulging in blood. "There is a very subtle line between where a picture had impact and where it becomes what we call a marmalade dropper." He explained that as "somebody who is sitting with their toast at the breakfast table, reading this story with such a degree of interest that the marmalade drops off their toast and falls flop on the table".

But two newspapers took a different approach.

City Press showed Hani face on, blood spilt across the bricks. The photograph filled the entire front page above the fold. The headline, in red type, was set inside the picture.

Mogale said that the photograph they used "is about the goriest we could find. I'm not into gore but I believed, everyone believed, that we needed to shock the nation a bit and deliver the story to them as blatantly, as raw, as it was, and this was the best we could do." He said elsewhere that "there are occasions, once in a while, when we feel that the situation warrants shocking the nation a little and this picture is a case in point."

Mogale indicated that another motive was concern about what their competitors might be using. "We didn't know what [the *Sunday Star*

and the *Sunday Times*] had up their sleeves, we had to play all our aces. Especially the *Sunday Times*, they are a much bigger operation than we are and we didn't know if they would have a whole special on Hani. All we could do is have a good picture, the best picture we had and what we felt was a good story."

The photographer, Tladi Khuele, had another concern. His contention was that a faceless body, that can only be recognised by reading the caption, becomes just another of the many anonymous body pictures that had come out of the violence in South Africa. "I can take a picture of a person from behind and people say, 'ah, it is one of those bodies'. But if he's well-known, people say, 'Is it him? It looks like him, maybe it is, he's dead'." He felt it important the people realise immediately that this is Hani, that they be shocked and say "I know this man, who killed him?"

In the *Sunday Star's* Late Final the photograph again showed the face. Editor David Hazelhurst, who made the decision himself with the agreement of colleagues, said that he "had no hesitation about showing [Hani's] face", given that he was "the second most popular person in this country".

He went on to explain that he was "influenced slightly" by the report from the graphic artist who went to do a drawing. "She told me that while she was there the body had been covered by a blanket and scores and scores of people came there and asked that the blanket be lifted, so they could see the face."

Hazelhurst said he was concerned not by "the sensibilities and sensitivities of the whites in the northern suburbs but by the actual people who revered Hani, who went [to his home] and the funeral. Seeing the face is not a horror to those people as it would have maybe been to some whites. Without exception the people wanted to see his face."

The photographer, Alf Khumalo, felt that it was a powerful picture but a gruesome one. "When you look at it from a transparency it looks gruesome but it looks even harsher when it's bigger," he said. "I actually got worried about the reaction of the masses at large."

But like Khuele he felt it was important that the body be immediately recognisable. He too

► overleaf

► previous page

felt that this body must be distinguished from the many anonymous ones that have been shown over the years. "It was important to show the face, to show people this was Hani that died, to show people it really happened. Otherwise they would not have believed, that's how much they loved him."

Hazelhurst was more worried about the blood that lay spilt across the bricks. The red blood spilling around the head was an obvious visual element. Khuele said of the shooting of

the photographs: "Everybody was there, TV crews and papers, all wanting to get a "good" picture, the obvious thing being the blood on the pavement."

Hazelhurst wanted the picture cropped so that what he described as "that huge pile of blood" was not included. He marked the picture himself, to be cut directly below the foot on the left, taking out about half the blood present in the picture as it was published. And he had left in more space

above the body, leaving in two feet that he said "sort of framed picture, which I felt brought more poignancy into it".

However the "cock-up factor" in journalism took over, with the transparency being cropped incorrectly in the works. Thus a controversial picture hit the streets unintended by any of its editors.

For the *Sowetan* the blood did not carry the same weight as the face. Mgwase explained that they had sought a balance that would convey the importance of the event but yet not be too gruesome. For them showing the face crossed the line but showing the blood around the body did not.

Die Burger picture editor, Pieter Spaarwater, said that "we believe, though not I personally, that blood is off-putting. People read this [newspaper] over their breakfasts". Their solution on the front page was to crop some of the blood, though not all, and run the picture small — over two columns.

The *Cape Times* ran a front page picture showing just the body with almost all the blood cropped out. It is a small picture, 4 columns wide but only seven cms deep. Night editor Holtzhausen said: "I don't think it's necessary to over-egg the cake. That picture, cropped the way it is, is powerful. Using more blood, and maybe using the picture bigger, wouldn't have achieved more. I think the impact is there."

The *Sunday Times* took perhaps the most extreme action of any paper that chose to show the body on the bricks. They ran a page one colour picture over half a page high showing Hani with his head turned away and virtually no blood visible. Behind the body stand Sexwale and Thenjiwe Mthintso. At the top of the page is a small black-and-white photograph of the body covered by a flag.

Assistant editor Dennis Hands confirmed that they drew the line at gory pictures. The main picture was selected for its human drama, with Hani's friends looking down at him, rather than for its potential to shock. He said that in choosing that picture "Tokyo Sexwale's very close association with Chris Hani clearly came into consideration."

And what did the readers think? *City Press* and *Sunday Star* received a handful of letters of complaint. Hazelhurst said "you got less of an outcry than if I'd got a crossword clue wrong". Mogale said *City Press* generally only get response to pictures of pinups. "Every single telephone call I can remember getting in response to a picture is some guy saying: 'She is my cousin, how can I reach her?'"

That Hani's supporters wanted to see his image, despite the horror, seemed borne out by two related tales from the black newspapers. Khuele said that many in the crowds who gathered on Sunday to mourn Hani's death had cut out the picture of Hani from the front page of *City Press* and were carrying it with them.

For those who saw it, Hani's face remains etched in memory, symbol of the last gasps of the apartheid regime.

Would readers have felt less or more for the event by having that image engraved in their memory? The jury is out. And editors are left to make hard decisions on gut instinct and too little time.

Catherine O'Dowd is a MA candidate in the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University.

The price of butane gas and other inflammables has soared in the Durban area following this week's municipal depot explosion which injured 28 workers.



28 labourers at a Durban Municipal depot were seriously injured yesterday when a gas pipe exploded during a cleaning operation.



Environmentalists have lashed out at the lack of safety measures which could have prevented the gas explosion and injury to 28 workers at a municipal depot this week.



Because not all people in KwaZulu Natal have the same perspective.

The Phoenix Muslim fathers have launched a special fund to help the victims of this week's crippling gas explosion at a Durban Municipal depot.



Durban restaurant owners, who rely on gas for their cordon bleu cooking, are boiling over the municipality's delay in repairing the gas supply damaged in a serious explosion this week.



Focusing on core readership.

Gourmet media

Their readers appreciated them but, chewed up and spat out by the competitive print market, independent publications lacked marketing, business and management skills.

Who really consumed the alternative press?

**Joan de Castro
and
David Everatt**

IN THE 1990s various independent publications in South Africa — *South African Labour Bulletin*, *Work in Progress*, *Learn and Teach*, *Speak*, *New Ground* and *Challenge* — formed a loose grouping called "the Stable" aimed at co-operating with and supporting each other.

The primary reason for this was the imminent threat of donor agencies withdrawing media funding, and the consequent need to develop strategies to achieve financial self-sufficiency. These publications had small circulations ranging between five and ten thousand. Towards the end of 1993, "the Stable" was formally launched as the Independent Magazine Group (IMG).

But most of the independent publications have since closed, along with many non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Why was there no place for these magazines in the "new South Africa"? Why has there been such a decline in independent print media when independent electronic media is just taking off? Community radio stations are flourishing at present and there are plans afoot for the introduction of community television stations.

While there have been independent, progressive, "alternative" publications throughout the country's history, the 1980s saw an upsurge in this type of print media. It was frequently funded by overseas donors as opposition to the government, including media opposition, intensified.

The publications which comprised the IMG were launched between 1971 and 1991. They can be seen as a more or less organic part of the vibrant civil society which emerged, under repressive conditions, in opposition to apartheid.

Each of the IMG publications had a different focus; labour for the *South African Labour Bulletin*, politics for *Work in Progress*, adult basic education for *Learn and Teach*, women for *Speak*, ecumenism for *Challenge* and environment and development for *New Ground*. However, despite their different foci, they all operated as alternative publications in terms of their independence and their provision of different perspectives from, and different information to, the mainstream media. Their clearly anti-apartheid stance was the defining aspect of their "alternative status": an ironic comment on the mainstream press since their anti-apartheid sentiments made the IMG magazines representative of majority views, if the South African population as a whole is considered.

In the 1990s, with the political changes in the country and the end of apartheid in sight, funders began to withdraw from South Africa and all the alternative publications were faced with an urgent need to become less reliant on funding. The Community Agency for Social Enquiry (CASE) was commissioned to undertake research projects for six of these magazines from mid-1993 to mid-1994.

Readership surveys were conducted for *Speak*, *Work in Progress*, *Challenge* and *New Ground*. *Learn and Teach* and *South African Labour Bulletin* opted for qualitative research; focus groups for the former, interviews for the

latter. As part of an overview, telephone interviews were conducted with certain media contacts and IMG editors.

The project examined the strengths and weaknesses of these magazines, their role and their reader profile. While it is difficult to compare across different methodologies, a number of similar questions were repeated in all the studies.

The main attributes of the IMG magazines, according to readers, were the variety of articles and the relevant, up-to-date, informative nature of these publications. These magazines tended to be used for work and/or study purposes and were frequently viewed as reference sources. Furthermore, publications tended to be circulated among family and friends by readers and reached more people than their official circulation figures suggested. Media contacts and editors noted that the main strengths of the IMG publications were their portrayal of other points of view not covered in the mainstream media, the fact that they provided a voice for ordinary people and that they had a good track record in opposing apartheid.

The only common dislike which emerged in the readership surveys, and indeed one of the few dislikes at all, was that the publications were seen as one-sided eg pro-ANC.

Although not specifically cited as a weakness, readers pointed out a range of distribution problems which affected both purchasers and subscribers. While the majority of readers had not experienced problems, feedback received during the course of the research suggested that:

- subscription lists were frequently out-of-date
- the magazines were often sold out or badly displayed
- the magazines did not arrive at outlets or were not sold near respondents
- the magazines arrived late, irregularly and, sometimes not at all.

According to the media contacts and editors, the weakness of the IMG publications revolved mainly around their funding and the lack of marketing, management and business skills and experience. This was exacerbated by the problem of attracting advertising to publications that had relatively small, low income readerships. Some of the media contacts interviewed suggested that the mindset of the editors and staff of some of the IMG publications may have been problematic in that they had expected to be funded and needed to change to thinking along business and marketing lines.

Another weakness of some of the magazines was a lack of skills as staff were hired for their political knowledge more than their media skills. Magazines also struggled to keep skilled people who were "head-hunted" by the mainstream media. This has been a growing trend with several former editors of IMG magazines switching to the electronic media, for example SAfm.

Examining the readership surveys, it appears that the demographic profiles of *Challenge*, *Work in Progress* and *New Ground* were roughly similar,

From dreamtime to realtime by Sandile Ngidi

Here begins a journey in which I recount my experiences as editor of one of KwaZulu Natal's modest but remarkable experiments in media empowerment. It is a journey of hard work, success and failure, a journey whose potholed road only a few can master.

The year was 1992, about 15 youngsters some white and many black, were discussing the launch of a youth publication "by the youth for the youth".

These youngsters, some from as far afield as Port Shepstone on the Kwazulu Natal south coast, had guts and innocent belief in the logic and the practicalities of the dream.

Former Raven Press illustrator Andy Mason, his partner Belinda Yangou and retrenched factory worker and worker-poet Gladman Ngubo, took the lead. They had started these discussions almost a year before. A dream was unfolding, and towards the end of the same year the pilot edition of *Realtime* was published.

The *New African* was the only newspaper which welcomed the arrival of *Realtime* with caution. Reporter Fraser Mtshali (now *Realtime* acting editor) was enthused by the publication but warned that it was rather too serious for its target readers. Somehow this was a work of art stretched beyond imaginable margins, he charged. Mtshali's feedback was taken seriously when a post-mortem of the pilot edition was done, and was later to influence the presentation of the next edition.

Community artists, black community leaders, white liberals and representatives of non-governmental organisations came to witness the birth of *Realtime*. But one critical sector did not feature in the guest list — advertising agencies and private

sector gurus. In retrospect, getting the latter on board on that particular evening might have helped forge strategic ties for potential future advertising revenue.

Up until I left at the end of July, advertisers had flatly refused buying space with *Realtime*, charging it was too small and irregular. To a degree they were right, we only had a print order of 15 000 units, which of course did not mean we sold all these units.

Distributors pushed us around and became used to being dropped. First it was Natal Newspapers, then an independent Umlazi-based one-man distributor, next Daily Dispatch and later Johannesburg-based Apollo Distributors. We knew the distributors were frustrated by the failure on our part to subscribe to the ABC, and to market *Realtime*, thereby encouraging sales. Our funding did not allow much expenditure on this line item. We were in a vicious cycle, alone and pitted against giants in the industry.

And, contrary to our initial belief that NGOs were going to form the core of our advertising base, events proved us wrong.

Immediately after the launch nothing was in place to position the publication on a strategic marketing footing. At the time, with the exception of Ngubo, no one worked on *Realtime* full-time, though Mason and his staff attended to adhoc demands as and when time allowed.

To make matters worse (despite good intentions), no-one had marketing experience to take *Realtime* forward. Perhaps one demonstration of this inexperience was the noble but flawed youth-driven distribution plan for *Realtime*, which was a dismal failure and an indirect instrument that pruned *Realtime* membership, as some youngsters failed to bring money back after sales.

The plan was grand in a way, youth-driven community organisations and

individual youths, were to be given the publication on consignment as a means of alleviating unemployment and placing ownership of *Realtime* with the youth.

Yet another deficiency and a blow to the publication, was the fact that the first edition came out almost a year after the pilot edition, partly due to the late arrival of subsequent funds and but also our own organisational inefficiency. Moreover, when funding was received at last, *Realtime* published in Zulu and English. Much to our rude awakening (though I was not employed by *Realtime* then), few Zulu-speaking urban black youths bought the Zulu edition. English (it seemed), was a symbol of upward mobility and not Shaka's tongue.

Stock control mechanisms were also either too weak or sometimes not adhered to. The *Realtime* dream was getting its first brushes of challenges that are commonplace in the robust publishing world. But we kept the dream.

Realtime Number 2 was published in the middle of 1993, heralding supposedly, the dawn of a new era. In terms of content and stylistic presentation, the publication added colourful layout and a more refreshing content mix.

Amidst the new mood and greater quest for relevance, this edition also had more participation from the youth. New voices were emerging with their pens, illustrations and photography. That same year I joined *Realtime* as editorial coordinator, and was later promoted editor.

I knew my limitations and the absence of a professional support base as time went on when *Realtime* began to stand on its own, no longer a project under the wings of Mason towards the end of 1993.

My second edition was not a major success technically, but I had tried to enthuse it with soul. Romance,

controversy, advocacy — these features became colourful in their presence. I included award-winning actor Vusi Kunene and Grace Mahlaba doing a deep kiss scene in the controversial docudrama *The Line*. But this was no strategy born out of a belief that once you have chosen erotica, you have suddenly captured human interest. I was trying to ensure that *Realtime* avoided shunning controversy, even if the journalistic mission called for another option. In an article I co-wrote with Nhlanhla Nyide, *The Line* was hailed as "a breath of fresh air", but we objected to its "irresponsible fabrications which undermine the very foundations of nation-building".

I was in search of role models for black youth in particular, and to this end I featured a tribute to Steve Biko, a profile of internationally-acclaimed Soweto choreographer Boyzie Cekwana, and Durban squatter-town conservationist Mike Mkhize. Apart from running a tribute to Robert "Treeman" Mazibuko, a tireless and world-renowned farmer and advocate of organic farming, I also introduced an environmental column in his honour.

Right now, *Realtime* might fold. But if the current management of the publication implements an aggressive and visionary leadership style which rewards creative talent, the publication might not be history, as were remarkable publications of yesteryear: *Learn and Teach* and *New Ground*. The key is to forge ties with like-minded brains in the publishing industry before it is too late.

In the final analysis, *Realtime* management like South Africa's NGOs, have to face the harsh reality that funding is but a passing phase. Financial self-sufficiency liberates.

Sandile Ngidi is senior liaison officer of the HSRC.

GOURMET MEDIA

► previous page

with the "average" reader in these surveys being male, white, well educated, aged 30 - 49 years, with a high household income, working full-time, residing in Gauteng, Natal or the Western Cape in a metropolitan area. Somewhat surprisingly, *Speak* readers tended to be male, African, young and working full-time.

It appears that the *South African Labour Bulletin* fits in roughly with the *Challenge*, *Work in Progress* and *New Ground* readers (except they had a slightly older age profile) and *Learn and Teach* fits in roughly with the *Speak* readers (with a slightly younger age profile).

Therefore there appears to be a contradiction. Publications were aimed at the masses, but were not read by them.

Respondents in the readership survey were asked if their respective magazines had a role to play in future. The overwhelming majority felt that their magazines should be society's watchdogs. Media contacts and editors thought that the main role for the alternative press as a whole was to provide media diversity. They were also seen as playing a role in reflecting the lives of ordinary people. Media contacts agreed that they could play a critical, independent watchdog role.

The reasons for closure are many and extend beyond the withdrawal of funding, inexperienced staff, distribution/subscription problems and low readership. In some cases the publications took too long to see the writing on the wall and to make the changes necessary to become self-sufficient. The mainstream media, less restricted in the 1990s, has also increasingly taken over part of the role, function and type of reporting that the

alternative media specialised in. It was also possible that self-sufficiency was an impossible goal. Given the loss of interest by traditional funders, who could fund the independent media? There were moves afoot to support these publications by the mainstream media via the Independent Media Diversity Trust (IMDT), but these did not appear to be sufficient.

Funders who previously supported non-government organisations and are now supporting the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) could have ensured that there were greater links between these sectors. This could have provided an opportunity for the IMG magazines, who were well-positioned in terms of development work, to play a role in the RDP. However, it does not appear as if the alternative press received the anticipated support, or sufficient support to sustain it. Therefore, while the IMG's previous role had become obsolete there could and should have been a place for them in the post-apartheid South Africa.

In conclusion, many strong alternative voices remain and more will probably emerge in other forms. The value they bring to society cannot be measured in financial terms. The closure of the IMG and most of their magazines is very serious for a society so dominated by media monopolies and where civil society is struggling to define its role.

In the process of the democratisation of South Africa the cost of the decline in the alternative media will be borne by all of us.

Joan de Castro is a senior researcher at CASE and David Everatt is the Director.

Homeless talk

A small newspaper produced in inner-city Johannesburg is helping convert street people into journalists. Stuart Wright reports.

GEORGE KOMPOTI was jobless and desperate when he decided to leave his wife and three children in their Harare high density suburb (read ghetto) last year and seek his fortune as a faceless thief on Johannesburg's inner-city streets.

Before he left he went to a sangoma who gave him a gruesome charm to protect him in his illegal exploits. "I kept it in the money pocket of my Wranglers. It was a thumb, it had no bone. It had been cut open and stuffed with muti to make it full just like a finger," he says grasping his right thumb and cocking his head to reveal dark eyes usually hidden behind the brim of his floppy red beach hat.

"It was for my defence in the bush. We call this the bush," he says waving at the glass and concrete towering over the city streets he calls home. "Here we get no animals, the animal is money. I am chasing money."

Kompoti hunted for cash at knife-point until about three months ago when he walked into a church service to "relax", was converted, handed

the charm to the Brazilian minister and vowed to find a new way of life.

He still sleeps in doorways, parks, abandoned buildings, and shelters for the homeless, but he has a steady flow of honest money and a new charm: a chewed down ballpoint pen he uses to write articles for a small newspaper called *Homeless Talk*.

The paper is run largely by homeless people. More than 200 started like Kompoti by buying copies for 50 cents and reselling them on the streets for R1,50. Like Kompoti, many then move on to contributing articles about their experiences as homeless drifters for which they receive up to R50.

From a dark corner of the Central Methodist Church building Kompoti now mans one of the newspaper's two distribution points and earns about R185 a week.

Judy Bassingthwaight, a founding editor who met countless homeless people through a

soup kitchen she runs, says: "Some of them have made selling their profession and earn up to R2 000 a month. It raises their self esteem, they send money home, they don't have to beg and some can pay for basic accommodation."

Homeless Talk's mix of profiles, autobiographies, poetry and news sells 40 000 copies of the six editions produced annually, and has won the respect of big corporations. Some take out full page advertisements and Liberty Life has offered free office space.

Until recently the newspaper was run from an office loftily perched on the 44th floor of the Carlton Centre but the editorial board has its roots in the dirty streets far below. Sellers, writers, founding editors and the Central Johannesburg Partnership — a community, business and city council initiative to revitalise the inner city — are all represented.

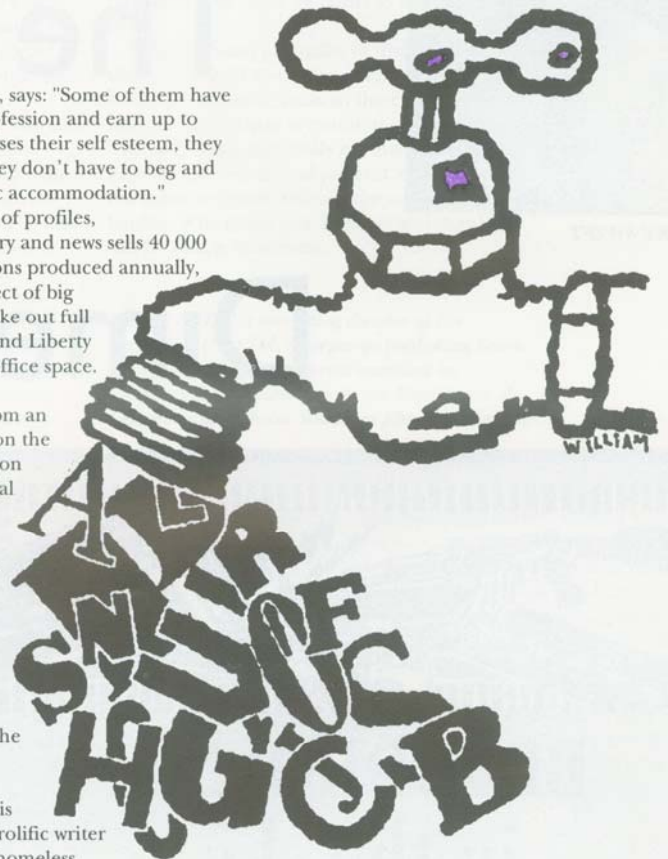
Armstrong Baduza is *Homeless Talk's* most prolific writer and represents other homeless journalists on the board. For a man who could read and write but "had never written a paragraph", he has come a long way since he lost his last steady job at the Johannesburg General Hospital in 1979.

Unemployed and homeless, he joined a gang of youths who sought shelter under the M2 highway at night.

"There was nothing I could do because I was staying with these youngsters. They would break into shops at night and steal clothes, maybe portable radios, and I would sell them." He was offered a way out when he attended a church service in order to get some soup and bread and was invited to write for a newspaper aimed at people just like him.

"My articles were always about my history with a little mixture of scriptures but the stories are mine, about my own experiences on the street," he says peering through grubby glasses at two tatty A4 sheets scribbled full of information for his latest piece.

At 52, Baduza is now developing his journalism skills through weekly workshops run by the Independent Media Development Trust which he says will teach him how to interview,



write about other people, take photographs and type.

"It is good because people are expressing their feelings and people who have no say in the professional media can express themselves in *Homeless Talk* like I did," he says.

Since *Homeless Talk* was launched last April it has grown from a little-known newspaper for the city's forgotten to a little newspaper with a growing reputation that now shares copy with similar publications in Germany and the United Kingdom.

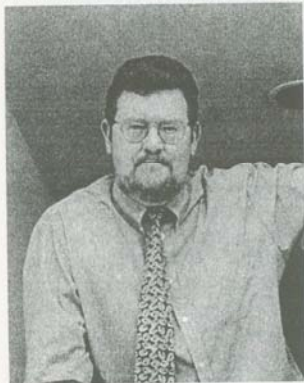
The newspaper's success is closely linked to the lot of those who produce it. For Baduza it has offered an alternative to a life of crime and the promise of a job as *Homeless Talk's* first full-time writer. "I see some improvement in my life," he says baring his yellow teeth in a triumphant smile.

"*Homeless Talk* has been able to pull me out of the way I was living and given me hope."

Stuart Wright is a journalist with the East Cape News Agency.

“I see some improvement in my life,” he says baring his yellow teeth in a triumphant smile. “Homeless Talk has been able to pull me out of the way I was living and given me hope.”

KERRY SWIFT, recently won the Siemens Business Writer of the Year Award and the Transnet Award for transport journalism for his work in *FleetWatch* magazine. The citation for the Transnet Award said he had "lifted transport writing into a new dimension". *Review* asked him to send an example of the work he has been doing and to explain what is so different. This is his response.



KERRY SWIFT

The New Dimension

WORKING ON THE TRIED and trusted premise that the best stories are always personal testimonies, I have looked for fresh feature angles

by approaching issues from the perspective of people who are most intimately involved.

Hijacking — the scourge of the transport industry — was a case in point. I wanted to find a fresh way of addressing what journalistically is rapidly becoming an over-visited issue.

Searching through old newspaper cuttings, I found the perfect subject — a helicopter pilot named John Vinagre who had been shot down during an aerial anti-hijack chase over Tembisa the previous year and who has made a business out of hunting hijacked vehicles. Potentially it had all the elements I needed to build a story, but the problem with John Vinagre was that he had steadfastly refused interviews on the grounds that media exposure might make him and his family a target of the crime syndicates that mastermind vehicle crime in South Africa.

However, the climate had changed. Hijacking had become a central part of Vinagre's life. He was outraged by the escalating levels of vehicle crime and the apparent inability of anyone, least of all the state, to stop it. He believed he had an answer to hijacking and he wanted to break his silence to publicise it. These two factors were enough to convince



BLOODHOUND in the sky

(abridged version)

BY KERRY SWIFT

It's 6.30am on April 5, 1994 and South Africa is waking to the prospect of a general election that will either usher in a new democratic future or plunge the country into a debilitating civil war.

Like most South Africans, John Vinagre and his wife Antonieta are concerned about the outcome. They are discussing the upcoming election as they drive to work and take the turnoff into the Rand Airport outside Germiston. They park their grey Nissan Patrol in the covered carpark outside the hangars belonging to Capital Air where John is managing director and Antonieta his capable assistant.

As John opens the security gate to Capital Air's reception area, the phone is already ringing. Antonieta glances at her watch. It is 6.45am. The call, from Bokomo Bakeries' headquarters in Clayville, north east of Johannesburg is to report that one of the company's 8-ton Hinos has been hijacked in the Tembisa area. Bokomo, which is one of his clients, wants John to mount an immediate search for the hijacked vehicle.

Just a normal day at Capital Air muses John wryly as he prepares for another aerial pursuit in the crisp Highveld dawn...

At age 49 and with 18 000 flying hours to his name, John Vinagre is one of South Africa's most experienced chopper pilots. Yet this nuggety Portuguese immigrant, who fled his native Mozambique in 1975 when Frelimo nationalised the family business in Lourenco Marques taking 14 helicopters along with it, is no ordinary flyboy. He also has a fair share of diesel mixed with the avgas coursing through those veins. Indeed, John has come a long way with the road transport industry, so much so that he has made it his professional home.

We meet in the early morning in his neat offices attached to Capital Air hangars at Germiston's Rand Airport. On the walls are the inevitable posters of helicopters in various locations, including a montage of photographs from the popular television series "Skatterjag", featuring Scot Scott, Melanie Walker and John Vinagre who flew the aerial treasure hunt for almost a decade.

It's 7.30am and Vinagre has just flown in. He's a bit stiff and remote at first. Like most operational pilots, he's a man of few words. Perhaps it's also because this is the first interview he has ever done with the media.

The reticence is not so much a question of modesty, it's just that he's in a line of work that shuns publicity. Media exposure could mean retaliation from the crime syndicates proliferating in Gauteng and John Vinagre is nothing if not a careful man.

It was Vinagre, flying for Lombard's Transport, who developed the highly successful aerial deterrence against fuel theft back in the early eighties. Subsequently, as operational managing director of Capital Air flying choppers out of Rand Airport, he has become South Africa's ace aerial anti-hijacker — the top-gun bloodhound in the sky for numerous fleet operators who regularly fall victim to the highwaymen feeding like leeches off the nation's truckers.

It is a mark of the man that his experience of the crime wave washing over South Africa's trucking lanes has made him more determined than ever to make a difference. "We either beat this thing back or it will destroy us," he says and he means it.

Like Henry V facing overwhelming odds on the green fields of France, this is one enormously determined guy. Indeed, John Vinagre has turned his job into a one-man crusade against hijacking and he wields his aerial sword with the resolve of a latter-day St George confronting the dragon. Having lost his business in Mozambique to a rapacious state, he is not about to sit back and watch other people lose theirs to a theft of a different nature.

...John Vinagre's mind is already in overdrive. Mentally he lists his options and decides to mount the aerial pursuit from Bokomo's Clayville premises which lie on the north-east fringe of Tembisa, the black township complex where John reckons the hijacked truck has been taken.

him to go public with his story. There is always an element of timing and luck with memorable stories.

My approach was to plan two entirely separate stories. The first would be the normal run-of-the-mill piece one might routinely write for the trade press — a few sparks but mainly product-focused and formulaic. The second would be a flashback story recreating the events leading up to and including the incident in which Vinagre was shot down in his pursuit helicopter the previous year.

The challenge was two-fold: how to marry these two stories with their different time frames and tempos, and second, how to craft the flashback story in such a way that readers would get a feeling of what it was really like for John Vinagre on the day his aircraft was shot out of the sky.

I wrote the two stories separately as planned so that each would have consistency and a logical flow. The first was reasonably straight forward, although I wrote it so that it could break to accommodate the second story as a series of flashback inserts at set stations through the piece.

The second — the flashback story — was far more challenging. For starters, my subject was reticent and self-effacing which made the interview difficult. Because this story demanded so much inner detail, I literally had to dig out the information piece by painstaking piece. It was as difficult for the subject as it was for me.

Technically, the flashback story was also difficult to write. My intention was to shift point of view through the story so that the piece would start and end with an omniscient narrator but move through various points of view as the action unfolded. I wanted the climax of the story to be pure stream of consciousness. In short, I wanted to climb inside Vinagre's head so readers would experience what he felt and thought when his chopper went down.

Use of such fictional techniques was developed by a small group of talented feature writers in the United States in the late sixties with much success, although critics believe these methods open the door to journalistic licence. They are, of course, entirely right. In my case, however, I patiently went over every detail of the flashback story with Vinagre after I completed it to ensure its authenticity and that the outer and inner dialogue were accurate.

The flashback story had to be written with the first story in mind. I knew where the various stations in the first story were and I had to write the second so that it would comfortably arrive and break at those stations. I also wrote it so that as each part of the flashback story unfolded, it would end leaving the reader hanging in mid-air — hopefully anxious to return to the action. I was trying to replicate the old thriller writing formula where the action moves along on different levels and the writer shifts from one to the other at the most tantalising moments.

My greatest constraint in all this, however,

was time. On the one hand I had only four hours interviewing time with the subject, while on the other, the deadline for the story left me just two days to complete the job. The writing took the best part of both.

Overall, I think the piece works. The story opens in flashback mode — signalled for the reader by the use of italics — and ends with an omniscient narrator editorialising about crime — a bit over the top perhaps, but worthy sentiments nonetheless.

With more time it might have been possible to write a great piece, but as the Americans have discovered, this approach to feature writing takes weeks, not days. This piece, excluding travelling time, took 24 hours to research and write.

What working journalist in this country has the luxury of 24 hours for a story, let alone a few weeks? What publication in the country would suitably reward that investment of creative time? The only thing that really motivates writers to experiment with technique and walk the extra few miles in South Africa is the odd trinket and bauble. Why thank you Siemens and thank you too Dr Anton Moolman.

KERRY SWIFT is marketing director of Fox Publishing (Pty) Ltd, a corporate publishing house in Johannesburg, and external examiner in Corporate Communications for the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University.

He sprints out to the Bell Jet Ranger, registration ZS HWU, straps himself into the chopper and starts the rotors.

In the back of his mind is a nagging concern that contrary to normal procedures in all anti-hijack flights, this time he has no weapons on board. Putting the thought aside, he completes a rapid pre-flight check and radios the tower.

"Rand tower, this is Hotel, Whisky, Uniform. Hijack response."

"Clear for takeoff Hotel, Whisky, Uniform," comes the immediate reply — air traffic control at Rand has long got used to the urgent scramble calls from Capital Air. "Call in on Jan Smuts once you're airborne," says the voice through the ether adding sardonically "and happy hunting!"

John eases the Jet Ranger gently off the helipad, drops the nose towards the adjoining road and heads out over Germiston Lake at speed. He notices blurred images of early morning rowers through the mist rising off the lake below, and watches a flock of wild ducks dash for the safety of a reed bed as the chopper cuts through the clear Highveld air. There'll always be a hunter, and the hunted will always be running. Climbing to 1000ft, this aerial predator resets the radio frequency and calls in Jan Smuts Airport...

The story of Capital Air's success really goes back to 1979 when John Vinagre persuaded a number of fleet operators in the Wadeville area around Germiston to pool resources and underwrite aerial surveillance flights along the main freight arteries leading from Johannesburg to the coast.

At that time, operators plying those

routes were experiencing a rash of fuel theft from their trucks and suspected their drivers were siphoning fuel off the rigs and selling it along the road. Vinagre was commissioned to check it out.

In reality, the drivers were responsible for the fuel losses, but not in the way fleet operators suspected. Drivers were stopping along the road to pick up prostitutes parading their ample buttock decoletage in stretch pants for passing truckers. Bimbos on board, truckers would drive to the nearby township and sow their wild oats.

Most of the highway hookers, however, were in league with petty thieves and while they and their driver Johns were flailing about in *flagrante delicto*, indulging their baser instincts behind closed doors in the townships, their trucks were being deflowered in a different way. As the old saying goes, nothing for nothing in this life.

"They were mainly after diesel but occasionally they stole from the load as well," says Vinagre. "In most cases, however, the drivers continued on their way without knowing they had been robbed."

To combat these losses, he came up with the simple idea of aerial monitoring of drivers along the main trucking routes. As he puts it: "The idea was to check on trucks at random by landing the choppers on the side of the road and flagging down drivers as they went past."

"These on-the-road checks meant we could inspect trucks for fuel and load tampering at will. Drivers were never

sure when we would drop from the sky and check out their rigs. At first I took the transport managers along so the drivers knew it was kosher, but after a while I did it alone.

"The drivers soon got to know me and the mere sight of me or the chopper were sufficient to keep the trucks rolling and the drivers' pants on. Shortly after these patrols started, the pilferage stopped because the drivers knew someone was watching them. It was so effective as a deterrent that we were able to stop the patrols altogether."

...At 7.05am, ZS HWU lands at Bokomo headquarters in Clayville and collects three company men who join John Vinagre in the hunt for the hijacked Hino. Frederick Miles is Bokomo's financial manager, Otto Weinreibe is from vehicle support, and Kobus Carstens is the company's transport manager.

With the rotors still turning, Otto and Kobus climb into the back seats and strap in while Fred climbs into the co-pilot's seat. Five minutes later, ZS HWU is airborne. Banking steeply to starboard over Midrand which spreads like an industrial rash across the Highveld, the chopper heads south for Tembisa township, its electronic receiver scanning for audio signals from a hidden transmitter on board the hijacked Hino.

John Vinagre contacts Jan Smuts tower requesting clearance for an aerial search of the Tembisa area and Gwen, their traffic controller on duty at Smuts that morning, instructs him to stay below 6 300ft and clear of Zero3 left, the international airfield's main runway.

The chopper is on a flight path that will

take it directly over Tembisa at 1 000ft at a ground speed of 120km/h. The four men can communicate with each other but besides John's greeting and a few desultory remarks, there is no time for small talk. Otto Weinreibe repeats the Hino's registration number over the intercom and the four men settle into silence as the chopper starts its first sweep over Tembisa.

The smoke from thousands of wood and coal fires in Tembisa and the neighbouring Ivory Park squatter camp still lingers like fine mist over the township as ZS HWU begins its search.

They fly an east-west grid across the township without success. As is normal procedure, a half hour into the search, John radios his wife back at Capital Air on their private frequency giving his location and reporting no sightings.

Switching back to the Smuts frequency, he alters course to begin north-south sweeps across the township.

On the third try they spot the missing Hino parked among the houses below. The cab has been tilted and about 12 people are milling around the truck. Other figures climb from the cab as John takes his aircraft into a tight turn above the vehicle.

From virtual silence, the cockpit is suddenly awash with noise. Everyone is talking at once with Otto shouting as he sees a couple of kids stoning his truck and breaking the windows.

*"They're running," says a voice over the intercom as the hijackers take off and sprint towards the nearby houses. "The bastards are splitting up. watch where the f***ers go." Now it's all expletives and adrenalin as the chopper circles the truck a second time and the occupants feel the rush of the hunt.*



That's when John Vinagre hears the gunshots. They resonate ominously through the static of his headset — abnormal sounds in the enveloping yet familiar clamour of the chase. Instinct tells him the chopper's under fire but his mind rejects it. There's no fear. He's measuring the whole thing in his head. Then he feels a very distinct power loss.

Practised hands instinctively throw the aircraft into a steep dive away from the scene as he tries to evade further ground fire.

"I don't believe it... they're shooting at us..." he shouts into the headset. It's like an afterthought because he knows the chopper's going down. That's when the first twinges of fear claw at his chest.

Time bends and distorts. Seconds become minutes as he nurses the crippled ship on. He becomes aware of the growing pressure of someone's feet pushing against the back of his seat... he levels the chopper out but the engine fails.

Five kilometers to the north west in the Smuts tower, the air traffic controller named Gwen watches ZS HWU disappear off her radar screen.

Around 1986, the pattern of heavy vehicle crime changed, and for the first time trucks began to go missing. "Initially they were only after the tyres, batteries and fuel and invariably we would find the vehicle with its load intact simply by flying over the townships. In most cases, the rigs were abandoned. At that time only about 10 per cent of stolen trucks had their loads tampered with. It was still very unsophisticated crime," says Vinagre.

But it didn't stay that way for long. Around 1989 the pattern changed once more. "It was as if someone had flicked a switch. One moment we were finding stolen trucks abandoned in the townships as usual, the next they were nowhere to be found. We spent hours in the air without seeing any trace of

them. Something had changed radically in the pattern of truck thefts and the criminals were winning once again."

Once more it was John Vinagre who dreamed up a suitable response. It occurred to him that the Department of Nature Conservation had been successfully using a game tracking system developed by Professor Gerard van Urk at Potchefstroom University. The system was operated by attaching electronic transmitting devices to the animals which could then be tracked from the air.

"The system had been operated since 1975 but it only had a range of 5km which was clearly insufficient for our purposes. So I approached Professor van Urk for help. Not only was he incredibly enthusiastic but over the next few months he developed a number of systems which we put to the test. In all, we put in 30 hours of aerial trials before settling for the system we now use," says Vinagre.

That system, registered under the name Helitrace, consists of a small electronic transmitter attached somewhere to the truck which emits an audio signal. Each transmitter makes use of a different frequency which can be tracked from the air over a radius of 80kms in the built-up PWV (Gauteng) area and 120 kms in open areas. This allows the helicopter search ship a reasonable degree of latitude to lock onto a hijacked vehicle and to follow at a suitable distance.

Once the vehicle is located from the air, the pursuit chopper calls in the SAPS Hijack Reaction Unit in Isando or Soweto, whose task it is to recover the vehicle and make arrests on the ground. Alternately, a private reaction company such as XPS is called in to try to recover the vehicle.

...I can get it down, thinks John Vinagre as he autorotates the crippled chopper towards an open patch of ground nestled between the tightly concentrated match box houses of Tembisa. He doesn't really have much choice — live powerlines to the north and west block his escape.

There's just enough space to put it down if I can get there on time... His thoughts are interrupted by a woman and child who set off across the open patch, oblivious to the approach of the crippled chopper.

Aborting his descent, he drags the chopper off its crash path and tries to lift it over the fast-approaching toy homes below. There's not enough speed or altitude and the chopper whistles into the ground between two houses, one of the rotor blades snapping as the aircraft comes to rest on its nose against one of the houses, its tail rotors torn off by the impact as it hits the wall.

Dust mushrooms upwards, a red-brown cloak engulfing the aircraft. With it comes a sickening fear. Fire... all he can think of is being engulfed in a blanket of orange flame as the rich and intoxicating smell of avgas fills the cockpit.

Fred Miles is already going into shock as John helps him get clear of the crippled aircraft. The two passengers in the back are already clear and watching from the nearby road. Fred falls to his knees dragging John down with him. A woman is screaming at them. "Look what you've done to my house," but there's a far more menacing sound — gunshots!

Glancing up, John sees Otto and Kobus running towards some nearby houses pursued by a mob. Seeing John and Fred on the ground, however, the mob veers back towards the crash site... They are shouting and there is only murder in their eyes...

John Vinagre has had considerable success with his aerial bloodhound business which now has 1 100 transmitters installed in various fleets, but he points out that there is still a great deal of reluctance among fleet operators to invest in preventative hijack measures.

"We're losing the battle against hijacking by default and, of course, the hijackers are becoming more sophisticated," he says. "What's needed is a concerted effort on all fronts. But, in the short term, I believe the answer to hijacking lies in turning back the clock and recreating the system we ran for Lombard's Transport. The solution lies in restarting regular aerial patrols along the main trucking routes. That is the only effective deterrent.

"The road transport industry should get together to subsidise day and night aerial patrols of the nation's highways. These spot checks would have the same deterrent effect on hijackings that they had against theft in the early eighties because most hijackings are unquestionably still the result of driver collusion. "Drivers should know there are eyes in the skies watching them."

Vinagre reckons around R40 000 a month would cover the costs of regular helicopter patrols of the Durban and Cape Town routes in and out of Johannesburg — the main playgrounds of organised hijackers.

Taken across the industry, R40 000 is small change, particularly when you realise that hijackings are costing the industry around R11 million a month in replacement costs alone, with hidden costs estimated at between R30 and R40 million a month.

"The only solution to hijacking is for all the players in the trucking industry to combine resources and tackle this scourge together. The current ad hoc response by individual operators acting alone against organised crime is a waste of time," says Vinagre.

... The mob reaches the two unarmed and defenceless men before either has a chance to think of escape. John Vinagre is still bending over his supine colleague when they are attacked. He is stabbed in the back and dragged to one side as the mob begins to beat and kick Fred Miles, now lying in a foetal position on the ground. They take his watch and scream: "Where are your guns, where is your money?" They kick him senseless as John tries to protect himself from the mindless wrath of the mob.

Otto and Kobus have reached the houses and run between them until they find a woman at an open door. They beg her for protection and she immediately takes control, taking them in and ushering the two terrified men into her bedroom. They climb under her bed and await their fate — breathless and fearful. Their lives are now entirely in the hands of a black stranger as groups of enraged youths scatter through the houses baying for the blood of the two white men...

...Just as John Vinagre is about to give up hope, a white Cressida backs out of a nearby householder's garage and drives slowly towards the mob which parts as it approaches. There are two men in the car — the driver and a passenger in the back who opens his door and shouts for the two white men to climb in. Despite being in shock and badly beaten, Fred Miles drags himself into the passenger seat while John clammers into the back before the mob is fully aware of what is happening. The car immediately races away...

All four of the men shot down in ZS HWU over Tembisa that morning escaped with their lives. But for the courageous intervention of three black strangers, they would not have made it, that much is abundantly clear.

As for the hijackers, it took Rudie van Olst of the East Rand Murder and Robbery Squad eight months to track them down, but for John Vinagre the hunt goes on...

Now for the really **bad** news

Guy Berger

THE GOOD NEWS is that the draft new constitution improves our right to information. The worrying news is that it has not yet accepted press representations for strengthening freedom of expression.

The disturbing news is that the draft bill of rights expressly refuses to protect unfettered free expression.

But without doubt the really bad news is not the flaws in the draft constitution. It is that the media missed the whole story.

Not that South Africa's newspapers were entirely snoozepapers. They, and their electronic counterparts, did a good job with the draft's deal (or lack thereof) on provincial powers, the Senate, the anthem, capital punishment, and the like.

But, to find the facts about constitutional thinking on matters pertaining to the press, one had to turn elsewhere.

The Internet was there — and the info highway produced the provisions particular to press freedom. A week later came *Constitutional Talk*, bulletin of the Constituent Assembly, inserted directly into most daily newspapers.

Still missing, in all this, however, were the journalists.

For the public, even with the Constitutional provisions in hand, there was no independent professional source — no Fourth Estate collecting, creating and publicising interpretations, comments, analysis, background and context about what the constitution means for press freedom.

And yet it is precisely these issues that earlier this year precipitated the most public rupture in the press in decades.

After lengthy lobbying, including securing support from the International Press Institute and the International Federation of Newspaper Publishers, the Conference of Editors won an audience with the Constituent Assembly's relevant theme committee.

But Conference of Editors (CoE) chair Khulu Sibiyi failed to pitch up, and his white colleagues were left playing second fiddle to representations by Thami Mazwai and the Black Editors Forum. The CoE's well-researched dossier by advocate Gilbert Marcus was eclipsed by Mazwai's call for constitutional limits on foreign ownership of the press.

Sunday Times editor Ken Owen, moving force in the campaign to get to the Constituent Assembly, felt he had been suckered — that the CoE's case could now be condemned as a whites-only initiative. In a dramatic display of *hubris* in his paper, he resigned; followed in similar style by *Mail & Guardian* editor Anton Harber.

So it was that the two papers that — more than any others — had focussed attention on press freedom under a new constitution fell

silent. It was as if they had withdrawn from the battle. Thus, neither paper raised a peep when the draft constitution was published without the CoE's views achieving acceptance.

It may have been a self-fulfilling prophecy that Owen and Harber's constitutional representations came to naught. But their failure to follow up on the issues involved could only have helped along a sorry situation.

Race is a real issue in South Africa's media control and content, and it rightly occupies much attention among journalists. But press freedom is not a racial issue, and nor should it be neglected in relation to the questions of colour.

However, without lead from erstwhile champions like Owen and Harber, the remainder of the media kept mum on the matter.

Was it a case of having lost the will to fight — a feeling that a press freedom campaign is counterproductive if it comes from white journalists? Was it a tactical decision to lie low, in the face of criticism from government, ANC and the Black Editors Forum? Was it a case of assuming that whatever the Constituent Assembly may decree, press freedom will merrily continue its happy way? Or, was it just sloppy, forgetful, uninformed — and uninformative — journalism?

Whatever, if the press is pussyfooting around the problems, South Africa's most powerful political voices are not.

My prediction is that there will first be increasing attempts to bypass the mass media, with the government trying to set up its own media apparatus.

No one would deny either state or government the need for a strong communications initiative, even if most journalists would also argue that a democracy needs a strong and independent mass media as well.

The danger is that no government in a democracy can possibly mount a communications plan that parallels the power and reach of politically-independent mass media (print as well as broadcast).

A time may therefore come when politicians under pressure decide it is time to mess with the media. Certainly this would be much more difficult than in the past, but a culture of constraint can be created. How? Consider the following:

● Freedom of expression in the draft constitution expressly does not protect "the incitement of imminent violence". Could this, then, open a journalist up to prosecution for reporting remarks like PW Botha's "don't awaken the Afrikaner tiger" or Mangosuthu Buthelezi's regular refrains that certain ANC actions "could lead to violence".

● While this particular clause is still under discussion, the draft says the right to free expression "does not protect ... advocacy of hatred based on race, ethnicity, gender or religion that constitutes incitement to discrimination".

In terms of this, a journalist could be really stretched in terms of comprehensive and verbatim coverage of racial clashes at Wits University, or anywhere else.

● And how does the "hate speech" provision impact on reporters trying to reflect Robert Mugabe's views on homosexuality (not to mention Winnie Mandela or those of Khoisan X!)?

In short, the constitution could create problems for journalists to do their job — and especially in a climate where criticism of government (from the left or the right) could be ultimately construed in colour coding. Could you quote the PAC's Patricia de Lille criticising the government for "pandering to whites"?

Also with ominous potential in the draft constitution, is the fact that while freedoms like religion cannot be limited under a state of emergency, freedom of expression may be.

To be sure, this is hinged on the qualification that any such limitation must still be reasonable, and consistent with the values of "an open and democratic society based on freedom and equality".

Yet what of a scenario of real mayhem in KwaZulu-Natal, prompting a central government crackdown in which freedom (necessarily) is a far cry, and where reporting on human rights abuses by security forces is ruled out?

It would have been reassuring had the Constituent Assembly taken on board CoE recommendations for a stronger test as to the constitutionality of curbs on press freedom. But left undecided — at this fairly advanced stage of negotiations — is the matter of whether limitations (such as on the right to freedom of expression) must be justifiable and/or necessary — and not merely reasonable.

Why the hesitation in the Constituent Assembly in this? The sad thing is the last place you'll find this question asked, let alone answered, is in the press.

Sometimes, it is true, people get the press they deserve. In this case, however, the people should not be blamed. The press has done a pitiful job of informing them of the press freedom picture. That is the bad news.

The worst news is that if things don't change, the press will get the pressures it deserves; the public will be one to suffer.

Professor Guy Berger is the head of the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University.

Ownership, control and affirmative action in **black,**

Thami Mazwai

THE OWNERSHIP AND CONTROL of the media is a topic which does not get the attention it deserves; and this is simply because the whole of the South African media would be on trial. We cannot expect it to indict itself.

Yet, the "ownership and management of the media, and what is necessary to ensure diversity", is a crucial issue. After all, the media must underpin our democracy and play a crucial role in protecting, consolidating and entrenching the freedoms we fought for and now enjoy. However, do all South Africans have easy access to the media? Does it reflect all shades of opinion? Does it encourage debate on sensitive issues? Does the African way of life, for instance customs, get the respect given to the western way of life? Is it gender sensitive in line with our new national outlook? Does its composition and management structure reflect the demographics of the country and gender? Obviously, the answer is NO to these questions. The media is top heavy white male in all respects. As this impacts negatively on our democracy, it must be corrected.

However, just as the de-concentration of the media is crucial if our democracy is to blossom, how the Government deals with this is ultra sensitive. It will show how committed it is to democracy. Furthermore, it is also going to determine how the world will see and relate to us. By extension, and this is what investors are interested in, is our political miracle going to continue?

In short, if the government intervenes directly in the control and management of the media, it will destroy whatever confidence the outside world has in us. In addition, ripples of fear will grip our communities as it will mean the first step towards authoritarian rule will have been taken.

On the other hand, the Government cannot leave the situation as it is, and hope it will right itself. The mainstream media, like many other institutions in the country, is still, consciously and unconsciously, clinging to the past where white was white. Appropriate steps have to be taken to make it more South African.

Yesterday's major players, the top heavy white male structures, are still today's principle actors. The point we must note is that because the media was white, it could not go all the way in fighting a white government enjoying the support of the white community. Hence, its commitment to freedom and justice in general, and press freedom in particular, was suspect.

For instance, journalists employed by major groups could not belong to the ANC, PAC or AZAPO, but were allowed to be members of the NP, PFP or CP. Journalists found guilty of so-called terrorism charges were not given their jobs back on release from jail, yet white journalists who served time in the SADF had

their jobs guaranteed. In fairness, I must mention that journalists detained without trial or who were banned, were kept on staffs and paid their salaries. The point I am making is that these newspapers were part of the attitudes of white South Africa, after all the staff and management was white. They could not see things differently from the rest of the population.

To get a clearer picture of what is happening, or not happening, let us look at the media under three headings: ownership by blacks; blacks in senior positions; programmes to fast track blacks into senior positions.

+ OWNERSHIP Blacks do not have any mentionable stake, if any, in the four major publishing houses; Nasionale, Perskor, Times Media Limited and Independent Newspapers. The then Argus company unbundled the *Sowetan* and sold it to Dr Nthato Motlana's Corporate Africa. However, it still owns a percentage of *Sowetan* and controls the printing and distribution of the publication. In short, the *Sowetan* is not a completely black-owned and controlled paper in the sense in which we want it. Let us stay on the Argus a little longer. Soon after unbundling the *Sowetan*, Anglo American, the ultimate owners of Argus, then unbundled further and sold *The Star* and other titles to Tony O'Reilly. Amazingly, Motlana, and any other black group for that matter, were not offered *The Star* and these other titles, or offered stakes in them. These titles and the printing and distribution operations were sold to O'Reilly for a song. I have no doubt that Anglo did not want a block of major and influential newspapers to fall into black hands for the usual stereotyped reasons we are always fed. Hence, when it sold the Argus stake in TML to O'Reilly, it still did not give blacks a slice of the action. A black group that wanted to buy the *Cape Times* was even frustrated. Times Media Limited, also owned by Anglo, and part of Omni Media, is now on the sellers block. Anglo says it wants the buyers to be blacks. On the other hand the same Anglo has been denying persisting reports that the *Financial Mail* and *Business Day* will be hived off and sold off independently to an overseas organisation or one headed by the editor of the *FM*. I desperately want to believe these denials and hope that all of Omni will fall into black hands. But, information I have is that the leaks in the press upset certain semi-completed deals, and these deals did not have black players. Let us wait and see.

Naspers and Perskor do not have any black share-holding worth talking about and talk is that they will be selling some titles to blacks. But it is still talk.

+ STAFF When we look at the complement of blacks in management levels of newspapers in the four groups, the position is as follows: there

are only two editors in the Western Cape to about 15 whites; there are three black editors in the Eastern Cape to about 15 whites; there are five black editors in Natal to about 18 whites; and in Gauteng the situation is hardly any better. At *The Star* we have four blacks to about 20 whites. At Times Media Limited three blacks to 20 whites in several titles.

Perskor and Naspers do not have black editors save in their blacks-only publications. Just as most black editors are also at the *Sowetan*. Furthermore, eighty percent of black editors in mainstream newspapers are on junior to middle management positions.

+ FAST TRACKS When we come to programmes for the development of blacks, there is nothing definite in all groups save a hunt-and-miss situation. The last time the Argus had a major initiative was when Doug Band got Joe Thloloe and a number of us countrywide overseas secondments and training. This has fizzled out.

Why did I give the above scenario? The answer is simple. For as long as the decision-makers in newspapers are predominantly white, those newspapers will reflect white aspirations, biases, values or attitudes.

For instance, when newspapers first reported on the RDP white journalists questioned what it would cost; while blacks saw it as a major development that would benefit our country. The announcement of retrenchments in the civil service, the change of the guard at the SABC, the changes in the police force, the appointment of diplomats, the furore over Dr Fanus Schoeman, the changes at SAfm etc, all evoked reactions that left the reader with no doubt as to which community the journalist came from. Mainstream newspapers tend to be protective of the interests of the white community. After all, the management and reporting staff are predominantly white. And, for many, this is done in the unconscious. There are two types of racists, one that has set ideas and is deliberately negative about blacks, and the one that is not aware he is being racist but innocently sees life as it was presented to him at white schools, the NGK churches, white universities and the old TV1. Such innocents predominate in the media.

Black journalists also see things through the eyes of their community. Our perspectives are also shaped by our background and environment. We are as guilty of being unconsciously biased as our white colleagues. Unfortunately for us, because of the power structure in the media, our perspectives, and therefore those of the black community, are in the periphery. This is the reality of South Africa.

There is therefore no doubt the concentration of the media in a few white hands, distorts the message. Hence, as far as we

white and

grey

blacks are concerned, there is only a relative difference between a media owned by a minority and one that is government owned. People who are against government control of the media should, in view of the principle involved, that of distorting the message, also be against control of the media by the minority. Where do we go from here?

Providing news is not an exact science, it is a process driven by subjective judgment. Attitudes, education, background, likes and dislikes, hopes and fears, knowledge of the subject, knowledge of the reader and many other factors come into play.

Our media must be de-concentrated and made more South African. How do we do this? We have already identified our major problem areas and they are: no black shareholders in the major groups, lack of senior editors in mainstream newspapers, and lack of development programmes to fast track blacks in the media. In short, there is little affirmative action in the media. How do we get it going?

The dangers of direct government involvement have been explained and I suggest the following strategies:

+ ADVERTISING To ensure that mainstream major groups of newspapers offer stakes to blacks, they should appoint blacks to senior editorial positions or prepare them for these positions; programmes should be set in place to develop and fast track blacks in the media industry; the government must not place its advertising, and that of organisations it has an interest in, such as parastatals, in newspapers or groups of newspapers that do not commit themselves to implementing the above three conditions.

The government spends R150-million and the provincial governments and parastatals bring this close to a billion.

The millions government, provincial governments and parastatals spend in advertising must be used to develop diversity in South Africa's media. Black publications and those media groups that are implementing affirmative action and black economic empowerment policies must benefit. It goes without saying that black groups must also reflect the country's demographics at ownership and management levels. This strategy has been tried, and with success, right here in South Africa. When TV was introduced and it started eating into the advertising cake, the four major newspaper groups were given a TV licence, now known as M-Net, now an international and continental player of note. This was affirmative action and empowerment in action, let it also be applied to blacks.

+ LEGISLATION Legislation that prohibits or regulates vertical integration must be introduced to enable free and fair competition.

Newspaper groups must not own distribution and printing companies, or use these to benefit the group newspapers to the detriment of competing titles. It must be ensured the industry does not create monopolies. Media monopolies are anathema to press freedom.

+ FOREIGNERS There must be a limit on the stake foreigners can have in our media. Under no circumstances must they have a controlling interest. This already applies in broadcasting, it must now be extended to the print media.

+ RESTRICTIONS Legislation should be introduced to restrict cross shareholding, interlocking directorships, trade agreements and cartels between major media groups. These militate against smaller organisations, make entry expensive and create monopolies or semi-monopolies. In addition, horizontal expansion must be monitored to ensure that groups do not straddle sub-sectors in the industry.

+ FINANCE The government should fund or help finance struggling media organisations owned by Africans, Coloureds or Indians. These are crucial to diversity in the media, and need a kick start. Many new black radio stations face closure if they are not helped, just as community newspapers are struggling. However, the government must not dictate policy, but must set up an industry committee independent of government that will protect its interests and ensure that money is not used for other purposes, and will also see to it that these organisations run their businesses in such a way that in five years time they will be weaned of government support. The programme would obviously have a sunset clause.

+ COMPETITION The Government, or the IBA, must not allow the major groups into radio as the many small radio stations being set up will be at risk against competition from the big boys. Regarding TV, the many consortiums vying for the one licence on offer must be scrutinised to ensure that a licence is granted to an operator with true black participation. Black organisations are watching Government attitudes and strategies on affirmative action and black economic empowerment with concern. Helping blacks into the media industry is crucial in the development of our country as it will allow South Africans to talk to each other as equals. "A good newspaper is a nation talking to itself," as a New York editor once said.

Let us have an industry with players that facilitate dialogue across racial, cultural, tribal, political, religious, social and other divides. This will be democracy in action.

Thami Mazwai is editor-in-chief of Enterprise and chairman of the BEF.

John Patten

JUST AS THE WHOLE of South Africa, in almost any walk of life, is undergoing rapid transition following the demise of apartheid, so the press and electronic media are facing up to the need to make changes reflecting the reality and the spirit of the new democracy. In recent months, the Black Editors' Forum (BEF) has been engaged in a campaign to speed up this transition and to give it focus and direction. And this has thrown it into apparent confrontation with the Conference of Editors (CoE), which broadly represents the editors of the mainstream daily and weekly publications of the country.

The perceived confrontation is more apparent than real, because there is a healthy realisation among member editors of the Conference that transformation is the imperative of the day. There may, however, be differences over time-scale and end solutions. The difference between the BEF and the CoE comes down to the fact that the BEF is lobbying for change in the CoE territory, while the CoE is concerned with the practicalities of managing change within its own territory.

Vitaly important in considering this change is the fact that transformation towards racial representivity is only one aspect of the press dilemma (although that aspect is the only one the BEF chooses to focus on at present).

Other matters that should not be ignored are the long and proud tradition of the South African press to date (especially the strong stand on independence and press freedom taken by the English press over many decades), and the problem of reflecting differing values of society better after transformation than before.

The drive of the BEF has three prongs — media diversity, media ownership and affirmative action.

A kingpin in this argument is to cite the fact that about 85 per cent of the SA population is not white, while about 85 per cent of the press is in white hands under white editors. From these statistics it is argued that, with this racial skew, the SA

"Customer care is a buzzword of the market, and the media have stopped serving customers' needs in their agitation to conform to political correctness."

► overleaf

press is unable to reflect accurately the mood of the people.

While there is merit in this argument, the statistics that matter far more in the world of the commercial press are the readership figures, which tell a different story.

Recent statistics for 38 leading SA publications, issued by the Amps national readership survey, show only eight newspapers with a majority of black readers, and two others with a higher percentage of black readers than from any of the other race groups.

Those 10 publications make up little over a quarter of the total — a very different position compared with the overall population make-up.

At the other end of the scale, there are 16 publications with a majority of white readers, with a further five publications having a higher percentage of white readers than from any other race group. This means more than half the leading publications of the country rely for their bread and butter more

on white readers than on any other group, reinforcing the need for them to serve a market with such a profile.

To complete the racial breakdown of newspaper readerships, the Amps figures show only one publication with a majority coloured readership, and three others depending more heavily on coloured readers than any other group. There are also only two publications in the survey with a majority Indian readership, with one

other paper relying more heavily on Indian readers than on any other group. To stay statistical a moment longer, it is worth noting that there are only a handful of newspapers whose editors do not reflect the main racial profile of the papers' readerships.

These are *The Argus* (white editor, majority coloured readership), *Daily Dispatch* (white editor, majority black readership), *Evening Post* (white editor, large minority black readership), *The Sunday Paper* (white editor, 50 per cent Indian readership), and *The Daily News* (white editor, large minority Indian readership).

The other papers have editors fitting their readership profiles. Another real consideration for mainstream papers is that their advertising base is heavily dependent on white-led companies, who in many cases rely for advertising response more heavily on white readers than on other groups.

The nub of the problem, thus, is that the ownership and editorships of newspapers reflect the market position of newspapers fairly accurately, even though they may be out of line with overall population statistics. In terms of newspaper viability, the market speaks more strongly than a population that does not buy, advertise in, or read newspapers.

It does not alter the BEF case for change. All it does is make it more difficult to achieve the changes the BEF would like to see take place. Suggestions for assisting the transformation process include government pressure (through threatened legislation) to diversify ownership to other race groups, government placing advertisements with black-owned publications to the exclusion of publications not meeting transformation criteria, and government funding for struggling black-owned publications.

All these are possible routes, but of questionable use. The government would not necessarily

achieve maximum response from placing advertisements according to political instead of commercial needs, and could not be sure of achieving viability for government-funded papers. The drag on the taxpayers might thus be considerable.

Mainstream newspapers have, to differing degrees, been making efforts to transform themselves from within, through the recruiting and training of black staff, and placing them in the fast lane for promotion.

To quite a large extent, unfortunately, this effort has been neutralised by the poaching game taking place between companies all trying to get into the affirmative action act.

Many of the best black journalists recruited and trained on mainstream newspapers have been poached by the SABC radio or television services, or by companies offering lucrative public relations positions, forcing newspapers back to Square One in their affirmative action programmes. This is one of the main reasons why there are not more black journalists in senior positions in mainstream positions already.

It would be wrong to believe, however, that mainstream newspapers are content simply to offer this as an excuse for inaction. Promotions to senior positions now tend to have an affirmative action conditional clause. That is, if a black journalist cannot be found immediately for a top position, then a black journalist must be seen to benefit from any staff reshuffle arising out of new appointments.

One of the real problems of fast-tracking black journalists into top positions is the effect it has on the morale of white journalists who have worked their way up the ladder to middle-ranking positions and who would expect to be rewarded with promotion for hard work and good service.

These journalists also have to be accommodated to an extent, even while trying to speed up promotional opportunities for journalists of other races.

The effect is that transformation, for very practical reasons, is taking place at a slower pace than can meet the impatience of the BEF campaign.

The BEF campaign is nevertheless very constructive, because it helps to keep the minds of employers and senior editorial executives focused on the political pressures that exist to conform to general perceptions of acceptable levels of transformation.

If there is a plea that should be made from the side of mainstream publications, then it is that blacks at all levels of society should be encouraged by the BEF, politicians and other influential black public players to assist in the transformation by becoming newspaper readers and advertisers.

The moment more black readers and advertisers are found, newspapers would have a commercial reason to adjust their content and staffs to black needs.

Where the BEF appears to be somewhat off-beam in its campaign is in its hostility to newspapers' ownership by international groups. International groups can probably do far more than domestic business groups to assist in transformation, because they have more economic muscle and because they have to meet public pressures from their widespread constituencies to conform to political correctness.

In the case of the take-over of the Argus Group by Tony O'Reilly's Independent Newspapers of Ireland, pressure for affirmative action has been greatly stepped up, in spite of the losses suffered as a result of poaching.

It is also somewhat vain for black groups to imagine they have a right to take over unbundled

newspaper groups if they haven't got the capital to do it. International owners can assist in this respect too — by providing bridging finance that in time can lead to black ownership.

There remains one major problem in the whole transformation process, which is worrying executives in both the print and electronic media. That is the fact that listeners and readers are responding badly to the efforts to adjust programme or newspaper content to the non-racial new SA.

The change to TV programmes caused an outcry. So did the change to radio programmes. There have been similar protests from long-established newspaper readers to the changes in content and emphasis that have taken place.

The result has been a serious fall-off in viewers, listeners and readers throughout the media, meaning all these media are serving their immediate customers less well than before.

Customer care is a buzzword of the market, and the media have stopped serving customers' needs in their agitation to conform to political correctness. The BEF campaign only tends to put more strain on that already strained relationship.

For transformation to succeed, therefore, the re-education of the media's existing customers must be aggressively augmented by efforts to expand the base of black customers. Without it, transformation can only land the media in a financial pickle of growing proportions.

BEF chairman Thami Mazwai, speaking at a recent press freedom forum, mentioned an example of how the white-led media did not represent the people. He referred to the case of a group of teenage black youths who had been abducted from their homes so that they could undergo tribal initiation and circumcision ceremonies they had refused voluntarily to submit to.

Mr Mazwai was offended by the fact that the white-led newspapers represented the abduction of these youths to their readers as a barbaric act. He argued that the initiation ceremonies and circumcision the boys were subjected to was part of an honourable tribal custom, and that the boys had been done a favour by the tribe through being abducted to undergo the ceremonies.

While Mr Mazwai may be right that the abductions may have been seen in tribal society as justified and right, this does not in any way alter the fact that measured against the cultural values of whites, the abductions were barbaric.

While tribal custom may have been upheld, honouring tribal rites, the abductions were also capable of being seen as a gross abuse of human rights — in that youths were forced against their wills to undergo ceremonies affecting them so intimately that they had the right to decide for themselves whether they wished to take part or not.

The cultural clashes thrown up by this example, and there must be many more, only serve to accentuate how important it is that the emphasis a publication places on an event is aligned to that publication's readership.

It would doom a publication to failure if a newspaper with a majority of white readers was run by a black editor who insisted on giving a tribal cultural aspect to his newspaper's coverage.

These are not easy problems to resolve. That is why they are taking time to work out. But the BEF is acting as the agent in attempting to speed up the process, while the Conference is wrestling with the practical problems.

John Patten is editor of The Mercury and acting chairman of the Conference of Editors.

"Listeners and readers are responding badly to the efforts to adjust programme or newspaper content to the non-racial new SA."

The Ruth First Award for courageous journalism

Gavin Williams

I T IS APPROPRIATE that the presentation of the award for courageous journalism in Ruth First's name should take place in a department of journalism and media studies at a university.

Ruth was a political activist, committed to socialism and to the liberation of Africa. Ruth was also a journalist.

She wrote for *Guardian* and *New Age*. She also edited *Fighting Talk* which published many of the exciting black and white writers of the 1950s, such as Es'kia Mphahlele's stories and the text of Athol Fugard's *The BloodKnot*.

Ruth was also to become an academic. She was a fine university teacher. Journalists and academics share common professional obligations — to search out the truth and maintain their independence.

Their claims to freedom of the press and to academic freedom can only be justified if they do so.

They are not required to be neutral or uncommitted; the best reporting and writing often emerges from deep convictions. But the obligations to research and investigate, to report and to explain, do not sit easily with political loyalties and commitments.

Ruth brought to all her writing the skills of a campaigning journalist. Her first concern was to get to the facts. The facts don't speak for themselves. You have to get out, find them, and express them.

Ruth had a perceptive eye for the particular and a capacity to describe people in an evocative way. Here she describes Gadaffi's address to the people of Libya:

From him comes an inexhaustible flow; didactic, at times incoherent; peppered with snatches of half-formed opinions, cryptic self-spun philosophies; some sound common sense, and as much prejudice. Few of his speeches do not contain the germ of at least one sound idea, and little of its real development. For Gadaffi's view of the world is uncomplicated by any knowledge of it.

Three themes link Ruth's writings on South Africa in the 1950s with her later work on other African countries.

The first theme is that the proper focus of social explanation should be on capitalism, in all its complex forms. From her experiences with mineworkers and farmworkers in 1946 and 1947 she saw racism in South Africa as the product of a structure through which mineowners and farmers gained control of labour. Control over labour was central to the story she told in her first book, *South West Africa*:

South of Ovamboland, in the aptly named police zone, men are handcuffed by slips of paper. They must have permits to seek work, permits to be in the area for any purpose other than to seek work, service contracts to prove they are working, passes to prove they are schoolboys and too young to carry passes.

A second key theme of Ruth's work was her view that there are moments when the people are able to seize and shape the political agenda. She wrote of the bus boycotts of 1956-7:

Political controversy moved away from the sterile debates in the House of Assembly... and nationwide attention was focused on this demonstration by a voteless, voiceless people.

The third theme in Ruth's work was her commitment — which now appears so old-fashioned — to socialism, her recognition of the difficulties of achieving it, and its problematic relations to nationalism, and of both to feminism.

She visited both the Soviet Union and China and reported rather naively on the achievements of Soviet civilisation and the Chinese people.

In the 1960s and 1970s she looked at independent Africa and at communist countries, and their policies, with a far more sceptical eye.

The twice-titled *Power in Africa: The Barrel of a Gun* sought to explain the most striking manifestation of post-independence politics in Africa, the *coup d'état*. Its central actors, and the focus of her indictment, were politicians, bureaucrats and soldiers.

Colonial inheritances, economic dependence and even direct foreign intervention, provide the contexts for political developments but not the explanation. Ruth did not allow them to become an alibi for failures for, she wrote, that "is a form of patronising"; it makes Africans "ever victim, never perpetrator".

Socialists were not exempt from Ruth's critical eye. She shrewdly observed how Nkrumah's 'socialist' policies were designed to extend patronage to his supporters and to undermine the economic base of his political opposition.

She disagreed strongly with the policies of the Soviet Union and its allies, including the SACP and was unpersuaded by the claims of Mao and the cultural revolution to offer an alternative path to socialism. She publicly supported the claims of Eritrea to independence in opposition to the "socialist" line and Soviet-aligned government of Ethiopia.

In the 1970s Ruth First turned to an apparently very different subject. A biography, written with Ann Scott, of Olive Schreiner. Their primary concern was to understand how Schreiner was able to go beyond her family, class and racial background and how her feminism was nevertheless limited by her own white, middle class experience and predominant forms of reference, and by the ambiguities in her views on female sexuality, motherhood and the nature of freedom for women and men.

In the 1980s, as Director of the Centre for African Studies in Mozambique, Ruth was a trenchant critic — and not always a popular one — of Frelimo politics — state farms for example — and, as Joe Hanlon wrote, her comments, however unwelcome, "were always listened to... she was a militant insider, speaking a language people understood".

Her life's work, then, illustrates the classic dilemma which Max Weber poses of which God to serve: the Daimon of politics with its concern for the consequences of action, or of Science with its overriding concern to promote the truth.

There is no easy resolution, and it is difficult, and perhaps impossible, to reconcile these claims. Ruth's work is a practical tribute to each of them.

Gavin Williams, of St Peters College Oxford, is a member of the Ruth First Memorial Trust. A longer version of this article will appear in *The Journal of Southern African Studies*.

COMMENTS FROM THE JUDGES

Entries for the Courageous Journalism Award competition, often put together with considerable effort and motivation, were a welcome counterweight to commentaries which claim a decline in South African journalism.

Contributions received included entering a dangerous hostel, violence in Crossroads, reporting Rwanda, mine-clearing in Mozambique, paedophilia and pornography, a Third Force exposé, chronicling the anti-Mangope uprisings, conditions at farm schools and emigration by neo-Nazis.

The decision to choose Louise



Flanagan (Daily Dispatch chief reporter and Rhodes journalism graduate) as the winner was in recognition of her sustained (over three

years), brave and in-depth investigations into Eastern Cape dirty tricks (on several political sides).

The judges also agreed that the kind of journalism exemplified by Moses Mamaile (entries from his work for City Press) deserved a special commendation. His articles exuded the compelling human interest that derives from pursuing a story through to those right at its centre.

This entailed Mamaile smuggling himself into a jail cell to interview a child held for allegedly stealing a watermelon. Subsequently, he tracked down the farm where she worked as a child-labourer. Despite incurring an assault by the farmer, Mamaile later returned with police to collect his notebook.

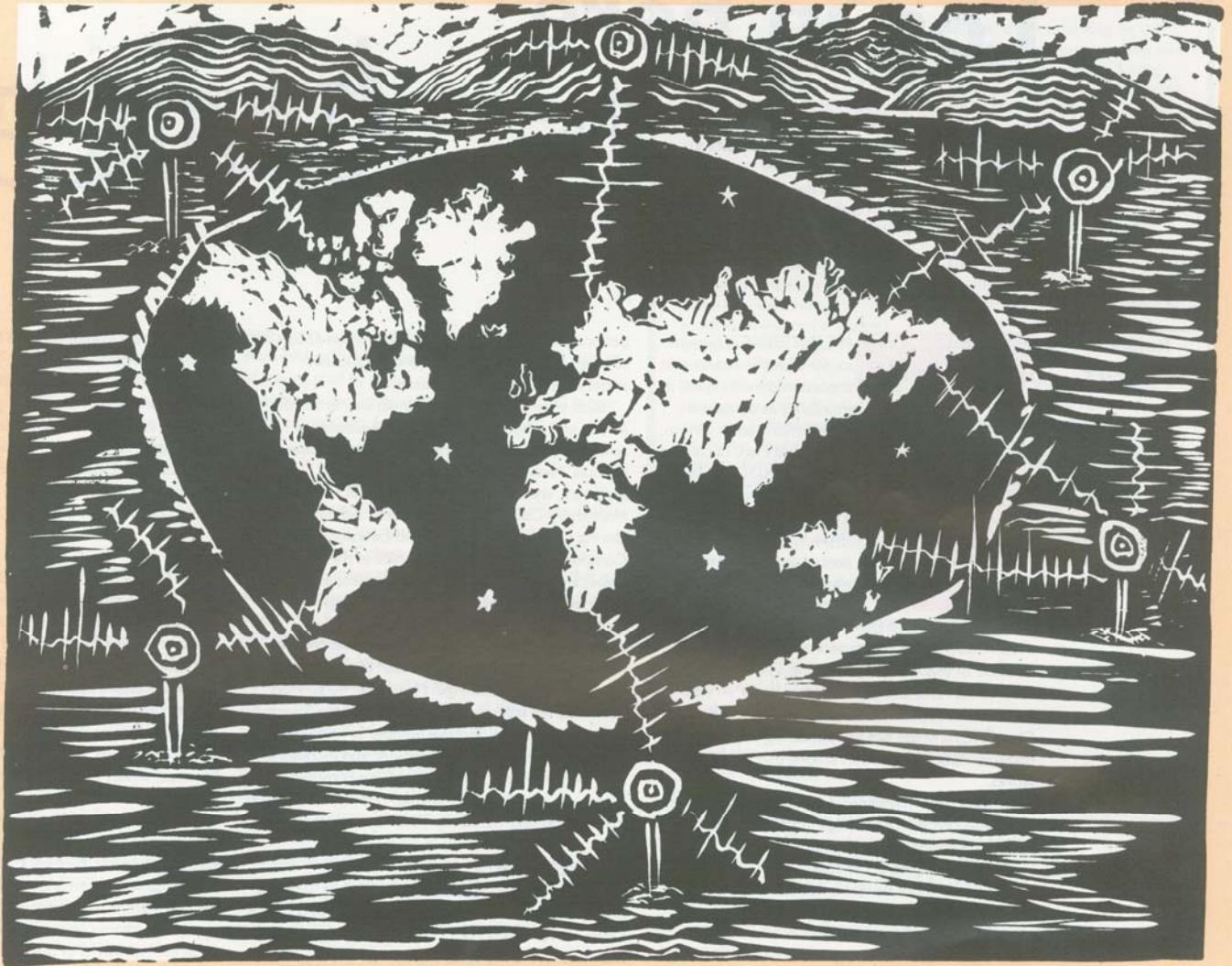
Also singled out for special mention was Donna Hornby (*Natal Witness*) who spent two months living in destitute communities.

Judges: Prof Guy Berger, Rhodes Journalism Department (ex-South editor) Shamim Meer, consultant, Jeanette Minnie, Director, Freedom of Expression Institute.

The South African Award for Courageous Journalism, worth R7000, is sponsored by the British-based Ruth First Memorial Trust. It was previously awarded to Enoch Sithole, of *New Nation*, for his exposé of the military signal that led to the assassination of Matthew Goniwe. The award will be made again in 1996, for work conducted during 1995/6.

● Deadline for submission is August 1, 1996.

INTERNET FOCUS



@34 **Log in here** for
the African
@titude

@41 On **e-haves** and
other things

@45 Of **copper wire**
and press
freedom

@38 The gatekeepers
or the
barbarians?

@43 Not just a
plaything of the
North

@39 Into the **wired**
blue yonder

@47 Africa: cyclists
on the
superhighway

Log in here for the

African

Roland
Stanbridge

THE INTERNET, despite its 40-50 million users and explosive growth, is still in its infancy as a popular global information system. Three years ago hardly anyone outside a university had even heard of it. Then came the World Wide Web (WWW)—that part of the Internet that allows colour graphics, and "clickable" hypertext links that can lead to information residing on any of seven million networked computers around the world. Because of this we are witnessing a publishing revolution. Also, the ease of interactivity — via electronic mail, discussion groups, Internet Relay Chat (IRC) and the like — is enabling a communication revolution among users around the world.

In computer magazines we read how those with high speed access can indulge in video conferencing, listen to real-time audio, and play with the Internet's emerging 3D virtual reality technologies.

But this issue of *Review* is not concerned with these latest bells and whistles. Most of the contributors are South Africans, concerned with how information technologies can be used for the benefit of the new South Africa, for Africa as a whole, and their impact on the media.

In the US there are about 50 telephone lines per 1000 inhabitants. Sweden, where I live, leads the world with 68 lines per 1000 inhabitants. Dave Wilson, Rhodes University academic and

contributor to this focus, tells us that in Africa probably only one person in 1000 has access to a telephone. *Mail & Guardian's* Bruce Cohen, in his contribution, comments that "millions of people from Angola to Afghanistan will never be wired to a lightbulb, let alone the information highway, by 2004. We know that millions of young people in our own country will never touch a PC keyboard in their lifetimes".

■ SCHOOLS

This is no cause for despondency. Not everyone has to have a computer. If there is the

political will to provide global information access at schools, in libraries, other public places, then society could still benefit greatly.

Such schemes are already underway in South Africa, and school networking is developing in several areas. There is already a Western Cape Schools' Network, the Pretoria Education Network, the Eastern Cape SchoolNet Project, and Maritzburg College online (in KwaZulu/Natal). During October an Internet and Educational Computing Conference took place in the Western Cape, and reports from the conference, available on Internet, were published by Western Cape school children!

In Sweden there is a strong belief that children need to become "Internet literate" to deal with the emerging Information Age. More than 40 schools now have full Internet access as part of the Swedish SchoolNet project, and the number is rising fast.

There are many such programs, and increasingly schoolchildren around the world can communicate with each other via the Internet, both by e-mail, and in real-time text-based environments, such as IRC.

■ GOVERNMENTS

Several governments have WWW sites, with the quality of information varying greatly. Canada has an Open Government pilot project providing access to the House of Commons, the Senate, the Supreme Court, and various federal departments and agencies. You can even listen to the national anthem.

Vast amounts of US Government data are available at its FedWorld site, which describes itself as "a one-stop location for the public to locate, order and have delivered to them, U.S. Government information."

In South Africa increasing amounts of information are being made available at the Internet site of the South African Government of National Unity. Minister of Justice Dullah Omar is among those currently exploring how to use new technology to promote open government and two-way communication with the people.

Internet connectivity and activity is clearly taking off in South Africa. This is the time for open debate and the formation of policies about how best to move forward with the Internet.

Let us hope for an open policy of electronic information flow in South Africa. After a recent past of censorship, Total Strategy information control, psychological warfare, repression of journalists, and news media concerned primarily with white society, change is suddenly possible. We're already seeing falling newspaper readership, 80 new radio stations licensed this year... In this situation of flux, the Internet should be fully exploited in strivings to promote information democracy.

At a recent conference on future communication policy, Professor Guy Berger, head of the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University, urged the government to improve its internal communication, upgrade its poor media liaison performance, and promote the communication potential of citizens by subsidising community radio stations and developing interactive online communications, such as Internet e-mail.

■ INITIATIVES

There are already a number of innovative and progressive communication initiatives in southern Africa, including MisaNet (see David Lush article), and SangoNet, a regional electronic information and communications network for development and human rights workers, *Mayibuye*, the journal of the ANC is online, as is the Centre for Democratic Communications, and the ANC Information Services, which is an excellent guide to southern African electronic resources.

Internationally, Greenpeace, Amnesty International, Unicef, Friends of the Earth, Rainforest Action Network and many other humanitarian and environmental organisations offer excellent archives of information, and often up-to-the-minute reports on current campaigns.

In fact, all forms of publishing, formal and informal, are flourishing on the Internet. Within two years more than 600 newspapers, nearly 650 magazines, and over 400 radio and TV sites have been established.

Many are going online for fear of being left behind, others because of new possibilities. Former *Rolling Stone* editor Michael Goldberg publishes the rock-and-roll publication *Addicted to Noise* because "... the Net right now is the best communications medium available to disseminate integrated images, text, sound and video to a worldwide audience. It's instantaneous".

Some are just taking advantage of this new low-cost opportunity to publish widely. As an example, some friends and I publish *Orbit*, an online travel guide born on the Net. We're currently getting some 7 000 "hits" a day. Indeed, the entire international travel industry is rushing to be online — airlines, travel agents, tourist boards, resorts, hotel chains, the Lonely Planet series, the Kruger National Park — all of it.

Researchers are publishing, industry is publishing, poets and artists are publishing. The geeks and the freaks and the cyberpriests are all there too. But so what. Diversity is part of human society. We've all heard the hype about pornography on the Internet, and the thought strikes me: although the Internet is my information medium of choice, I have never seen any pornography, though I have time and again encountered it on TV. On the Internet you choose what kind of information you want to consume.

cyber library

Search the past year's
Mail&Guardian ... free
of charge, and with
just a few mouse-clicks.

eM&G

The Electronic
Mail&Guardian

<http://www.mg.co.za/mg/>

@titude

But back to publishing...

Some online publications are already operating at a profit, either through advertising, like *Aftonbladet* in Sweden, the *Thomas Register* in the US, and South Africa's *Financial Mail*; through sponsorships or through various fee-based services — like Time Inc., which attracts some 3.5 million readers to its WWW site each week.

DIFFERENCES

There are interesting qualitative differences between print and online versions of publications. In mid-1994 my colleague Mark Comerford and I put up the first Swedish newspaper on the Net, *Aftonbladet*. The first issues tried to duplicate the print version electronically, but soon the understanding arose that we were dealing with a new medium with new possibilities. Information can be continuously updated. San Jose's online Mercury Center for example, revises its breaking news headlines hourly. Errors can be corrected whenever detected. The structure need not follow a first page to last page format. Geographical boundaries disappear, and electronic media can reach global audiences. Space is no longer a problem — "The Net allows us to publish in depth," writes Cohen.

Today *Aftonbladet* does not regard itself as a newspaper company, but an information company, providing news and entertainment and facilitating communication via a variety of platforms — print, CD, radio, television, Internet, video and fax.

In this issue of *Review* Neil Jacobsohn, general manager of TML's electronic media, comments that at Times Media Ltd the realisation grew "that we were not putters of ink on paper. Rather, we were creators and vendors of content, and increasingly the medium by which we delivered this content would become less important."

The electronic version of the *Chicago Tribune* is available on the America Online network as *Chicago Online*. It is attempting to re-invent itself as the community's primary online resource, and according to writer Alison Steube "its goal is to put a city, not a newspaper, into cyberspace".

In a recent e-mail interview with Rhodes journalism student Michele Aires, Irwin Manoim, an editor at the electronic *Mail & Guardian* (eM&G) said the long-term commercial goal was to set up a site which behaved like a village mall, "where people can meet, chat, read the news and gossip and most important, shop. We have a seven-stage plan to proceed from where we are now (recycling the print version) into creating various different e-zines with a life and character of their own, one dealing with arts, music, cyberculture and the like, one dealing with technology, etc. etc."

The only obstacle, said Manoim, was that the Web was still in its infancy in South Africa. "Most local Internet users have e-mail and nothing else;

advertisers are still unsure about the new technology; there isn't yet an American-style culture of buying stuff by credit card over the line; our own Internet providers do not yet have a "secure" server for commercial transactions."

INTERACTIVITY

Interactivity is one of several dynamic factors that suddenly become possible with electronic publishing. For Cohen, what makes the Internet such an important new publishing medium is that it allows information to be placed in context, and true interaction between journalists and their readers can take place.

To promote interactivity, the eM&G has an e-mail discussion forum where "readers" talk to each other, comment on stories in the paper, debate issues in SA society, get into furious arguments with one another, and even plan real-life parties together. ANC MP Willie Hofmeyr is a frequent participant in the discussions.

The innovative Internet magazine *HotWired* links stories to "threads", a set of bulletin board discussions that allow users to join ongoing conversations about issues raised in the main story.

Aftonbladet, using IRC technology, invites readers to join in real time text-based discussions.

It is now common practice to include writer's e-mail addresses — often hyperlinked to their byline — resulting in much direct dialogue between journalists and their readers.

ONLINE RESEARCH

In 1991 — long before the advent of Internet publishing, Tom Koch wrote "Journalism for the 21st Century" — a visionary book at the time, in which he predicted that online data technologies would empower journalists "by providing them with information equal to or greater than that possessed by the public or private official".

An early British example was an ITV Channel 4 documentary *The Scottish Eye*, produced by investigative journalist Duncan Campbell in May 1992.

The subject was William Jarrett, then Professor of Medicine at Glasgow School of Medicine, regarded by many as the scientist most likely to produce a vaccine against AIDS. A key figure at various international AIDS conferences, Jarrett had received millions of pounds in grants to pursue his research.

For years journalists unquestioningly cited what Jarrett had to say about himself, and one could read stories such as: "In the year 2000 the world may think of Glasgow as a place where a tiny team of scientists developed a weapon to fight the biggest threat to civilisation since the Atom bomb — Aids. The scientist who could put Glasgow on the map in

Don't be fooled...

...by the commonplace observation that "Nobody owns the Internet, nobody controls it". The cables have owners, the information meets gateways. Internet providers can and do act as censors. Surveillance is more than possible...

Around the world the Internet has its enemies, who fear open access to information and want to control it. Encryption of information is already banned in France. Obviously the French government doesn't want its citizens writing anything the authorities can't decode. The only other countries with such laws are Iraq and Russia, although in September the 34-nation Council of Europe agreed to outlaw strong encryption products which do not make "keys" available to governments. This may soon become law. In the US the security authorities are feverishly keen to have access to

all information flowing on the Net. In China there are less than 10 000 Internet users. To get access, you have to prove to the Chinese Academy of Sciences that you need it for research purposes. In Hong Kong there is huge Internet activity, and one wonders what 1997 will bring in this regard!

Only last week a network systems operator at Stockholm University proudly told me he could produce detailed reports of Internet activities by users at the university. "I can analyse what information users have downloaded, and where they got it from" he said, apparently oblivious to the invasion of privacy this entailed.

"Behind the hype," writes Misa's information co-ordinator, David Lush, "the Internet remains vulnerable to the same abuse — censorship, propaganda, regulation and monopolisation — as other, more conventional media".

this way is Scottish genius Professor Bill Jarrett..." (*Glasgow Herald*, 8 December 1989).

Campbell searched in Medline, the major electronic source for biomedical literature, and discovered that research claims being made by Jarrett were completely false!

Today, the ability to interrogate databases is increasingly regarded as a basic requisite skill for journalists. In the US several stories generated with the assistance of computer-aided research have resulted in the coveted Pulitzer Prize. At the *Philadelphia Inquirer* one cannot rise beyond cadet reporter status without being competent in using international databases.

Around the world schools of journalism are restructuring their curricula to include instruction in computer-assisted research and reporting.

In September this year, in his inaugural speech as the new head of Rhodes University's Department of Journalism and Media Studies, Professor Berger told the gathered dignitaries:

"Along with the new media comes the need for enhanced research and analytical skills, and the ability to sift, separate and link levels of information. Our students will increasingly have to think up their stories in various levels of complexity and comprehensiveness. Operating in a world of hypertext will also require a broad liberal arts and scientific knowledge, in order to make the links between information..."

Mid-career journalists everywhere are reschooling themselves. During the past year more than 250 radio, TV

cyber smalls

TELL the world about it. Place a classified advert on the World Wide Web with the Mail&Guardian — for free!

Just e-mail us your birth and marriage notices; love letters, personals; goods or accommodation wanted or for sale; public events or free happenings.

* For full details, visit our site at <http://www.mg.co.za/mg/classifieds/>

eM&G

The Electronic Mail&Guardian

and print workers in Sweden have attended Internet research courses at the Department of Journalism in Stockholm. In January 1996 the entire MNet Carte Blanche team in Johannesburg plans to go "back to school" to learn electronic research methods — how to interrogate global databases and use the Internet as a tool.

An ever-increasing number of journalists use the Internet to communicate, to track down experts in various subjects, to identify trends and attitudes, to monitor debates, to gather statistics, to search in libraries, to obtain a variety of viewpoints, to uncover new sources of information, to assemble background facts, to enquire into esoteric subjects, to extract and analyse data from databases...

When major news breaks — the assassination of Rabin, the Kobe earthquake, the Bosnian peace agreement, whatever — wired journalists around the world collaborate with each other to share sources, give tips and information. Web sites are instantly created to provide focal points for those needing information. The Poynter Institute of Media Studies in Florida keeps up to date guides for journalists covering breaking news.

NEW TOOLS

As the information available via the Internet continues to increase, a wide range of new tools and techniques for dealing with mega amounts of data is arising. In just the past few months a number of powerful new easy-to-use "search engines" have emerged on the Web. Employing artificial intelligence, natural language searching, relevance ranking and full-text search capability, they can examine millions of documents within seconds and retrieve those that match your search criteria.

Some electronic publications, like the eM&G, have searchable archives.

The powerful tools are fast forging the Internet into the world's most sophisticated and complete research environment. One of them, Hytelnet, provides direct access to computers housed in libraries around the world. One can search the catalogues and order literature. Hytelnet can also link one to the world's major commercial database hosts, such as Dialog and Nexis/Lexis, allowing one to search among many millions of documents.

Journalists needing additional information, or expert opinion on a subject, can send a query to Profnet, from whence it is forwarded by e-mail to universities all over the world, and finally to those academics and researchers specialising in the particular topic.

Communication is a major aspect of Internet activity, and tens of thousands of subjects are constantly being discussed and debated in the so-called newsgroups. There are Internet tools which can search backwards in time through all these debates, and extract those that relate to ones subject of interest. SiftNews, a tool developed at Stanford University, can continuously monitor all ongoing newsgroup discussions, filter out those that match your criteria, and send them to you as e-mail.

The entire *Encyclopaedia Britannica* is available online (to subscribers) and it plans to become a complete knowledge base, being continuously updated and linked to other relevant sites. For example, an article on the Hubble telescope could be linked to a Nasa site where pictures from the space telescope are being continuously displayed.

At Stockholm's renowned Karolinska research hospital a friend of mine Dr Gudmundur Axelson regularly consults the Internet for new information which he knows is probably not in the text books. There is even a complete Virtual Hospital, where both laypersons and medical researchers can go for help ...

The entire works of Shakespeare are on the Net, searchable, and with words hyperlinked to a dictionary of terms. Project Gutenberg, with a goal of publishing 10 000 classic books on the Internet within the next four years, already has 250 titles online. You can search for words or phrases, or download the entire text.

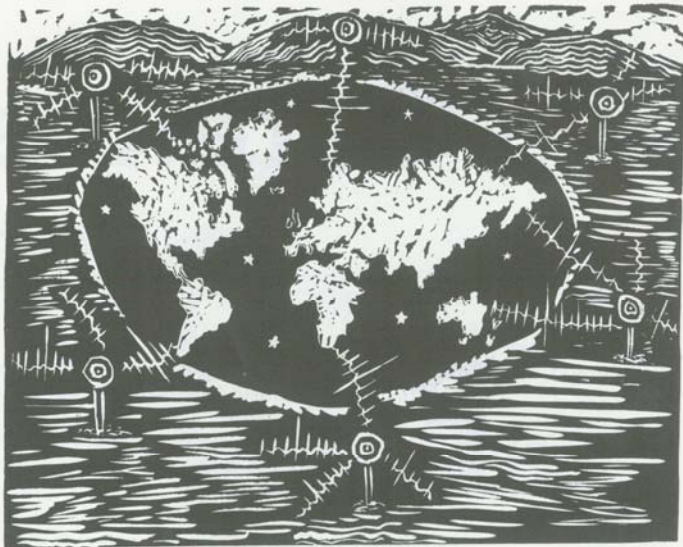
YAST

Actually, the information available on the Net is so vast, it is almost impossible to summarise "what is out there". Some 10 000 new host computers are added each day. As much information as the entire *Encyclopaedia Britannica* is added every two days. To belittle the Internet, to describe it as "only" this or "only" that, is to display a failure of the imagination. No one can grasp it in its entirety. Any one person can only understand it in part. There is something there for everyone, and it's big enough for all. Its impact on communication around the world is profound, and it is changing the way we present, access and think about information.

In his article in this issue, Andrew Morris, computer correspondent for *The Argus*, comments that information is not knowledge. Jacobsohn makes the same point: "Unlimited access to information does not mean knowledge or wisdom. Facts in isolation remain just that." Jacobsohn is making the point that placing information in context is the key skill of newspapering, "not a skill that can lightly be emulated by the New Age publishers".

I am not so convinced. Some of the New Age publications on the Internet are pretty good, both visually and content wise. Take a look at *Firehorse*, an Australian rave review newcomer aimed at youth that has never existed in print. It attracts tens of thousands of readers daily. I believe that traditional news providers are going to be — are already being — challenged by all manner of new "content providers" who suddenly have access to this medium of global communication and publishing.

Remember, it wasn't so long that typographers bewailed the advent of desktop publishing, and we heard all that nonsense about 20 different typefaces on a page. What actually emerged was a huge flourishing of design talent, as access to typefaces



and layout tools was taken out of the hands of the few. Now we are seeing a similar phenomenon with publishing on the Internet.

CITIZEN-FOCUSED JOURNALISM

Finally, I believe that in South Africa, the Internet could be the medium for a new, and necessary, citizen-focused journalism. The world has been watching South Africa for a long time. Now that apartheid has gone, how is this affecting the daily lives of the people of South Africa?

As of old, the foreign correspondents mostly live in, and report out of, Johannesburg. They tell us of high political happenings and car hijackings. Gravy train corruption and serial murders. But precious little about the people, about their hopes and fears, about how life is or is not changing for them.

Grahamstown's *Grocotts Mail* may be the oldest newspaper in South Africa, but it certainly doesn't represent the tens of thousands of people living almost on its doorstep. The nearby East London *Daily Dispatch* hardly seems to realise they exist either. Yet it wasn't so long ago that these very people lived in constant fear of the horror weapons and riot vehicles of the Apartheid regime. Who is going to tell us about these people? What do they have to say about their own situation? The world certainly won't learn anything from the foreign correspondents either, for whom Grahamstown is no more than the annual Arts Festival phenomenon.

A small start was made recently, when school children from a Grahamstown township wrote stories about life around them, and published on the Internet (<http://www.ru.ac.za/departments/journ>). In an article titled "High Failure Rates In Black Schools", Nomatamsanqa Matiwana wrote that high failure rates in Grahamstown are caused by a shortage of teachers.

"When there are no teachers in schools, there are no leaders for tomorrow. The students depend on teachers for knowledge, they need them. We appeal to the government to do something about this. Without education there is no future. We need help as soon as possible. I hope that a solution to this problem will be found soon."

The voice of youth. Let's hear the voices of many more South Africans.

Roland Stanbridge is a former South African journalist who now teaches electronic research and electronic publishing at the Department of Journalism and Communication, Stockholm University, Sweden.

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The Gatekeepers or the Barbarians?

Stephen D.
Isaacs

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PRESUMING — and this is no minor presumption — that multimedia journalism becomes widespread, just who will research and collect and display this unprecedented wealth of information — this combination of video, text, photographs, animations, graphics, voice, and who knows what else? Will it be computer wizards? Cyberspace entrepreneurs? Librarians?

The fact is, it had better be journalists.

The best journalists — I have been lucky enough to know many of them over the last three generations — share a common denominator: they trust only what they dig up themselves. They insist on always seeing things firsthand, on taking nobody's word for anything, on approaching everything and everyone sceptically. They assume a missionary's role: they must protect their public from the charlatans.

Many of those superior journalists reacted with disdain and distrust a generation ago when people called researchers set foot in newsrooms. But researchers quickly proved to be of immense value in finding information, so most journalists welcomed their help. And journalists still controlled what to look for, how to recognize it, and what to do with it. They provided the critical element — news judgment.

Now, as new forms of media emerge, good journalists will again need to adapt to new kinds of help while still insisting that in the broad sense, no one else can do their job for them.

That means that remaining a superior journalist is about to become umpteen times harder than it has been. But if good journalists fail to take on this new and formidable challenge, the computer whizzes and champions of glitz may in effect capture journalism and become the real masters of the universe of media in an ever-blossoming media age. The stakes are enormous.

The fact is, the new computer entrepreneurs are itching for the existing, dedicated journalistic entrepreneurs to leave an opening.

Among those itchy fellows is one named Bill Gates. His breathless little company, the Microsoft Corporation, not long ago hired a former journalist as its director of news. Likewise, Bell Atlantic, Pacific Bell, AT & T, Tele-Communications, Inc., Viacom, you name it, are all now watching and getting ready.

What will the good journalists need to learn to ensure that they are the ones doing the journalism that underlies those big bucks?

They will need to know what's available out there in cyberspace; to know what's appropriate to link to the subject on which they're reporting; to know how to find it, and link it, and display it. To know how to structure stories in new ways that take advantage of this new blend of media forms.

Here's an example:

We are covering the OJ Simpson case. The issue becomes the reliability of the testing of deoxyribonucleic acid — the macromolecule known as DNA. Instead of just reporting the surface (what's said in court, what this or that expert says in a short quote or even shorter soundbite, etc.), we can show our public how the testing of DNA actually happens. We can assemble a series of stories ranging from the very simplest inverted pyramid model, six or eight paragraphs long, to (just click here) stories mixed with graphics and full-motion video that allow our audience to take its time and in effect see documentaries and peer through microscopes and scanners and read dozens and dozens of articles.

Instead of just listening to sound bites from this or that expert, our readers/viewers will be able to see and hear actual interviews in full at a pace at which they want to read and hear and absorb. For those who want the surface, it is there. Those who want to pursue more deeply can do that, just as far as they wish.

I started doing a bit of research into DNA in cyberspace the other day. I used one of the browsing devices for what passes for an information superhighway right now — the Internet — and simply specified the three letters DNA.

Within five seconds, my computer screen was displaying the titles of hundreds of recent articles about DNA from a broad range of publications. I started reading one article after another — researching a story the "old" way in the last quarter of this century.

The difference is that with the tools now available, I can bring relevant parts of this research into my new media story, and flag them by little icons (click here) where appropriate. The parts that are so flagged may lead to photographs, animations, video, sounds, interviews, etc., which can pop on the screen if and when the reader/viewer/listener designates.

This new journalism ought to be able to demystify complex subjects, subjects even as complex as DNA matching.

So back to the question, who will control this process?

Will it be men and women like those who run the best of today's journalistic enterprises, people steeped in a tradition of journalistic goals, of public service and of commitment? Or will it be people with more limited priorities, mainly a nice chunk of those billions of dollars?

Stephen D. Isaacs is a professor and associate dean of Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism and co-chair of the university's Center for New Media.

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Into the wired blue yonder

Neil Jacobsohn

IT'S BECOME INCREASINGLY uncomfortable to be a traditional newspaper and magazine publisher over recent years. It's not just that competition has hotbedded up, or that the market is tougher. It's not just difficult economic circumstances or the entry of new international players. It's that someone has moved the entire damn goalposts!

At the heart of the shift is technology, but this is not a technology issue — rather it's an enabling issue.

The historical parallel is the invention of the printing press. Until then, literacy had been the preserve of a religious and social elite. But with mass printing came the start of mass literacy and the industrial revolution. In the same way, without the technology that has turned virtually every desktop computer into a mini printing press, the information revolution could not happen.

It was one thing when inexpensive desktop publishing systems running on standard PCs were able to deliver reasonably sophisticated publications. Distribution remained the key and distribution world-wide remained largely in the hands of the major media groups.

And then along came the on-ramp to the information superhighway, in the form of the Internet — and suddenly everyone was a publisher. Suddenly, electronic upstarts were talking about revered newspapers and magazines as "dead tree editions" and "cobweb publications".

Suddenly smart youngsters with earrings and rude T-shirts were predicting the demise of traditional newspapers and magazines. And equally suddenly, the growth world-wide of users of the Internet and the proprietary on-line services such as CompuServe and America-on-Line was so phenomenal that even the traditional publishers were swept away on the tide. Electronic publishing — and the Internet in particular — became the cover story on *Time*, on *Newsweek*, on *Business Week*, on *Fortune* magazine. Our safe, secure world was changing.

From inside the publishing industry, it was both bewildering and scary. The cyber-kids heralding our death spoke a language most publishers only half-understood. Indeed, five minutes study of the industry revealed that it was largely a world of vapourware, of vision more than reality. No-one really knew — and no-one really knows today — where the information highway was leading, or what it really was.

Even so, what a seductive vision! Unlimited volumes of information, infinitely searchable, including text, animation, sound, graphics and video,

delivered live, up to the minute, to educated, literate and technologically-aware consumers. A publisher's dreams come true.

But the newspaper industry values its cynicism, and in the face of this techno-onslaught the industry was initially slow to respond. It was the new-age publishers — from Microsoft at the top end to those scruffy cyber-nerds who seemed so contemptuous of our traditions — who took the lead in producing the first content for the superhighway.

From inside, our torpor seemed understandable. Journalism is not exactly a stranger to its own brand of arrogance. Newspapermen and women have a special impudence, believing no-one understands their markets as they do.

Suddenly these conventional wisdoms were challenged. Some in the industry feigned indifference, some expressed fear. But a handful started realising we were not seeing a fad, but a genuine shift in the way people were consuming information. The first lane of the information superhighway had opened for traffic.

Slowly, into the thick skulls of editors and newspaper managers like myself, crept the awareness that our traditional role as the core provider of information to the community was facing a challenge as never before. We'd fought the immediacy of radio, but had held our ground on the basis of radio's transient nature. Television had rocked us with its visual impact, but we had claimed the high ground of interpretation and analysis.

But here was a medium that combined the immediacy of radio with the visual impact of TV and could offer infinitely more analytical depth than any newspaper. And worse, it was reasonably cheap, easily accessible and the barriers to entry were so low as to be almost non-existent.

It dawned soon that this was the most wonderful publishing opportunity, rather than a threat. Publishing visionaries argued that if we were to defend and maintain our role as primary providers of information to our communities, we had better embrace, understand and master the new technologies.

Thus there grew, within Times Media Ltd as an example, the realisation that we were not putters of ink on paper. Rather, we were creators and vendors of content, and increasingly the medium by which we delivered this content would become less important.

Certainly it was high time to re-examine our attitudes towards our customers. In the new business world, for example, there are increasing numbers of people who want and need

market-moving information as it happens. Our response? To tell our readers to wait until the newspaper thumps onto their driveway at 6.30am next day — carrying yesterday's news.

Not for a moment is this a suggestion that print is dead or even ill. Print will be with us for decades to come. Electronic publishing does offer immense advantages, but as many disadvantages. It's complicated, it's slow, it requires costly, complex equipment, and its very vastness intimidates users. Print publications, on the other hand, despite obvious weaknesses such as lack of immediacy, are cheap, easily accessible, simple to navigate, immensely portable, and familiar to almost everyone on earth.

But that does not mean that electronic publishing cannot develop in parallel to print.

In embracing this thought, TML came to appreciate the value of the massive information resources we hold — resources that we traditionally used once and then threw away — or even worse, that we do not use at all. How much information do we publish on an average day compared to what we discard?

With this realisation grew the key concept — that of context — which underpins my contention that publishers who recognise the sea-change taking place can become the leading information providers on the information highway.

Paradoxically, unlimited access to information does not mean knowledge or wisdom. Facts in isolation remain just that. Further, the very vastness of the Internet makes it an intimidating place, and its lack of context often leads to a lack of credibility.

It's here that opportunity knocks for traditional publishers. If we're doing our job properly, our readers know and trust us. We can provide the credibility often missing from on-line information. In essence, good newspapers can provide the context to the information tide.

Editors, hopefully skilled, plough through the fields of facts and, hopefully, publish the wheat and discard the chaff. Experienced journalists take decisions about what news is significant. Those become the major news stories, while matters of less importance are cut to a few paragraphs or discarded entirely.

It is this placing of information in context that is the key skill of newspapering, and this is not a skill that can lightly be emulated by the new-age publishers.

Now imagine if we combine the skilled, sensitive provision of context with the ability of the microchip to scan and search vast quantities of information. Imagine converting a newspaper from a



two-dimensional news-sheet into a multidimensional information resource, placing events and people in historical perspective.

And of course, it's happening already, as anyone who regularly surfs the Net will know. It is newspaper publishers who are creating the leading information sites on the World Wide Web - not by simply converting newspapers into an electronic format, but by skilfully blending the best of their

traditional craft with the best of bleeding edge technology.

Visit the *Electronic Telegraph* for example (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk>) to see how the news archives are used to add depth and context to breaking events. Look into the *Wall Street Journal* Website (<http://update.wsj.com>) to see how the Briefing Book is used to provide real-time, on-line profiles of news-breaking companies.

And visit TML's first site, the *Financial Mail* Internet edition (FMI) (<http://www.atd.co.za/fm>) to see if we're keeping our promise to add value.

Are these isolated examples? As I write this story in Johannesburg in mid-October, there are, according to today's *Newslink* news directory site (<http://www.newslink.org/menu.html>) no fewer than 496 newspapers on the Web, 369 broadcast sites, 508 magazines and 467 special news sites (newsletters, news agencies and the like). The fact is that newspaper publishers are now aggressively fighting for their rightful place on the information highway.

But at the end of the day, economics is the realpolitik of publishing, as it is of any industry. Is there money to be made to sustain the new journalism?

I believe the answer lies in this quotation from the August 1995 edition of an American industry newsletter, *Interactive Publishing Alert*: "In a few short months, the on-line advertising market has exploded from almost non-existent to practically ubiquitous."

Equally compelling is the outcome of a poll of the top 200 advertisers in the US by *Interad Monthly*. As of July 1995, only one in 10 had an on-line advertising presence. But by end-1995, almost half intended to be advertising on the Internet. Now there's a business opportunity if ever one has slapped me through the face.

And think about the potential power of on-line advertising as a medium. The link is one-to-one between the advertiser and customer. It's like telling the reader to get up out of the chair, to hop into the car and to drive down to the advertiser's premises for a visit.

It's interactive. The reader has to participate, to call for or reject information. And it's vast. The advertiser can offer virtually limitless quantities of information.

Of course, it's not that simple. This isn't good, old fashioned "in yer face" advertising. If the material is not compelling, relevant, entertaining, amusing or fun, the reader will simply bale out. So it is not only publishing that is facing a revolution. The advertising industry too needs to redefine its focus.

But there seems little doubt there is a market out there. Just think about the people who are perusing the Net. By definition they're literate. If they're able to afford a decent computer system and access to the Net, or if they work in a place with access, by definition they're likely to have reasonable disposable income, or at least they're at a university or college, which makes them equally desirable from an advertiser's viewpoint.

It's this that is leading advertisers on *ESPN SportsZone* (<http://ESPN.SportsZone.com>) to pay \$100 000 per advertising site. Or \$50 000 on the *Wall Street Journal* site. Or £25 000 for an *Electronic Telegraph* advertising spot.

And it is this that has enabled TML to successfully sell sufficient South African corporate advertising on its pioneer *Financial Mail* site to cover its costs and thus open the door to a range of new TML Internet titles in the coming year. Even on the southern tip of Africa, the future is here.

Neil Jacobsohn is General Manager: Electronic Media of Times Media Limited. He is tasked with pathfinding the publishing future for TML. His job is to identify new media opportunities and to turn them into paying businesses. A journalist by background, Neil moved from the Deputy Editor's chair of Business Day into TML group management in 1988.

Some of our biggest reasons for believing in big business are some of our smallest.



A few of the business leaders of tomorrow at play.

If our children are to inherit a country worth inheriting, a financially strong country, big business becomes more important than ever before.

For one thing, like other small countries with big business, it is big business that enables South Africa to compete in the international markets and be a big earner of foreign exchange.

For another, it is big business that provides a stable base from which medium and small business can grow and expand on

a scale significant enough to become major contributors to the wealth- and job-creation processes of the new South Africa.

And that is really what a healthy economy is all about, a mix of big, medium and small businesses operating internationally and internally off a strong, competitive base.

Big business and the South African economy. Inseparable if the new South Africa is to have an economy worthy of generations to come.



ANGLO AMERICAN CORPORATION OF SOUTH AFRICA

17899



On e-haves and other things

Andrew Morris

THE INTERNET MAY BE the sexiest subject on the planet, but when you stop and think, in one way it is merely another tool for accessing information — call it an electronic Swiss army knife if you want, but a tool nonetheless. This may sound like blasphemy considering the number of people accessing the Internet every day; the number of companies offering services around the Internet; the attendant news coverage of occasional criminal or immoral activity on the Internet and the sheer volume of information circling the globe.

It is a power tool for the "gold-collar worker", the term used to describe individuals whose main task is the collection, analysis, presentation and use of information.

Information is the capital of the post-industrial age and potentially the division of the population into e-haves and e-havenots. As the agrarian revolution established land as wealth, and the industrial revolution established money as wealth, so the information revolution is establishing access to information.

Another point to consider in this information age is that the revolution is fast compared to 500 years for the agrarian and 100 years for the industrial. For the first time in human history we are seeing a radical shift within a single generation, and we have no reference points or past experiences upon which to understand the fundamental changes taking place.

What we can say is that information is the foundation for knowledge and that as access to the information storehouses of the world become available to the masses, the potential for increasing the sum of knowledge is vast. A weekend newspaper contains as much information as an agrarian worker would have been exposed to during his whole lifetime, and this raises another important issue. With information being so readily available in a medium which takes little expertise to present, how does the reader attach importance, and relevance to it as a source?

The answer is in adopting the tried and tested methods of good investigation and objective reporting, and that is why the Internet is merely a tool. It cannot and should not replace knowledge, which is the ability to apply information. We should still take time to delve deep into the storehouses and establish credentials — there is no substitute for legwork.

But what of the information providers? The Internet has been termed the ultimate vanity press, with no rules, no ownership and minimal infrastructure costs to become a presence. While this is a current problem, there is more and more concern being shown for the accuracy and quality of information presented. First, authoritative links to other information sources can be an integral part of the e-document, to support the content. Second, as the number of visitors to a site becomes a differentiating factor, and therefore "hit parades" determine success, it is in the interests of the information providers to adopt a professional approach to content rather than presentation. Third, tools will emerge to give accurate statistics on a number of information attributes, and these could easily become validators to provide the reader with confidence that sources are accurate.

Information and the delivery systems of computer networks are fast becoming the major asset of businesses and organisations. It is estimated that by the turn of the century less than 10 per cent of the world's population will be engaged in the production of food, and little more than 25 per cent in the manufacture of consumer goods. The remainder will be engaged in the collection, analysis and dissemination of information and related products. New industries are emerging all the time to deliver information to an eager consumer market.

Making decisions is a complex activity, but in essence it is the identification of a need, the location of supporting information, consideration of alternatives and the implementation of an action plan. Whether it is a decision of what to do this evening or a long term strategy for a business, the process remains the same. Information sources therefore play an important role for the decision maker — without information a decision may be based on an entirely incorrect premise. With too much information or information presented in a random and unstructured fashion, inertia may cause decisions to be fundamentally flawed if not avoided altogether. We could find ourselves drowning in information, while being starved of knowledge and this more than anything else suggests that new and more sophisticated tools will emerge to manage the flood.

Traditional methods of delivering information are becoming obsolete, particularly where immediacy is the most important consideration. Just look at where we have come from — news of Lincoln's assassination took five days to reach London, news of Kennedy's took five minutes and we all watched the Gulf War live on our televisions. *The Times* of London carried a headline that suggested that ALL passengers on the Titanic were saved when the ship hit the iceberg. General "Stormin' Norman" Swartzkopf said during the Gulf War that future conflicts would be won or lost in the media, and what he is really saying is that information will be the key to future survival.

The Internet is fast becoming a global public utility spread across millions of computers and delivering information access at little cost. We are in effect "plugging in" our information appliances to this utility to retrieve the best information possible to satisfy our needs. While it is not yet a true utility the building blocks are there and it will only be a matter of time before we "get wired" as effortlessly as we switch on a radio or kettle.

These building blocks are global databases, communications technologies and desktop computer applications. It is worth considering these blocks in turn to understand how the Internet is reshaping our understanding of the value of information.

■ GLOBAL DATABASES

Electronic information bases form the core of most businesses, but it is only in the past few years that these storehouses have been recognised as their

wealth. By using computers to analyse large volumes of raw data, consumer habits may emerge which would have been previously impossible to determine. Why in a large US chain of stores do they place 6-packs of beer next to disposable nappies? Reason — most purchases of disposables during evening trading result in the sale of beer — husbands on their way home stop off and the beer is an impulse purchase. Why do banks target the under 14 market for new accounts? Reason — the earlier you open an account the less likely you are to change banks.

Volumes of unstructured data are stored electronically and these are growing all the time. Imagine the volume of transactions going through a supermarket check-out, each and every one giving insights into your life style and spending patterns. What we are moving towards is an era of tools to mine these rich seams of information. These databases exist and without electronic storage it would be impossible to store all this information let alone make sense of it.

■ COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

Global communication is something we take for granted — geo-positional satellites spanning the globe to deliver signals between locations — undersea optical fibre cables linking the continental land masses — houses and buildings connected by simple copper wire to exchanges acting as switches into the global connection. In the same way that the telegraph boomed because of railways, since they offered trans-continental pathways, so the existing telephone system is the backbone of the Internet. The major problem is that this old system was never designed to cater for the volumes of traffic. As we begin to move graphics, photographs and full-motion video along phone lines the bottleneck becomes the technology of the telephone wires. In the USA it is estimated that laying optic fibre in place of copper wire will take \$29 per capita, but would take

years to complete. No matter how much capacity we get there will always be more traffic.

The information superhighway is being built while we travel along and for the foreseeable future the response time will be poor and the true potential unrealised. But, what we will witness is a cycle of incremental improvement and deterioration as capacity increases, applications and users need more capacity and so on.

■ DESKTOP COMPUTER APPLICATIONS

Desktop computers began as a hobbyist's dream and with limited disk storage, memory and display capabilities and were not really capable of much meaningful work. It was first with the Apple and later the IBM PC that a base was established, but no-one really knew how successful the industry was to become. IBM estimated that the total world demand for PCs would be 250 000 and yet its own production exceeded this figure in its second year. In fact, the IBM was built from standard parts because they did not foresee the business capability or its explosion in use.

From the first systems grew the software industry, originally offering limited applications for accounting and document processing. It was all character-based, slow and limited in functionality. Within fifteen years we have reached the point where applications share information which comprises text, video and sound. Add to this the capability to connect across telephone lines and you have a gateway to a massive computer system — almost unlimited.

But we still have a long way to go before computers are as easy to use as other domestic appliances — the QWERTY keyboard, the technical demands and the sheer bulk of the machines will all come under scrutiny as we attempt to reach the point of pervasive computing.

■ FREEDOM OF ACCESS TO INFORMATION

If individual privacy isn't already the first road kill on the information superhighway then it soon will be, is a sentiment voiced by many civil liberties groups, and privacy is currently a hotly debated issue. We will have to balance the desire to access others' information against privacy of our own. It is a trade-off — privacy has to be given up in exchange for economic activity. As we move into a cashless, paperless and digital society this becomes truer, and we will have to be vigilant to ensure that we do not lose our identity.

The other side of the coin is that information should be available and at no cost. Libraries used to be the exclusive domain of monasteries, with books chained to shelves. As publishing and literacy brought the written word to the populace the church began to lose control.

We are soon to see the same with governments and business losing economic control as information filters into the public domain.

It may be beneficial, it may not — but without raising the debate and keeping a watchful eye we may not be able to avoid the extremes — total loss of privacy and the complete breakdown of society. *Noblesse oblige* — position has its responsibilities, is now an individual issue. If we have access to information we have responsibilities to the originators — acknowledgment of sources, accurate reporting and payment where payment is due.

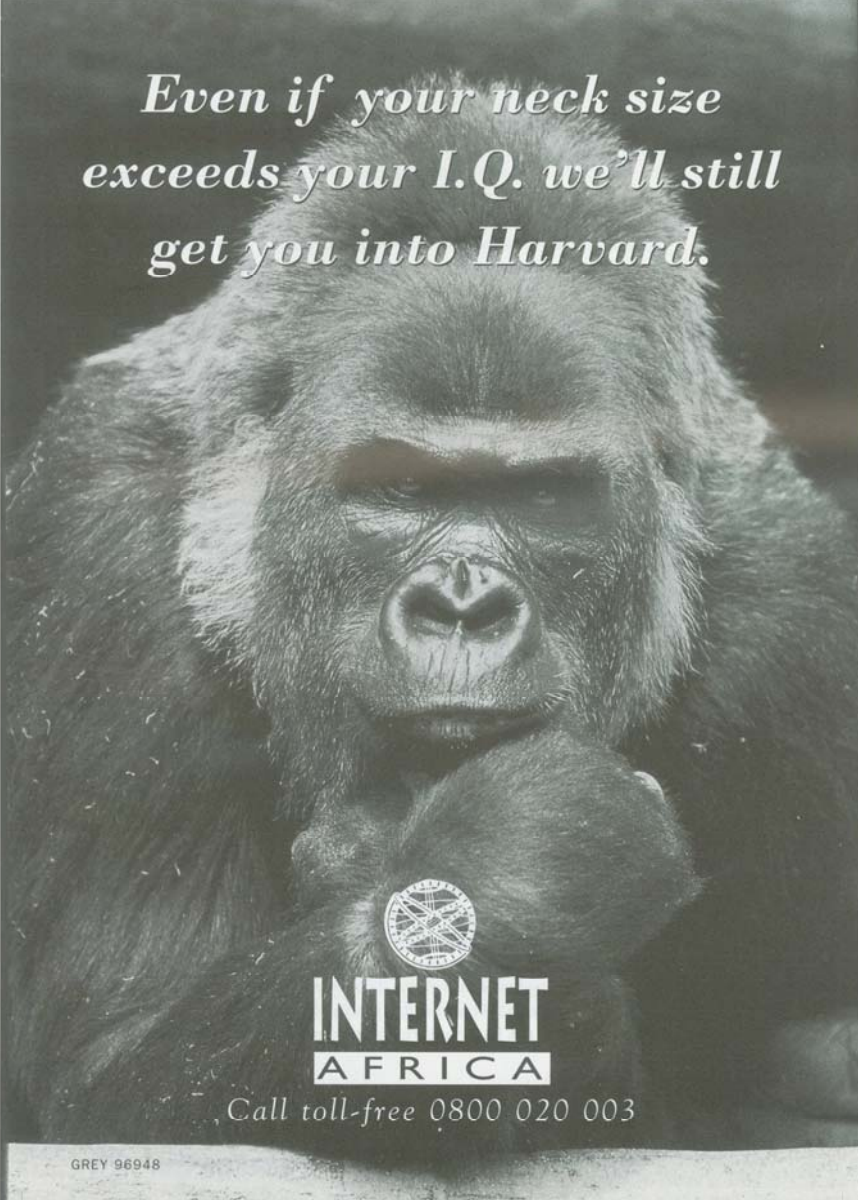
■ LITTLE OR NO COST

If the promise of free and unfettered access to information is to be provided to everyone equally, there must be a reduction in the associated costs. This will require alliances between governments and the telecommunications authorities around the world to adopt a strategy of establishing an infrastructure for the information utility. Right now, the technology, connection and required expertise comes at a price, but since the birth of the personal computer there has been a doubling in speed and functionality every twelve months. Today a desktop computer one thousand times as powerful as early mainframes costs only a fraction of the price. A laser printer in the early 80s would cost R1 million, and now you can pick one up for a couple of thousand Rands that is faster, has better quality output and is more reliable.

Despite the occasional negative press surrounding the Internet, there is a huge community of people who use it daily and this community is doubling every year. In the same way that a few bad drivers don't make you stop using your car, using the Internet doesn't mean you will be the victim of hate mail, information theft or offensive material.

Like it or not the Internet is not going away. Maybe the fall-out from the initial explosion is settling and we are entering a period of consolidation, but to discount it is a dangerous decision to make. To embrace the technology is the only option, so as they say — it's easier to ride a horse in the direction it's going, that way you get to steer a little.

Andrew Morris is the computer correspondent for The Argus and a regular contributor to other computer-related publications. He is now engaged in creating the on-line service of the Independent Newspapers, and continues his research into information ethics. Earlier this year he received a merit award in the IT Journalist of the Year competition.



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exceeds your I.Q. we'll still
get you into Harvard.*


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Not just a plaything of the North

Bruce Cohen

LAST YEAR I WAS INVITED to speak at the first Pan-Arab Newspaper Publishers' Conference in Lebanon. I went to Beirut to share my experience in having launched MisaNet, an Internet service linking several independent newspapers and media resources in Southern Africa. I also told them about the services I had developed for the *Mail & Guardian* (if we only had the Net during PW's states of emergency in the mid-Eighties!), about the potential of this medium to empower and democratise the communication process.

I was there with a mission — to warn the Arab media not to allow the information highway to bypass them; that the Net was not just a plaything of the North, but a powerful liberating information tool for the South too; that if they did not create their own on-ramps they would become squatters in the global village, marginalised at the periphery of a wired world.

My evangelism was met by polite applause and general disinterest. Few of the Arab publishers seemed to give a damn. It took me a while to realise why.

The Net is by its very nature an uncontrollable and open communication space, offering no comfort to the sheiks of Saudi Arabia, the emirs of Qatar and Oman, the Husseins, the Hassads — or their appointed editors and publishers. Cyberspace is simply a threat to their closed and ordered information universe. Correctly, they slammed the door shut.

So I flew home swigging a duty-free bottle of Arak, which softened the rejection somewhat.

A year down the line my zeal for promoting the Net as a liberating force is less missionary, but no less enthusiastic. As I have become more involved in on-line publishing, I have become fascinated by the relationship between the on-line world and the world of ink and paper. How will these "hard" and "soft" media relate in the future and what are the implications for newspapers and journalists?

Statistically, the wired future is apocalyptic: at the current rate of growth, the entire population of the world will be plugged in to the Internet in the first decade of the 21st century, around 2004. This

utterly ludicrous prediction is based on the doubling rate of Internet host computers every six months and a thumbsuck extrapolation of usage (somewhere between 5 and 10 users per host which gives us the current figure of between 20 and 40 million users). We know that tens of millions of people from Angola to Afghanistan will never be wired to a light bulb, let alone the information highway, by 2004. We know that millions of young people in our own country will never touch a PC keyboard in their lifetimes.

Does this mean that newspapers in the (under)developing world which are going on-line are simply elitist and irrelevant? Is being wired just cyber-masturbation? If so, the *Mail & Guardian*, the first newspaper in Africa to go on-line, has a lot to answer for.

But then so too does a paper like the *Post* in Lusaka which, operating in a country which is poorer in every way when compared to ours, now offers a bi-weekly Internet edition of its feisty and fiery journalism. As does the *Namibian* in Windhoek which provides a limited worldwide daily feed through our MisaNet service.

The simple fact is the Internet is a compelling and powerful medium of communication that should be exciting and challenging journalists everywhere. It is a unique medium that holds out great promise for an improvement in both the quality and quantity of our journalism and our role as mediators and interpreters of the shrinking-widening world.

I want to explore some of the key features of the Internet that make it such an important new medium and describe how we at the *Mail & Guardian* are experimenting with this new technology.

■ CONTEXT

Because we're able to store and retrieve digital information so easily on the Internet, we're able to develop a new kind of reporting, one that's been branded "context" journalism.

It means anyone who's wired can follow the *Mail & Guardian's* coverage of any event or issue back in time as a continuous and seamless thread of

information. You don't have to be a researcher or a computer boffin to do this — simply enter our electronic archive at the Worknet gopher site and you can key-word search through more than a year's worth of copy.

We are also able to offer readers a greater continuity of coverage by "re-packaging" running stories on our on-line service. A recent example was the bitter row over the ghost of Steve Biko, sparked by the attempts by Azasm to close white teachers out of black schools. Over a number of weeks the "hard copy" *Mail & Guardian* published several opinion pieces and letters on the issue. We then assembled all these discrete elements — including unpublished material — on our Web site, with hypertext links connecting them, enabling visitors to browse and read the entire debate in context.

There's been excellent work done by other media in this area, such as Newscorp's on-line coverage of the recent Beijing women's conference or CNN's ongoing coverage of the Bosnia crisis where its Web service offers a wide range of background reports, graphics and pictures linked to the running story dispatches.

Providing context and continuity to complex stories is something that the Net can do better than any other medium. In a world of sound-bites and dislocated news items, this is a significant advance.

■ DEPTH

We're able to provide this context because the Net allows us to publish in depth. Our on-line editions can carry stories in their entirety, copy that would, in our "hard" editions, inevitably suffer heavy editing due to space constraints.

A recent *Mail & Guardian* example was the leaked foreign affairs document we published on SA's arms sales policies to the rest of the world. The document offered fascinating insight (on a country by country basis totalling dozens of pages) into government's world view.

In the print edition of the *Mail* we were only able to highlight the mainpoints of the document, but on our Web site that week we published the entire document, offering on-line readers unprecedented

depth of information on the subject. (The large number of visitors to this story from foreign sites, including numerous "hits" from the American.MIL(itary) and .GOV(ernment) domains, was in itself illuminating). The more recent — and somewhat controversial — publication of the full 35 000-word manifesto of the Unabomber is a further illustration of the powerful role the Net can play in disseminating a far greater depth of information. *The Washington Post* (with agreement

of the *New York Times*) just published it on 19 September in its dead tree edition. Thereafter Time Warner and *HotWired* posted the full text on their Web site, attracting immediate worldwide attention. The Net also facilitates the publishing of more balanced coverage. Rebuttals and reaction can be published in full, not simply relegated to the last few paragraphs of a story.

INTERACTIVITY

The unique power of the Net is that it is a truly interactive environment, linking us directly to our readers. Over the last few months, e-mail letters to the editor have rocketed, and we're planning to place all e-mail letters unedited on our Internet site, whether they appear in the print version of the *Mail* or not. There is simply no longer the excuse of "lack of space".

Our readers can also immediately and effortlessly challenge us on our reporting. I've had the experience of being "flamed" (criticised) for a story. My e-mail box was quickly brimming with angry letters that I simply could not ignore.

Being so accessible should make us more accountable, and more careful about what we write.

But by far the most interesting experience in this area has been the *Mail & Guardian* forum, which we launched a year ago. Operating like an electronic mailing list, the forum has become a local cyber-institution, routing thousands of messages a month to members who use it to discuss subjects both trivial and serious.

The forum has had a fascinating spin-off, with members building a strong camaraderie with one another. They've got together for braais in Cape Town and booze-ups in New York. Those living outside SA who have visited the country recently have found a warm bond of friendship with local forum members.

Several senior staffers on the *Mail*, including the editor, are on the forum, and are thus constantly interacting with our on-line community, listening to and participating in debates and discussions that often evolve from *Mail & Guardian* stories.

MEASURABILITY

A rather extraordinary feature of the Net is that it is the most measurable of all media. Its in-built market-research mechanism enables us to gather regular, detailed information about reader preferences and tastes. We run a monthly statistics programme on our Web site which reveals which stories and sections of our on-line service get the most and least "hits".

There's no gut instinct or self-fulfilling and inadequately sampled market research. We can monitor exactly what interests our on-line readers. We also run a monthly interactive competition in which we actively canvas feedback, so we are constantly taking the pulse of our on-line readers. The combination of the Net's interactive feedback loop and the detailed, objective audience research can be of great value to editors and journalists who actually want to listen to their readers. I suspect that in the mahogany rows of many newsrooms, this may not be an altogether attractive idea.

I've covered briefly what I believe are the four key editorially important aspects of on-line publishing — context, depth, interactivity and measurability. Each one of these four areas offers fascinating opportunities for further experimentation and investigation. The learning curve has just begun.

Bruce Cohen is a director of the Mail & Guardian and executive trustee of the SA Newspaper Education trust (SANET). He brought the Mail & Guardian on-line in March 1994.

Who's winning the battle to get more and more South Africans to buy newspapers?

(There's nothing Irish about the answer...)

Over the five year period, 1990 to 1995, there is only one company whose sold newspapers have grown by more than the rate of the population increase. That company is Caxton Newspapers. Our 11 paid papers have put on 24% ABC circulation growth. This is in stark contrast to the biggest publisher of dailies, who've seen circulation slide by 10% in the same period.

In addition, Caxton is a group who has a vigorous empowerment programme. We're bringing newspapers to communities who have never been served by newspapers before. And we're doing it in partnership with people from the communities we aim to serve. In



Alexandra, in Soweto and on the East Rand. And there are more to come...

With a full time training department, and a unique system of awards and incentives, Caxton encourages its journalists to aim high. The payoff comes in the dedicated readership for our free and paid pa-

pers. With an aggregate circulation (including associates) of 1,3 million in 62 communities, Caxton is playing a major role in the creation of a free and informative press in the New South Africa.

Caxton - born, bred and rooted in the RSA.

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of copper wire and press freedom

David Lush

WHEN AFRICAN MEDIA WORKERS penned the 1991 Windhoek Declaration on Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic African Press, the politics rather than the practicalities of media freedom were uppermost in their minds. It was, some say, with heady idealism that they enshrined the notion that the "establishment, maintenance and fostering of an independent, pluralistic and free press is essential to the development and maintenance of democracy in a nation, and for economic development"; an as yet unproved hypothesis which now forms the cornerstone of international media policy in the post New World Information Order era.

However, when the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) was formed in September 1992 to work towards the implementation of the Windhoek Declaration, it became clear that, in southern Africa at least, media freedom and diversity was as much about copper wire and fibre optics as it was about repression, legislation and ownership. The region's dilapidated and expensive postal and telecommunication networks made MISA's task of communicating with, and facilitating communication between, media and media workers in the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) countries a nightmare.

It cost MISA's representative in Angola U\$10 (R35) — a third of an average Angolan editor's monthly salary — to send a one-page fax to MISA headquarters in neighbouring Namibia. It was 330 per cent more expensive for MISA members in Zambia to call MISA HQ as it was for the secretariat to call them. Even so, it still cost MISA HQ the same to phone or fax neighbouring states as it did to call the UK or the USA.

This had major repercussions on MISA's all-important advocacy work. Even when MISA was able to gather adequate information on a violation of media freedom, it took at least two whole days to fax. The information — in the form of a one-page "alert" — to 50 or so media and human rights organisations around the world. The phone bill for faxing out just one alert was in the region of U\$150 (R525), while bad lines often made faxes illegible at the other end. Breaks in transmission made faxing all the more frustrating.

Posting information was similarly migraine-inducing. While MISA's bi-monthly publication, *Free Press*, reached readers in Europe and North America within 10 days of being posted, the same air mail packages took two months or more to arrive at some destinations in the SADC region — sometimes the magazine was never delivered at all! Air mailing one edition of what was then an

eight-page A4 free-sheet cost MISA more than U\$1000 (R3500). (*Free Press* is now a 28-page glossy magazine, which costs more than R5000 per edition to mail out to paying subscribers.)

In short, southern Africa's postal and telecommunication networks are one of the region's most potent forms of censorship. They curtail the right of citizens to "seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media...regardless of frontiers", as laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They also obstruct the "establishment, maintenance and fostering of an independent, pluralistic and free press", which the authors of the Windhoek Declaration believed so essential to social and economic development.

So MISA sought alternative means of communicating, and soon found salvation in cyberspace. A trail had already been laid by the Toronto-based International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX), a network of media freedom organisations around the world linked by electronic mail (e-mail). MISA joined the IFEX network, and overnight the distribution of media freedom "alerts" was reduced to the sending of a single e-mail message (circulated automatically to the 120 or so media and human rights organisations subscribing to IFEX) at the cost of a 10 second local phone call.

This in turn allowed MISA staff more time and money to research and campaign against media freedom violations, the organisation issuing more than 70 alerts during 1994. Within 12 hours of e-mailing out news that journalist Rabuka Chalatshe had been shot by soldiers during last year's coup in Lesotho, MISA had mobilised funds to pay for surgery which saved Chalatshe's leg, not to mention his career.

Once MISA HQ was on-line, the organisation began providing its members with modems and e-mail software of their own, which enabled MISA's constituents to communicate more efficiently and cost-effectively with the secretariat, and vice-versa.

FACT FILE

"MISA is a regional network which seeks to foster free, independent and diverse media throughout southern Africa in the service of democracy and development, as envisaged by the Windhoek Declaration on Promoting an Independent and Pluralistic African Press."

- Launched in September 1992
- Operates in the 11 countries making up the Southern African Development Community (SADC).
- Based in Windhoek, Namibia
- Joined the IFEX network in 1993 to increase international awareness of media freedom violations in southern Africa.
- In 1994, MISA issued via IFEX more than 70 "action alerts" relating to media freedom violations in southern Africa.

MisaNet

- 20 MISA member organisations linked by e-mail to exchange news and information.
- Daily feed of between 10 and 20 stories.

➤ overleaf

Named the MisaNet, this e-mail network also allowed for the exchange of news stories between MISA members, thus breaking their dependency on the war-and-famine copy of international wire services, and sanitised and censored stories from state-controlled agencies for news about the region. Stories were zapped around the region within hours of newspapers hitting the streets in their respective capitals, while the e-mail edition of *Free Press* was delivered to desk-tops world-wide before the (admittedly-more attractive) hard-copy version had even rolled off the presses in Windhoek.

MISA's news sources were further diversified when features from Inter Press Service's (IPS) Africa bureau were brought onto the MisaNet. Similar joint

ventures with other suppliers of "indigenous" news and information are planned, as is the launch of an on-line archive containing — amongst other things — electronic editions of MISA-member publications from throughout the SADC region. The archive will serve as a research tool for MISA members, most of whom are unable to afford time and resources needed to develop their own in-house libraries. Sitting on the Internet, the MISA archive will also be accessible — at a fee — to anyone else needing information on the region.

Some MISA members have developed their own Internet initiatives. South Africa's *Mail & Guardian* newspaper and *The Post* in Zambia now boast tens of thousands of new readers around the world, their World Wide Web sites

prompting one American computer scientist — bored of the corporate overkill which abounds on the Web — to nominate the papers for an "honesty in cyberspace" award.

The opportunities appear limitless; the distribution of photographs, radio soundbites and video footage via the Internet is already a reality, while advances in information technology (IT) also open the way to cheaper printing, new advertising markets, and the potential for narrowing the information gap which exists between the developed and developing worlds.

But behind the hype, the Internet remains vulnerable to the same abuse — censorship, propaganda, regulation and monopolisation — as are other, more conventional media. For starters, journalists are notoriously technophobic, and many — decision makers in particular — have given MISA's Internet evangelism a wide berth.

Matters have been made worse by the lack of local technicians to train and troubleshoot once modems and software have been installed. One newspaper in Francistown, Botswana accidentally trashed their e-mail software several weeks after it was installed, and the nearest technician was 500km away. They have been off-line ever since.

The Internet might be a very appropriate technology, but it still relies totally on telephone lines, which in southern Africa are controlled largely by state-run monopolies. Private Internet service providers are prohibited from setting-up in Botswana, while Internet nodes in many other countries are housed and run by government-funded institutions, notably universities. As Vineeta Shetty of Communications International points out, Africa has the lowest number of telephone lines per person in the whole world; one line for every 235 people, which is around 120 times less than in more developed countries.

There still abound throughout southern Africa computerless newsrooms where journalists rely more on their feet than on the telephone — let alone the Internet — for researching their stories. Rather than empower smaller media operations, the Internet could create a media elite with the means to swamp their less-wired colleagues and competitors — hardly a recipe for media diversity.

Nonetheless, the Internet does provide the media with a unique opportunity to test and hopefully prove the hypothesis put forward by the authors of the Windhoek Declaration. By using IT to break through the information voids which cocoon SADC countries, the media can — in theory — contribute significantly to the social, economic and political development of the region. Tangible success in this regard will provide journalists with an unassailable argument in favour of governments respecting media freedom and diversity.

David Lush is information co-ordinator at the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA)

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Africa: cyclists on the superhighway

Dave Wilson

A RECENT BBC BROADCAST dealing with the Internet gave a figure of one telephone per 100 people as being an average for the African continent. Given the vast differences in

telecommunications infrastructure in this region, it should come as little surprise that much of the continent has a telephone density of more like 0.1 per cent, or one telephone per 1000 people. In this context, terms like "information superhighway" become virtually meaningless, and any form of Internet connection appears to be a largely unattainable dream for the majority of African countries.

The Internet Society regularly publishes a global map showing international Internet connectivity by country, with connected countries being shown in various shades indicating the type of connection available (whether it be a dialup FidoNet or UUCP link, or a dedicated IP link). However, what isn't apparent from this diagram is the relative density of connected points in each country. A country shown as being connected may really mean a single researcher operating a PC-based dialup link at around 200 characters per second, with no internal links to other parts of the country. Equally, it may just as easily indicate millions of users with access to multi-megabit per second (millions of characters per second) networks and all the latest Internet facilities and applications. What is probably needed in this situation is one of those maps usually published to illustrate an economic point, for example, gross domestic product. These usually have varying size blobs showing the relative GDP of each country. Something similar for number of international connections and/or Internet node density would probably be a lot more informative.

In Ghana, there are approximately 50 000 telephones installed, with 40 000 of those in the capital city, Accra. Work is underway on replacing the aged analogue-based infrastructure with digital exchanges and new trunks, but in the meantime telephone availability as well as reliability remains limited. At a recent workshop I ran in Accra, it was impossible to make a call from a PC and modem to a PC and modem on an adjoining desk. We eventually resorted to internal PABX dialing. In Zambia, an international call to the USA, for example, can cost as much as the monthly salary of a university lecturer. That country, too, has its infrastructural and other problems. A dialup link based at the University of Zambia, which served hundreds of users, was regularly disconnected on a Friday evening because of a long-standing dispute over an item on a monthly telephone account. Unfortunately, it would take until Monday morning to raise someone at the local telecommunications organisation, explain the situation, and have the line reconnected. Zambia has been directly Internet connected since late 1994, but is still operating over a 14.4Kb line. Egypt, another country lucky enough to have a direct link, has approximately 78 000 users and a single 9.6Kb international line.

One could easily become discouraged in this situation. It is to the eternal credit of African researchers, academics, businessmen, and the like, that this does not happen. On the contrary, the

enthusiasm for getting connected is overwhelming, and the sense that whole countries are missing out on one of the most important technological developments this century is very real. Why, then, does this situation persist, and why is the information accessibility gap between the haves and have-nots widening by the day? Well-motivated, enthusiastic proposals for network development usually have no problem attracting significant donor funding, especially if it can be shown that the plans lead to self-sustaining networks within relatively short time periods. In addition, folk who are encouraged to embark on such projects very quickly reach a point where outside help is no longer needed.

The major problem appears to be infrastructural, whether in government or telecommunications. A country like Nigeria, with the second largest GDP in Africa, should be close behind South Africa in the international Internet arena. Instead, it lags behind many other African countries, including those that are much smaller and poorer, like Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Mozambique and Tanzania.

There appear to be a number of issues which should be focused upon in order to overcome these difficulties. The success of many networking ventures is usually characterised by a number of these factors. They are:

■ **COOPERATION** While it is true that projects should be driven in as cooperative a fashion as possible, and cognisance must be taken of other efforts, one shouldn't become embroiled in cooperative ventures which often result in delays in the actual implementation of the network. Cooperation has overheads of its own, which can sometimes sink a well-intentioned project.

■ **INTERNET STANDARDS** Incredible as it may be to believe, there are still folk around these days who are advocating the use of network technologies that do not adhere to Internet standards, and have very little chance of meeting those standards anytime soon. Full Internet connectivity should be the ultimate goal of any networking project, and one should use these, even if only a small subset thereof, from the beginning. This is the only rational way to allow for the evolution of fledgling networks into those capable of supporting future demands.

■ **EXISTING TECHNOLOGIES** Making the best use possible of existing technologies is very important in the African context. The temptation is to delay the initiation of network projects because newer, better technology may be available in a short while. This is undoubtedly true, but one can become enmeshed in a never-ending waiting game. A better approach is to use what is available, and upgrade in time.

■ **LEAP-FROGGING** This is probably the most crucial aspect of any network planning. Plans must allow for the bypassing of intermediate steps which may have been followed in other initiatives. This is the only way the information gap is going to be narrowed — if new plans faithfully follow each and every step of previous initiatives, the gap will

become wider and considerable time and effort will be wasted.

■ **LOCAL EXPERTISE** This must be identified and developed as far as possible. Responsibility for the running of each participating site must lie with local staff, and new developments must be driven by local needs and conditions.

■ **FLEXIBLE ROUTING** Sites should not be forced into particular routing arrangements without taking technical issues into account. Routing should be flexible enough to take failures in telecommunications infrastructure into account.

■ **DEVELOPMENT EXPANSION** Network development should follow an exploding model. Initial developments will take place at central hub nodes, and will expand out to nodes further afield, as new developments happen centrally. In this way, technical knowledge and experience built up by central operations can be passed on to downstream sites, who in turn may pass them on to further downstream sites.

■ **MINIMUM EQUIPMENT** Networking sites should be able to start operation with a minimum of equipment and training, regardless of the technical sophistication of equipment in use. Any further networking developments should not exclude or hinder the operation of the simplest node in the network.

■ **SELF-SUSTAINABILITY** The network, once implemented, must be self-sustaining. Costs of network operation should be recovered from users of the network, preferably dependent on usage volume. Cost recovery should also allow for further network development.

■ **PARTNERSHIPS** The concept of partnering should be applied as far as practicable, in order to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and experience from more developed sites to those still in the developing phase.

■ **TECHNICAL DECISIONS** These should not be taken until absolutely necessary for the further development of the network, so as to take advantage of the latest facilities available at as close a time as possible to actual network implementation.

It should not be forgotten that even in our infrastructurally sound country, the first efforts at international connectivity used a low-speed dialup link running on a single PC with a locally-developed gateway in place to move mail and documents to and from local networks. This has evolved in a relatively short period of time to a situation where this country has more than 40 000 Internet nodes and more than 30 Internet service providers. Small beginnings grow into sophisticated end-products very quickly once an initial momentum is achieved. *Dave Wilson is director of Computing Services at Rhodes University. He has been involved in Internet development since 1988, when the first international link to South Africa was established.*



thumbsuck

It may surprise those critics of English-language newspapers (there don't seem to be any critics of Afrikaans newspapers) that, middle-class and white male dominated as they are, they have for some time tried to play the politically correct ball. Reminiscing through the Argus Company's stylebook circa 1976 (that "year of momentous change" and other clichés) Thumbsuck came across detailed advice on "referring to the races" for reporters and subs (who, we all know, were mostly middle-class white, albeit younger, men).

"The company's newspapers," the stylebook intoned, "are expected to avoid giving offence when classifying races in news reports". Thus, reporters were not to describe Africans as Natives, Bantu or Kaffirs (this edition was before the time of "Plurals").

The political intricacies (or insensitivities) of the period, however, allowed such references (to Bantu and the like) in direct quotations from speeches (when presumably, if one follows the logic here, they must have been less offensive).

Further, African men or women were NOT (the stylebook's caps) to be called "Native boy" or "Native girl" and the term "watch boy" (he who guards the premises) was also banned. The more common "garden boy" is not mentioned, but presumably was frowned upon — although it is still in common usage in "polite" white circles to this day.

The stylebook also advised that the term "non-White" was "rapidly becoming objectionable". Too rapidly, as it turned out, for the author of said text who, a few paragraphs later, recommends reporters:

- "give the names of non-Whites in news reports" and,
- "avoid the practice which dismisses non-Whites as ciphers".

To be fair, this stylistic oversight had been corrected by the 1977 edition.

Of course, matters have become more complex of late and journalists now have to cope with a range of "isms" that extend beyond the sensibilities of race, such as ageism and sexism. A recent (1993) edition of *Working With Words* by Americans Brian Brooks and James Pinson (St Martin's Press, New York) has a chapter on the "isms" by contributor Jean Gaddy Wilson.

Thus, in that land of the terribly politically correct the headline

Grandmother wins election as mayor

is incorrect because it is both ageist (it focuses unduly on age) and sexist (it focuses on a woman's tie to her family rather than the appropriate accomplishment — being elected mayor).

Further, one is also no longer allowed the escape clause afforded by speeches to Argus journalists in the 1970s. Quoting a woman as describing herself as "only a Jewish mother" is wrong, notes Wilson, because it uses a stereotype, and it is "not the journalist's job to perpetuate that stereotype" — even if that is the source's preferred description of herself.

Wilson's advice to writers? Follow one simple rule of writing or speaking to eliminate most biases: "Ask yourself: 'Would I say the same thing about an affluent white man?'"

Ironic that the maligned male should become the yardstick of correct writing. But there is truth in the advice: which reader has read a report describing a male accused as blond, well-built and confident in his Pierre Cardin creation?

For your enlightenment (it really is a rather good book and worth acquiring) American Indians no longer say "Ugh", Eskimos (the correct terms are Inuit or Native Alaskan) no longer rub noses (apparently they never did), African Americans are no longer "soulful", white Americans aren't "pale faces" and, sadly, women are no longer "statuesque", "full-figured", "pert" or "petite". But, to be fair, men aren't "jocks", "beefcake", "hunks", "stallions" or "studs" either.

Where does this leave the writer? (Sir) Peregrin Worsthorne in *Review* a few issues back commented that much depended on the surrounding culture. He had had a number of pieces rejected in America as being politically incorrect that were published, however, in Britain. "Over here," he noted, "one can be as politically incorrect as one likes so long as the writing is up to scratch. Style in these matters is all."

Personally Thumbsuck believes South Africa leans toward the American model and style will not save us here.

There have been some attempts at getting our thought processes into line. The "Ministry in the Office of the President" recently released guidelines on describing the disabled (handicapped is incorrect). Thus

epileptics should be referred to as "persons with epilepsy" and one no longer writes of "persons suffering from a ..." but rather "persons with a ...".

And we're all learning. In a similar "blaps" to that of the Argus in the 1970s the Ministry release, having noted that handicapped is a no-no, lists the preferred form of "retarded" as "persons with a mental handicap".

It is, naturally, bad form to poke fun at these well-intentioned attempts.

But we're not as bad as Hong Kong with the looming handover. Says one SA sub working there: "I was abruptly told not to use the phrase 'Tiananmen Square massacre'. It's the 'Tiananmen Square crackdown'."

Public Service radio lives up to its civil service name, judging by the problems Thumbsuck had in trying to reach an AM Live journalist.

Phone call #1: Put through to a number that rings till it cuts off.

Phone call #2: Put through to the same number, despite a request to reach said journalist's secretary.

Phone call #3: Main switchboard operator says he is not permitted to take messages.

Thumbsuck: "This is absurd. Put me through to your boss so I can complain."

Ring, ring...

"Hello, television here. No, we don't do complaints. I'll put you through."

Music, music...

The world's greatest news tip-off died on the line with Thumbsuck.

So now you know why, contrary to international trends, SA's newspapers still routinely beat radio to the stories. Auckland Park's bureaucracy is as bad as ever.

LOST

FATHER CHRISTMAS SUIT

Will the person who borrowed a father Christmas suit from Mrs Clayton/Salem Club last year Please return ASAP. Telephone 22526 or 22412.

Grocott's Mail, November 28 1995