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0521629705 - Reviving the Fourth Estate: Democracy, Accountability and the Media

Julianne Schultz

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## REVIVING THE FOURTH ESTATE

### Democracy, Accountability and the Media

The news media is traditionally the watchdog of democracy. Today, it is also one of the most pervasive global industries. In this lively and accessible book, Schultz systematically analyses the role of journalism in Australia and the scope of its democratic purpose. She examines key news stories, and looks at the attitudes of Australian journalists themselves. The fourth estate remains the ideal of most journalists, but the reality has been impaired by the increasing concentration of media ownership and by political, ethical and career interests. While Australian journalism has become bolder and more investigative, increasing commercialism and decreasing ethical standards have left the public sceptical. Schultz argues for a revival of the fourth estate based on journalistic independence and political autonomy, together with increased accountability and responsiveness.

Julianne Schultz is a journalist, academic, writer and librettist. She has unique experience as both a journalist and a journalism academic. She has been Associate Professor of Journalism at the University of Technology, Sydney. She has worked for a number of media organisations and has been published in a wide range of newspapers and magazines, most recently as a contributing editor with the Brisbane *Courier-Mail*. Her books include *Not Just Another Business* and *Accuracy and Australian Newspapers*.

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## *Acknowledgments*

This book has had a long gestation. The first seeds were sown two decades ago when as a young journalist I tried to put the idealised notions of the media that I had learnt about at university into practice. This was not always an easy fit, but I was lucky to work with people who took the gap between the rhetorical ideal and the practical reality sufficiently seriously to talk about it and try to produce exemplary journalism.

As a journalism educator I saw students mulling over the same dilemma: how could the commercially driven news media fulfil a role as an independent quasi-political institution, the Fourth Estate? As an academic researcher I was keen to explore the way Australian journalists dealt with the gap between theory and practice.

Then I began the research that led to this book. I interviewed many leading investigative journalists, with the assistance of grants from the NSW Law Foundation, the University of Technology, Sydney and the Australian Research Council and found that most of them found a rationale for their work in the rhetoric of the Fourth Estate.

Although the ideal of the Fourth Estate may have taken a battering as the media industry became larger and more powerful, it remained relevant to the aspirations of many journalists. As the media is a political institution of some importance, the capacity of journalists to reshape media practice was of interest to the Reshaping Australian Institutions project at the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University, and I had many useful discussions with colleagues there.

I then attempted to answer the question of whether the ideal of the Fourth Estate could be revived at the end of the late twentieth century and whether journalists could be capable custodians of the ideal. That



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question formed the core of my University of Sydney doctoral thesis which has now become this book.

As this long gestation suggests I am indebted to many friends and colleagues for their patience and encouragement, and my editors at Cambridge University Press who helped refine the argument and make it more accessible.

I am also grateful to my parents, Noel and Cynthia, who showed by example that education need not stop in youth, my husband, Ian, whose support has not wavered, and the tolerance of my children, Isabelle and Carl, to whom I can at last say, 'Yes, the book is finished.'