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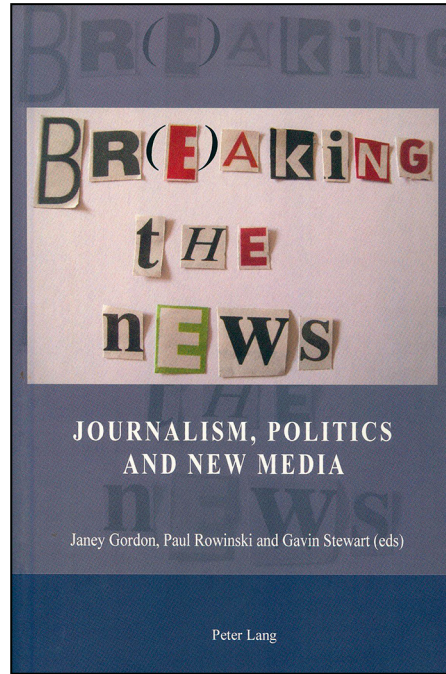
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## Refreshed digital journalism education mission needed

*Br(e)aking the News: Journalism, Politics and New Media*, edited by Janey Gordon, Paul Rowinski and Gavin Stewart. Berne, Switzerland: Peter Lang AC. 2013. 308 pages. ISBN 9783034309042

TWO DECADES ago, United States media ecologist Neil Postman posed critical questions about the ‘mission of education’ in his book *The End of Education*. Detailing the failings of American education faced with encroaching corporate and managerial strategies that did not tackle the real problem—an ‘identity crisis’—he ironically heralded the coming challenges over journalism education. It has outgrown the rationales of the past.

Just as in education generally, what is needed is a new master narrative, a fresh sense of mission for what it is to be a journalist in our stressed democracies and a revitalised rationale for journalism education. In her penultimate chapter of *Br(e)aking the News*, a book challenging the journalistic mission across the board, Susan Jacobson sets out a strategy for not winding up with the ‘end of American (Western?) jour-



nalism education’. She reminds us that virtually every day there is a new article or two published about the latest tactic for successfully teaching journalism.

As she notes, journalism educators are persuaded to ‘join social media, investigate crowdsourcing, embrace citizen journalism, report hyperlocal news, incorporate data journalism, employ multimedia storytelling and try out the latest apps and widgets’ (p. 253). Jacobson cites many units that offer changed methodologies in teaching journalism, from the Neiman Journalism Lab to Poynter.org. But, she asks, has journalism education lost the plot? New methodologies and tactics are all very well, she argues, but shouldn’t we be picking up Postman’s essential education challenge—it’s not just about technique, but a fundamental,



rethought narrative that makes sense of journalism to young people? Rather than an ‘end’ or being lost in a ‘media bubble’, we need a more dialogic, community-empowering news model—a form of trustworthy journalism that is a conversation between journalism, sources and audiences.

This book has 14 chapters with various interpretations of digital media change and strategies, from the impact of the Leveson Inquiry into media phone hacking and journalism ethics in the United Kingdom; how Middle East journalists tweeted the Arab Spring; ‘terrorism radio’ and illiteracy in the tribal areas of northwest Pakistan; to Berlusconi, Murdoch and the ‘power of persuasion’ over Europe (with special relevance post-Brexit, although written before then).

One chapter of considerable Antipodean interest is Twitter ‘gatematching’, an assessment of media tweeting and sharing patterns at Australian news and comment sites (p. 181). The findings may be surprising to some. Trusted ‘quality’ broadsheet style (largely ‘compact’ these days) news sites dominate Twitter dissemination, suggesting critiques on the decline of legacy media on social platforms may be misconceived, or certainly premature. *The Sydney Morning Herald* tops the 21 news sites surveyed, followed by the ABC, with Murdoch’s news.com.au a distant third. Of the seven opinion and commentary sites, the non-profit academic public interest outlet *The Conversation* (founded in 2011) has made a strong impact as a trusted ‘high

brow’ and engaged contributor to the twittersphere.

The ATNIX (Australian Twitter News Index) is a valuable tool created for this project. Sadly, there is no equivalent research into the New Zealand media, which recently came close to signing the death warrant of its own media plurality with a failed merger proposal by NZME and Fairfax to the Commerce Commission.

### Reference

Postman, N. (1996). *The end of education*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.

### Powerful, unadulterated insight into West Papua

*The Earth Cries Out*, by Bonnie Etherington. Auckland: Vintage, 2017, 285 pages. ISBN 978-0-14-377065-7

AT FIRST glance, Bonnie Etherington’s debut novel may not seem to be more than an exploration of grief amid family tragedy. On closer inspection, woven among and intertwined with a young family’s attempt at atonement and healing, is the story of a nation crying out for freedom from Indonesian repression. The political and social issues raised by Etherington—self-determination, colonialism, exploitation, mass murder, racism, mortality—reflect West Papua’s dark history of colonialism. This is made all the more real through the eyes of the young protagonist, Ruth. What greater way to chart almost 50 years of repression of a Pacific nation than through the innocent eyes of a child?

