Stones, ripples, waves : refiguring The first stone media event

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**Publication Date:**
2005

**DOI:**
https://doi.org/10.26190/unswworks/22791

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Acknowledgements

Firstly, I should acknowledge that much of this research was funded by an Australian Postgraduate Award (APA), a Commonwealth Government Scholarship. I consider myself very fortunate to have been able to work full-time on this project for the duration of this scholarship.

Since April 2001, I have had the privilege of working full-time for the Honourable John Watkins MP, most recently in the Transport portfolio. The knowledge, skills and friends gained in this position have proven invaluable, and I thank him and his former Chief of Staff, Jane Fitzgerald, for the opportunity.

The School of English at the UNSW deserves a special word of thanks. A large proportion of this research was conducted, and parts of it written, in an office provided by the School. The School also offered me employment as a research assistant and tutor in both English and Women's Studies. Thanks to my supervisor, Dr Suzanne Eggins, for carefully reading drafts and providing valuable feedback in its later stages. To my other supervisor, Dr Brigitta Olubas, for reading the penultimate draft. To Dr Helene Bowen Raddock, outgoing Convenor of the Women’s Studies program, for her e-support and for providing invaluable feedback on one of my chapters.

To my current work colleagues: in particular, Simon Hunter, Michelle Flahey, Tina Sorenson, and Josh Murray (also my current Chief of Staff), for making me laugh on a day-to-day basis. Special thanks also to Louise Wagner for her support, encouragement and friendship over the past ten years – and for being one of the few people to never utter the words dreaded by every PhD student: ‘Haven’t you finished yet?’

To Rebecca Curran, whose personal and academic support and encouragement have always been unconditional – not to mention her uncompromising feminism. She empathised with the crazy-making pressures of combining fulltime employment with the "T" word, and even found time to carefully read, and comment upon, my drafts. Although her immense intellectual ability will guarantee its success, I wish her all the best for her imminent thesis submission. I thank her profusely for all the cups of tea, countless reassuring emails, and many visits to Glebe, Leichhardt and the Feminist Bookshop to ponder our rather ‘daggy’ second wave feminist proclivities.

To (now Dr) Ian Collinson, for many years of passionate intellectual sparring – including intense arguments over the ‘evils’ of textual (as opposed to ethnographic) criticism – days in front of the microfilm machines, copious comments on previous drafts, and for his marathon final proof-reading. On both a personal and professional level, I thank him for his energising support when I decided rather late in the process to limit my previously unwieldy thesis to this one media event, and for his unwavering faith in my ability. As a de facto supervisor, I couldn’t have asked for any better.

To my brother, Owen, with whom this thesis (in its various incarnations) and I shared a flat for over two years, before he and his partner, Kirsty, left for the UK. Happily, they are home to drink to its submission, and to the birth of their daughter or son this July.

Finally, this thesis is dedicated to my parents, Rose and Maurice. This work would never have been possible without many years of unconditional emotional, moral, and financial support. It is my sincere hope that the following work validates their substantial investment. Mum and Dad, I’ve ‘wrapped it up’.
ABSTRACT

This interdisciplinary study critically revisits the Australian print media’s engagement with Helen Garner’s controversial work of ‘non-fiction’, *The First Stone* (1995). Print news media engagement with the book, marked by intense discursive contestation over feminism, has been constituted both by feminists and other critics as a significant cultural signpost. However, the highly visible print media event following the book’s publication raised a plethora of critical questions and dilemmas that remain unsatisfactorily addressed. Building upon John Fiske’s work on media events as sites of maximum visibility and discursive turbulence (Fiske: 1996), this study re-theorises the public dialogue following *The First Stone*’s publication in terms of four constitutive elements: narrative, celebrity, audience, and history and conflict. Through an analysis of these four diverse yet interconnected aspects of the media event, I create a critical space not only for its limitations to emerge but also the frequently overlooked possibilities it offers in terms of the wider feminism and print media culture relationship. As part of its central aim to refigure *The First Stone* media event, this thesis argues against prior characterisations of the debate as constitutive of either a monologic articulation of conservative, antifeminist voices or an unmitigated attack on its author by a homogenous feminism. In particular, I use this media event as indicative of the sophistication and complexity of media engagement with contemporary feminism, despite both continued derision and overly simplistic celebration of this relationship. Texts subject to analysis here include: *The First Stone*, various ‘mainstream’ media representations and self-representations of three ‘celebrity feminists’ (Helen Garner, Anne Summers and Jenna Mead), letters to the editor of newspapers and magazines, ‘popular’ feminist books by Kathy Bail and Virginia Trioli, and a number of media texts in which those claiming a feminist subject position and those sympathetic to feminism act as either news sources or columnists/commentators. Although Garner’s narrative is throughout identified to be deeply problematic, I argue that the media event it precipitated provides valuable insights into both the opportunities and the constraints of the print media-feminism nexus in 1990s Australia.
Stones, Ripples, Waves: Refiguring *The First Stone* Media Event

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**Abstract**

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Introduction

‘Stones, Ripples, Waves’

A strange thing happened to feminism on its way into the nineties (Marilyn Lake, 1995: 26).

The strength of feminism lies in its ability to create discourse, to dispute, to negotiate the boundaries and the barriers, and also to take issue with the various feminisms which have sprung into being (Angela McRobbie, 1994: 72).

There is no value to be derived in silencing disputes. The only question is how best to have them, how most productively to stage them, and how to act in ways that acknowledge the irreversible complexity of who we are (Judith Butler, 2001: 416).

In March 1995, after a protracted legal battle, Pan MacMillan published a work of non-fiction by well-known Australian author, Helen Garner. The book was loosely based on events at Ormond College, a prestigious residential college of the University of Melbourne, in 1991. The Master of the college was alleged to have sexually harassed two young female students from the university residence under his care and, failing resolution through the College’s internal grievance procedures, was subsequently charged in 1992.¹ In The First Stone (1995), Garner maps her deeply emotive, personalised response to these events in a polemic on the limitations of contemporary feminism. The publication of The First Stone (TFS) captured Australian media attention in complex and diverse ways for at least the proceeding two years. While talkback radio, current affairs television, and public events such as literary festivals and forums all engaged with Garner’s text, this work analyses the print media manifestations of this debate. TFS media event raises a plethora of critical questions and dilemmas that remain unsatisfactorily addressed. To help remedy this critical absence, the central aim of this thesis is to reconceptualise the debate in a way that accounts for its limitations and its opportunities for Australian feminism.

The vast intertextual web that came to constitute TFS media event marks the opening up of a discursive space within Australian print media previously unavailable to feminism in such a concentrated form. TFS media event has left a mark on the

¹ The Master, Alan Gregory (or in Garner’s narrative, ‘Colin Shepherd’), was charged with two counts of indecent assault, subsequently reduced to one; he was convicted but successfully appealed. For valuable summaries and chronologies of these events, see Trioli: 1996 and Goldsworthy, 1996: 64-66.
Australian feminist psyche, as it perpetually resurfaces in journals, newspapers, conferences, tutorials, and in day-to-day conversations. It has been common among feminist critics to articulate a concern about the effects of both the book and the media event on Australian feminism. In a manner that assumes the intrinsic negativity of the event’s publicly staged conflict, Australian feminism is said to have ‘lost its innocence’ (Kendall and Mitchell, 3/9/2000, *The Age*, ‘News Extra’: 1). The dialogue precipitated by its publication represents a ‘cultural flashpoint’ (Turner et al., 2000: 2-4), not simply in an intramural sense between Australian feminists, but within broader public discourse. The debate literally became front-page news, a rare achievement for an event with cultural politics, and feminism specifically, at its centre. Throughout the nation, and in Sydney and Melbourne in particular, articles, opinion pieces, letters to the editor, cartoons, reviews, and books illustrated a profound preoccupation in public discourse with questions about ‘sex and power’ (as the book itself is sub-titled) and the text’s representations of feminism. Women and men with varying degrees of cultural capital and legitimation – that is, ‘institutional’ and ‘citizen’ critics (see Eberly: 2000) – contributed to and thereby sustained TFS media event. These readers argued not only over their conflicting interpretations of the text, but over (the effects of) social and political practices associated with feminism (Eberly, 2000: 3).

Feminist responses to the book were, unsurprisingly, largely condemnatory. As Judith Ion remarks: ‘Any one sentence of Garner’s book holds the potential for further debate with regard to its implicit and explicit assumptions, allegations and assertions’ (Ion, 1998: 109-110). However, despite the book’s ideological limitations, the publication of TFS enabled feminism, and manifold narratives of its past, present and future, to achieve a point of ‘maximum visibility’ (Fiske, 1996: 8) in Australian public discourse. Social movements such as feminism have always relied heavily on the publicity afforded by media technologies, and this media event represents one of the highest points of visibility in the history of the relationship between Australian feminism and print media: ‘Not since the heady days of the 1970s had the media given feminism so much copy’ (Spongberg, 1997: 257). Feminist debates such as those following TFS are commonly condemned as ‘feminists and faux feminist bashing other feminists in print’ (Miller, 1997: 167); this thesis sees such automatic rejection of media debates as untenable and instead seeks to foreground the possibilities as well as the limitations of such publicly staged contestations over feminism.

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2 Although not a direct citation, the authors attribute this comment to feminist historian, Ann Curthoys.
3 As I will suggest in Chapter Two, the concurrently staged controversy over Helen Darville-Demidenko’s *The Hand That Signed The Paper* suggests that the mid-1990s was marked by sustained media attention to women authors and their engagement with race- or gender-based cultural politics.
Despite its intensity, a comprehensive analysis of this media event in its entirety has not yet been produced. The text became implicated in a ‘media event’ that saw it come to mean in ways that cannot be gleaned from, and which exceed, the initial narrative parameters of TFS. Assuming that literary texts are ‘not received as single entities, but within institutional frameworks [of which media is but one] and conditions that largely determine the function of the works’ (Felski, 1989: 10), this thesis looks at how the book was framed in Australian public discourse in the mid-1990s, and more importantly, how feminism was framed in such impassioned discussions. It also works as a form of cultural history, a partial history of one reverberative moment in the very recent past, but a historical project nonetheless. As David Carter argues, such a cultural history is 'a study of the institutions and discourses, the structures and techniques, of meaning-making in a given society at a given time' (Carter, 1997: x).

The relationship between news culture and Australian writing, either fiction or non-fiction, has been markedly unexamined. The same can be said of studies concerned with how books marketed as ‘feminist’ circulate – are made-to-mean (and in turn make feminism mean) – through the journalistic field (Bourdieu: 1998). However, rather than acting solely as a hermeneutics of reception, this thesis is most concerned with how the text comes to be valued as an important contribution, not simply to Australian writing as part of an increasingly prevalent auto/biographical genre, but to public conversations (and contestations) over feminism. Aside from illustrating that literary debate has been thoroughly drawn into ‘mass-mediated popular culture’ (Turner, 1996: 33), this media event also represents a particularly heightened expression of the manner in which feminist debate is being conducted in, and adapted to, this field – sometimes for the better, sometimes to its detriment.

TFS media event suggests much about the at times fraught relationship between feminism and the Australian print media, a relationship that is my primary area of investigation. Where relevant, I also attend to points in the event that illuminate some broader shifts in the contemporary sphere which have themselves been the source of much anxiety, including the increased attention to celebrity, the so-called turn to the personal, and media’s role in the performance of contemporary citizenship. In contrast with much previous feminist criticism on TFS media debate, I am not concerned with establishing the feminist (or antifeminist) nature of either the book or its author. Nor do I invoke an ‘authentic feminism which is elsewhere’ and is corrupted by its

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4 In Australia, Graeme Turner’s Literature, Journalism and the Media (1996) has attempted to fill this gap.
5 One important exception is Charlotte Templin’s Feminism and the Politics of Literary Reputation: The Example of Erica Jong (1995). Furthermore, a few studies have been produced in the Australian context in relation to Germaine Greer’s writing. See Sheridan et al.: 2000, Spongberg: 1993.
appropriation in ‘popular’ writing and media texts (see Brunsdon, 1998: 101, Mayne, 1994: 272). Rather, my analytical foci are the book’s marketing and classification as an important contribution to public understandings of feminism and its exemplification of broader processes of the ‘media mediation’ of feminism (Murray, 2004: 219), processes which continue to cause justifiably anxiety amongst feminist critics. In recognition that the sustainability of a media event is dependent on its continuing status as ‘news’ – something which itself shifts from ‘moment to moment’ (Tuchman, 1978: 184) – this thesis is attentive throughout to the processes via which feminism, or rather its representation in \textit{TFS}, is rendered newsworthy.

This work also represents a contribution to recent work on ‘media events’ and how they come to operate, the cultural work they do, in what has been referred to as the ‘postmodern public sphere’ (Hartley: 1996). In previous analyses of media events, the print media aspect has been largely overlooked in favour of a focus on how such events play out on television and/or radio; therefore, this study extends criticism on media events by focusing on print media culture. Here, I appropriate the ‘media event’ paradigm as explicated particularly in the more recent work of John Fiske (1996), coupled with a Foucauldian-informed emphasis on discourse, to create a critical space for both the limitations and the largely overlooked possibilities of the event to emerge. Throughout I build upon Fiske’s work (detailed in \textit{Chapter One}) and use this one event to make some broader claims about the feminism-media relationship. This thesis is structured around \textit{TFS} media event’s four constitutive elements: narrative, celebrity, audience, and history and conflict. Through each of these elements, particular discursive constructions of feminism come to achieve ‘maximum visibility’ and ‘maximum turbulence’ (Fiske: 1996) within the Australian print media. Accordingly, I analyse the book itself, print media constructions of both major and minor celebrities, a series of letters to the editor, and deployments of generational tropes and particular constructions of (feminist) history in print media and ‘popular’ feminist writing by young women during the event. \textit{TFS} media event is sustained and managed through these four intersecting and mutually reinforcing elements. These four constitutive elements are not simply characteristic of this media event, but of contemporary media culture itself.\textsuperscript{6} In media events, however, their interrelations and their role in ordering public debate become even more pronounced. In terms of the specificities of \textit{TFS} media

\textsuperscript{6} My use of the term ‘media culture’ over either media or popular culture is indebted to Douglas Kellner, who uses it in his book of the same name to avoid the over-burdened signifier ‘popular’ (see Kellner: 1995). In this thesis, I use the term ‘media culture’ (see Kellner: 1995) to refer not only to press coverage of \textit{TFS}, but to include the forms of ‘popular’ feminist writing which were integral to the event’s sustenance.
event, this thesis – as my title implies – calls into question previous ways of conceptualising the event.

Transcending Antinomies

During and after the media event, commentators have been united in their assumption that the publication of TFS represents a poignant cultural marker in Australian history. As the tenth anniversary of its publication approaches, and as the academic and the broader community are no longer ‘saturated with talk about it’ (Pybus, 1995: 8), TFS media event needs to be critically revisited. With such historical distance, it is possible to pose critical questions precluded by the closer proximity – not to mention institutional, social and personal affiliations – of earlier criticism. Although a detailed analysis of the event’s operations has not been produced, previous critical commentary on the event has been inadequate for a number of reasons, not the least of which are a lack of attention to the event (and its form) in its entirety and failure to view it as symptomatic of the broader shifts in media culture to which I have previously referred. To refigure TFS media event, I analyse hitherto neglected aspects of the debate and take a fresh approach to those areas interrogated in previous studies. In this thesis, I attempt to (re)open these previously blocked avenues. Here, former ways of ‘knowing’ the media event are problematised and proven insufficient.

In this work I attempt to negotiate a position between what I perceive to be the two dominant interpretations of the event that hinder previous criticism. Put simply, that the event represents the dominance of a hegemonic antifeminism (pro-Garner) or feminism (anti-Garner) within Australian print media. Of most concern with both these positions is their failure to theorise the event as an ongoing struggle over the meanings of feminism, involving voices closely identified with feminism, those for whom it represents a redundant, dogmatic ideology, and others whose alignments are less certain or fixed. One commentator, citing an Australian editorial, outlines these conflicting perspectives about the book’s effects: ‘Either at one extreme, as this editorial saw it, as the long awaited time when “certain perverse trends in contemporary radical feminism [were flushed] out into the open”, or at the other, as the year that the 1990s anti-feminist backlash really got cracking in Australia’ (Parker, 1996: 33, see also Lumby, 1999: 172). Despite such acknowledgements, rather than view the event (like all communication) as dialogic, most previous critics have seen it as monologic and have accordingly advocated its dismissal. Adopting a position at either end of this continuum fails to concede the continuous struggle between centripetal and centrifugal forces in which media culture is always engaged (Allen, 1998: 134). As I will suggest, such antinomies are also vulnerable in light of the media event’s prevailing meta-
commentary. Few critics have conceded that the high degree of meta-commentary in the media event is indicative of the possibilities offered within media culture for an interrogation of its own practices. In this sense, criticism of the event’s internal operations is a crucial aspect of its actualisation, and further works to contest the assumption of its monovocality; in each chapter this reflexivity, said to constitute late modernity (Giddens: 1991), will be foregrounded.

It is valuable to briefly summarise these polarised positions. Conservative critics have characterised the response to the book as a silencing of Garner, thereby overstating feminist control over public discourse. In these accounts, as part of a wider cultural move towards a repressive ‘political correctness’, feminism is afforded an enormous power to speak, and to exclude others from the media frame. For such critics, Garner was unduly savaged for merely speaking truth (see McDonald: 1995, Giles: 1995). Conversely, more progressive critics have viewed the event as indicative of the inexorable control exercised by conservatives over media, either through the circulation of antifeminist discourse or through foregrounding conflict between feminists. In this critical narrative, the book’s publication is newsworthy as it plays to media culture’s anti-feminist bent and desire for the ‘spectacle’ of feminist conflict and disarray (see d’Arcens: 1998, Genovese: 2002). In these accounts, the substantial defences of the Ormond women and their actions that surfaced in feature articles, opinion pieces, and letters to the editor during the event are elided in order to sustain the narrative of media culture’s inevitably antagonistic response to feminism and the women whose actions it informs. TFS media event was constituted by much more than ‘highly publicised attacks on feminism’ (Davis, 1997: 85). To assume that TFS media event or that any media engagement with feminism is entirely negative is also to assume not only the impossible monologism of print news media, but that readers will unquestioningly accept commentators’ ‘preferred inflection of reality’ as ‘the most truthful one available’ (Allen, 1998: 128-129). Neither language nor communicative practices more broadly can sustain such assumptions. My choice to revisit the event and mount a challenge to the idea that it was monologic does not obscure the antifeminist sentiments of the event’s more conservative participants, nor does it elide the asymmetrical power or different levels of cultural currency afforded its participants. As Chilla Bulbeck astutely observes, ‘in the 1990s, we are still apt to hear some feminist stories more than others’ (Bulbeck, 2001: 2).

In both instances, conservative and progressive, different reading positions and formations are homogenised, flattened into an unproductive dichotomy; this thesis attempts to move beyond such binary logic, whose problems are well-known. Here, the complex ‘evaluative communities’ made visible, or rather constituted, by the media
event are simplified (Templin, 1995: 36). To reconceptualise the event, the central aim of this thesis, the restrictive dualism outlined above needs to be transcended. In these antinomies, media culture was seen to be monologic, an unsustainable assumption due to the complexities of communicative practices, reader sophistication, and the polysemy of signs. As I argue throughout, the media event represented neither the unfettered, uncritical circulation of TFS's central presuppositions nor their (or its author's) suppression. This thesis operates in the murkiness disallowed by both approaches, emphasising instead simultaneously what the event made possible (including the space it opened for feminists to speak) and what it excluded. The aspects of the event upon which I focus serve to accentuate its unpredictability. Rather than asking, as others have done, 'why' this event became so readily inscribed in the popular imaginary, I reconfigure the question to 'how' it came to dominate the Australian mediascape. In this sense, this work is an analysis of the 'politics of signification' (Hall, 1980: 138). Throughout this thesis I seek not to uncover what these texts definitively mean (itself an impossible task), but 'how meaning is possible – at what price and along what tracks' (Barthes in Sulieman, 1992: 11).

Book reviews, and authorial 'epitexts' such as newspaper interviews (Genette, 1997: 345), are central to the work of promotion and publicity and the construction of literary celebrity. Such texts act as powerful intermediaries between readers and authors (Moran, 2000: 40). They are also central to the attribution of value, which is now commonly recognised as being 'radically contingent' (Templin, 1995: 16). In cultural studies and literary reception theory, contra formalist assumptions of textual immanence, there is a focus on the way shifting contexts of reception, history, time and space, mediate the interpretive processes of reading (see Hall: 1980, Radway: 1984). At times, as I will suggest, this process of active labour is made visible. Many critics during the event, including Garner, tried to provide the interpretive context for future readings of the book. The debate surrounding the book is important, not only in terms of feminism and public discourse, but because for many it provided the context for reading TFS. As attempts to effect interpretive closure, in different media ‘epitexts’ TFS comes to be discursively constituted in particular ways. Certain ways of speaking about the text become privileged over others, particularly in relation to its 'non-fictionality'. Moreover, the book itself is rarely invoked without concurrent reference to the media event. Consequently, the media event fulfils not only an important commercial or advertising function, but also an interpretive one. Before embarking on the analysis of such a context, I should situate myself in relation to this material.
**Who’s Speaking?**

As Elaine Showalter argues, ‘feminist critics today can no longer speak with the unselfconscious authority of the past’ (Showalter, 1997: 68). In light of this largely ethical impetus to ‘get personal’ (Miller: 1991) or to make explicit one’s own relation to the material being subjected to a feminist critical gaze, I will briefly clarify my own response to the debate and how it came to be problematised as my argument emerged. Firstly, I should clarify that my own readings of the event’s texts have been produced in a specific institutional context for a particular purpose, and therefore my own interpretations are privileged over those of the ‘Other woman’ who may have taken up these texts in ways inaccessible via my methodological choice of textual analysis (see Sheridan, 1995: 101).

In relation to the genesis of my own project, the following quotation from Helen Garner is relevant: *The First Stone* was not a project that I planned, but rather one I drifted into (Garner, 1997: 12). When I commenced this project – an impossibly broad, amorphous ‘feminism and the Australian media’ dissertation – I envisaged analysis of *TFS* and subsequent media rumblings would occupy one, perhaps two, chapters. However, the more I read and researched, the more this work seemed to organically transform itself (at times against my will) and in the final few years of its gestation, I conceded that the vast stores of primary material – textual traces of the event itself – warranted the critical attention towards which it was propelling me.

Even while finalising this project, my personal response to this media event is one of profound ambivalence. Although wishing to avoid an explicit generational identification, I will note that when *TFS* emerged in the bookstores I was in my early twenties and responded with outrage at Garner’s ill-founded assumptions about young feminists. Seeing myself as the type of leftwing campus-based feminist activist I believed Garner to have savaged, I took her critique rather personally. Moreover, I was outraged when P.P. McGuinness and John Laws used the book to reanimate their pre-existing antipathies to feminism. Like my fellow student activists, I found myself vigorously condemning the debate and rightwing media commentators, seeing it predominantly as another opportunity for reactionary forces to attack an (always) already beleaguered feminism and to further compound the voicelessness of young Australian women. (Traces of such a position can be found in my analysis of the book itself, which I still feel to be a deeply problematic narrative.) In the course of this research, however, I found such an unequivocal position became complicated and my pessimistic reading of the event was consequently challenged. Having gradually come to the realisation that media, representation, and feminism and their interrelations were much more complex than I (a traditionally trained literary scholar) had initially
acknowledged, my focus on this one media event became the grounds on which I could attempt to theorise the ambivalence produced out of my readings of its texts. Furthermore, as I delved deeper into secondary material on the feminism-media nexus, I concluded that my focus on this one media event could serve a much broader critical purpose.

*Strategic Focalisation*
This thesis, as will be clear throughout, is not merely a contribution to scholarship on *TFS* or the subsequent media event. Through interrogation of one particular event, this work is at heart a study of feminism and (its) cultural (re)production. In using this media event as the focal point, I am able to intervene in a series of wider debates about contemporary cultural politics or the politics of representation. Accordingly, this thesis follows in the tradition of a number of recent works, produced largely in the US context, that focus on singular media events in order to theorise more broadly about representation, politics, identity and gender in the current cultural context. Most of these texts approach their subjects as crises in the ‘structure of feeling’ (Williams: 1977, see also Fiske, 1996: 8), as fractures in the sense-making of the dominant culture. Further, these studies – like the spectacular events on which they focus – most commonly engage with questions over increasingly less clearly delineated boundaries between the private/public spheres and notions of gendered conflict, questions which caused a great deal of anxiety during *TFS* media event.

These controversial stories, as Robyn Lakoff argues, exhibit another substantial commonality: ‘They are all about language: who has the ability and the right to make meaning for everyone. ... Therein resides power’ (Lakoff, 2000: 19). *TFS* media event, preoccupied with questions of who was giving meaning to feminism, was likewise fought in and through language. In Lakoff’s framework, *TFS* event would pass the ‘undue attention test’, as rather than involving narrow questions relating solely to *TFS*, it engages with issues and anxieties that move well beyond Garner’s narrative and which ‘help make sense of our reality’ (Lakoff, 2000: 18-19). This thesis argues that the condition of ‘hypervisibility’ constitutive of media events potentially has a ‘great diagnostic value’ (Fraser, 1997: 99), enabling such events to be seen as indicative of much broader tendencies and tensions. In this vein, *TFS* media event provides a significant opportunity to revisit ‘how public space is managed, how public debate is conducted’ and ‘who counts in the public domain’ (Mead, 1997a: 10). Other media

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7 For Lakoff, highly visible cultural events that receive what some perceive to be ‘undue attention’ commonly focus on the roles of men and women: ‘who can do what, and say what’. Furthermore, she suggests that ‘we use these stories to explore the hardest questions we have to face, as ways to circle around our feelings and test possible resolutions ...’ (Lakoff, 2000: 19).
events and national spectacles through which cultural politics have been scrutinised include the Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas sexual harassment case (Morrison, ed: 1993, Flax: 1998), the OJ Simpson murder trial (Morrison and Lacour, eds: 1997, Kellner: 2003), the Clinton-Lewinsky mass-mediated politico-sexual ‘scandal’ (Berlant and Duggan: 2001), Hilary Clinton’s senate campaign (Vavrus: 2002), the Nancy Kerrigan-Tonya Harding spectacle of ice-skating conflict (Baughman, ed: 1995), and the death of Diana, Princess of Wales (Barcan, ed: 1997). Marjorie Garber’s edited collection Media Spectacles focuses on a number of these events (Garber et al., eds: 1993), as does John Fiske’s Media Matters (the text from which my notion of the media event develops).

These examples, however, should not imply that TFS media event simply represents a localised version of the US-based ‘culture wars’ (see Jay: 1997). As I will argue, such an interpretive frame, and its rhetoric of importation, elides the cultural and historical specificity of this media event and should be avoided. In any case, there are also Australian examples of the type of work mentioned above.

In the specifically Australian context, Jenna Mead’s own Bodyjamming (1997), Rosalind Else-Mitchell and Naomi Flutter’s Talking up: Young Women’s Take on Feminism (1998) and to a lesser extent Mark Davis’ Gangland (1997, 1999, 2nd edition), also use TFS media event as the basis for a consideration of the wider context of Australian public life, as did Robert Manne (1996) and Andrew Reimer (1996) with the controversy over Helen Darville-Demidenko’s The Hand That Signed The Paper. In the tradition of such critical works, I attempt here to think through the media event differently in order to rethink broader questions surrounding feminism, media and representation. Like the publications listed above, the aspects of the event identified and examined here act as conduits for larger meditations on these questions. One of the major differences, as I will demonstrate, between the event interrogated here and those cited above is the role of textuality in its genesis. That is to say, while the book was irrefutably based on extra-literary occurrences, this media event was born not out of these experiences, but out of the publication of the book that attempted to render them intelligible. The other way in which TFS event relates to these high-profile, necessarily ideological, wars over language is that it provides the grounds to re-engage with what it means to be a public and whether former models of theorising debate in public remain appropriate in a shifting media context.

**Telling (Feminist) Stories**

As I argue throughout, contemporary media culture is the central means via which particular (necessarily interested) stories of feminism are circulated and consumed. That said, media culture acts as a significant site, not merely for the ‘dissemination’ of
feminist ideas implied by the linear model of communication, but for their construction and re-negotiation. Furthermore, as the site wherein feminist debate and dissent is largely now conducted (see Lilburn: 1999) and the stage on which feminist identities are performed, the ‘discursive politics’ (Young: 1997) of media culture necessitate greater practical intervention and critical attention. Despite the arguments of some critics, these ‘struggles over culture are not a weak substitute for “real” politics’ (Giroux, 2000: 7). As Rita Felski argues, ‘women’s resistance takes a number of forms’, occurs in a variety of contexts, and is not ‘limited to either working within, or the revolutionary transformation of, state institutions’ (Felski, 2000: 204). It should not be remarkable to suggest that there are as many feminisms as there are ways of reading different texts, TFS included. Battles over feminisms’ meanings were both covered by, and staged in, newspapers during the event. This thesis argues not that there is one ‘official story’ imposed upon audiences by a homogenous dominant culture (Morrison, 1997: xxviii), but that a number of conflicting narratives come to be actualised within the media event frame. As Chapter Two will make evident, contributors to TFS media event – prompted by Garner’s own focus – ask ‘What is contemporary Australian feminism?’ in a theoretical and political context that precludes the singularity inherent in such a question. TFS event is the site of a ‘definitional dispute’ over feminism (Deem, 1999: 91), a dispute that can never be wholly resolved. Central to this dispute are the particular stories, including histories, discursively constituted in Australian print media culture from the mid-1990s onwards. It is the politics of such stories, the role of media culture in their constitution, accreditation, and circulation, and attempts to circumscribe the uses to which they can be put, which concern me here.

The sustained public commentary and meta-commentary over TFS is indicative of a broader cultural struggle over the meanings of feminism occurring in various spaces of media culture at this time, and beyond into the twenty-first century. Contemporary feminism, therefore, can be seen as a ‘semiotic hot spot’ (Hartley, 1996: 5). However, while recognising the presence of different feminisms in contemporary media culture, this thesis sees TFS media event as an attempt – though certainly not always successful – to delimit how feminism came to mean in public discourse at a particular temporal juncture. In this sense, I am concerned with ‘processes of stabilisation and fixation’ through which feminism ‘comes to acquire certain meanings over others’ (Ahmed, 1998: 91). As Sarah Ahmed suggests, the identification of these

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8 Michelle Barrett has referred to the academic ‘turn to culture’ within feminism, which has seen greater attention to ‘words’ over ‘things’; that is, to the field of the symbolic and textuality over the traditionally Marxist materialist analysis of women’s oppression (Barrett, 1997: 112-113).

9 As Stuart Hall argues (1980), while encoded messages may have a ‘preferred meaning’, those decoding the message may not accept it and instead could actively produce negotiated or oppositional readings.
instances of discursive closure can be seen as the first step in the necessary and inevitable process of their contestation (Ahmed, 1998: 91). Meaning-making processes necessarily entail ‘pressure for closure’ and ‘understanding what possibilities exist for ‘control’ also requires grappling with communicative messiness and unpredictability which necessarily limits the possibility for controlling the final outcome of the meaning-making process’ (Louw, 2001: 205). In the ensuing chapters, emphasising its representational and political complexities, I attend to such ‘messiness’ and ‘unpredictability’ in TFS media event.

**TFS Media Event and ‘Truth’**

*TFS* (and indeed the story of its gestation) came to have a privileged relationship to ‘truth’ in the Australian mediascape, not only in relation to Garner’s interpretation of ‘what happened’ in the Ormond case, but what had happened to feminism in the late twentieth century. The media event acted as a site for the circulation of truth-claims and counter truth-claims, in a perpetual contest for legitimacy, about feminism and its manifestations. As the ‘truth’ of the actual case is unavailable, Tregear argues that the only way in which the ‘Ormond affair’ can be approached is through a Foucauldian informed genealogy:

> In other words, to write about the Affair in a manner which makes no attempt at a factual reconstruction, but rather tries to reveal or flesh-out hidden assumptions, so as to suggest that what we have previously claimed to know about the affair may not be as fixed as it previously had appeared (Tregear, 2002: 112).

While sympathetic to Tregear’s genealogical methodology, a critical task he merely recommends rather than completes, the focus of my own project is the media field surrounding the book, not what happened at Ormond. Tregear uses the term ‘Ormond Affair’ to refer to the initial moment of alleged harassment and to its textual renderings. In contrast, this thesis focuses only on the latter. Here, I seek not to problematise media accounts as ‘biased’ or as ‘misrepresenting’ the case, but instead to scrutinise the truth-claims of various media texts following Garner’s narrativisation of the event. I am not concerned with the ‘facts’ of the case or with an ‘authentic’ feminism practised beyond media boundaries, or even with print media surrounding Ormond prior to the publication of *TFS*. Conversely, in recognition that no reality is knowable except through its representations, I am concerned with its putting into discourse. The event is only knowable through the textual traces available to the critic, traces I argue have been under-examined or obscured in accounts homogenising the different aspects of the media event. Furthermore, as Chapter Two will show, the relationship of non-fiction to ‘truth’ was a central preoccupation of the media event.
Thematically the debate was about power (like the alleged moment of harassment itself), its tenor and form suggest much about the machinations, and mutability, of power itself. The truth-claims of the media event are inherently unstable and counter-truth claims came to circulate throughout the discursive field in which it is enacted. Furthermore, the situatedness of all feminist knowledge, the contingencies and positionalities of its own truth-claims, is commonly acknowledged. Following this, I argue here that TFS media event can be illuminated by an analysis that concentrates on how particular truth-claims (and the speakers who articulate them), mostly about feminism, functioned during this moment. As Stuart Allan argues, analyses of news culture need to place much greater conceptual emphasis on these questions of ‘what gets to count as ‘truth’ in a given instance, and who has the right to define that truth’ (Allen, 1999: 105). In addition, it is important to recognise the ‘fluid configuration of truth’ and that different audiences are capable of identifying the ‘slippages, fissures and silences which together are always threatening to undermine its discursive authority’ (Allen, 1999: 106-107). Truth-claims – and counter-truth claims – during TFS media event, however, did not relate to what happened at Ormond College.

Displacing Sexual Harassment
As media attention to high profile sexual dramas, such as the Bill Clinton-Monica Lewinsky affair or the earlier Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas sexual harassment trial attest, ‘the mainstream media is never so fascinated with feminism as during a sexual harassment case’ (Deem, 1999: 88). In the context of TFS event, Melissa Deem’s comments have a particular resonance. However, my primary concern here is not discourses of sexual harassment and their contestation in news discourse. As Ann Genovese argues, TFS was ‘a book about sexual harassment that wasn’t about sexual harassment at all’ (Genovese, 2002: 149). In terms of the event’s focus on feminism itself, I concur with Virginia Trioli’s comments that ‘the discussion should no longer be fixed on this case’; instead, ‘the representation of the event and its fallout is what matters to us most now’ (Trioli, 1996: 16-17). Therefore, I have chosen to focus on questions of feminism and representation, rather than on media engagement with sexed crime (in this instance, sexual harassment); this strategic decision is based largely in the event itself.

It is not surprising that such an issue, indicative of the politicisation of (hetero)sexual interaction, came in a sense to signify in a metonymic way for feminism, and thus prompted a more general debate about feminism and its position in contemporary Australian life. Furthermore, the young women involved in the case – who were referred to in print media not as complainants but as ‘feminists’ – came to
stand for an entire generation (Mead, 1997b: 246). Throughout the public discourse on TFS, a displacement was effected from the issue of sexual harassment and legal remedy, specifically in relation to the Ormond case, to the ‘nature and future of feminism itself’ (Curthoys, 1997: 194). As Jenny Morgan argues in her analysis of the debate, ‘sexual harassment itself has disappeared from the agenda’ (Morgan, 1997: 101). The specificities of this particular case were elided, as the public commentary focused not only on the percolation of feminist discourse into hitherto privatised, non-politicised, spaces (specifically sexual encounters between masculine and feminine subjects) but also on questions of feminist authority. Moreover, media attention to the Master diminished and was substituted for that of another feminist ‘victim’: Helen Garner. Therefore, despite what Susan Bordo (following Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*) refers to as a ‘discursive explosion’ about sexual harassment within mainstream media (Bordo, 1997: 146), the alleged harassment endured by the women at the centre of Garner’s narrative at times becomes incidental to the broader narrative of feminist excess and the feminine ineptitude it allegedly fosters. Sexual harassment in this media event therefore produced media interest only insofar as it provided an insight into the current state – and future – of feminism in Australia. It offered the grounds on which the (in)adequacies of feminism could be considered. That said, a number of feminists as either journalistic sources, commentators or writers of letters to the editor used the space of the media event to defend the actions of the Ormond women who were, therefore, not totally erased from view. Most contributors to the event were preoccupied with the type of subjects produced by feminism. In this way, questions of feminist subjectivity and the complexities of its performance featured throughout.

*Performing Feminism: Self-Representational Practices in the Event*

As Chapter One will outline, this thesis also reads TFS media event in terms of a series of debates about media culture. One of the demonstrable shifts in media culture of particular interest here is the ‘turn to the personal’. This ‘fascination with the personal narrative’ is said to arise from a wider fascination with the subject (Smith, 1993: 393) evident in both academic and ‘popular’ discourses. The idea of a unique, self-present liberal humanist self has been displaced by countless theorists who have reconceptualised subjectivity as in process, and underscored the role of narrative (and the media through which it is articulated) in the constitution of such a subject (Giddens: 1991, Smith: 1993). Self-representation has always been important to feminism, a political act which functions as a form of empowerment for women. News, and indeed ‘popular’ feminist writing, however, as sites of self-representation have to a
large extent been overlooked. As I have suggested, I argue throughout that TFS media event represents both the opportunities and limitations of the feminism-media relationship; one of its most under-theorised possibilities is the way it acts as a site of self-inscription for women (including feminists).

To a greater or lesser degree, each chapter addresses the (feminist) subject and its articulation. For example, Chapter Three deals with the narrative ‘I’ in TFS and how its truth-claims are bound up in Garner’s attempts to establish a feminist subjectivity; Chapter Four engages with the (often reflexive) self-representational practices of celebrity feminists; Chapter Five examines the ways in the subject is constituted in narrative and demonstrates that counter truth-claims are, like Garner’s own, dependent claims to a particular feminist subjectivity; finally, Chapter Six emphasises that ‘popular’ feminist writing, using the first-person pronoun, also invokes particular notions of the young feminist subject. Furthermore, in wake of challenges to identity politics that have accompanied this reconceptualisation of the subject, anxieties about feminism and how it is being performed in a context without a clear women’s movement or uniform feminist ontology (itself always an impossibility because of its exclusions) preoccupy both the media event and its subsequent criticism. These are just some of the ways I will take up the question of the personal and the (feminist) subject in this work.

Feminist Cultural Studies

In the coming chapters, I subject various forms of media and non-fiction publications to close textual analysis, focusing on how their respective discursive frameworks attempt to delimit public understandings of feminism. Although traversing the disciplinary ground of English, Australian Studies, Women’s Studies, and Media Studies, the reading practices I adopt here most easily situate this project within feminist cultural studies. Cultural studies, often conceived of as a political project in itself, is concerned with the way in which forms of media culture are bound up in relations of power and their potential contestation (Hollows, 2000: 25). Although they have had an ‘uneven development’ and there are some substantial differences between them (Franklin et al., 1991: 8-14), both feminism and cultural studies traverse similar, yet distinct, political terrain. Both ‘focus on the analysis of forms of power and oppression, and on the politics of the production of knowledge within the academy, as well as elsewhere in society’ (Franklin et al., 1991: 1-2). Feminist cultural studies is, as Rita Felski observes, ‘a field that is not a field, that resists definition and freely crosses

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10 See Sue Thornton, whose subtitle is indicative of the at times troubled relationship between feminism and cultural studies – Feminism Theory and Cultural Studies: Stories of Unsettled Relations (2000).
boundaries between disciplines’ (Felski, 2000: 163). Such interdisciplinarity is, both politically and intellectually, central to feminist cultural studies (Probyn, 1998b: 61). In terms of theories and methodologies, feminist cultural studies is characterised by eclecticism (Probyn, 1998b: 61) and accordingly this thesis does not adopt a uniform doctrinaire theoretical approach. In particular, while exposing the ideological limitations of various forms of representation that characterises early forms of cultural studies (Kemp, 1992: 328), attention to discourse can be seen as central to the projects of contemporary feminist cultural studies (Probyn, 1998b: 57), and – as Chapter One will suggest – such a focus marks this thesis. Further, while difficult to define, feminist cultural studies signals a form of self-consciously politicised criticism that works to render visible the gendered power relations of various modes of signification; this commitment will be visible throughout my analysis.

Chapter Outlines
This thesis is structured according to the four previously outlined constitutive elements: narrative, celebrity, audience, and history and conflict. The four elements of this topology inevitably overlap, and therefore individual chapters are frequently in dialogue with others; preliminary points made in one chapter are more thoroughly developed in subsequent chapters. This is most obviously the case with generationalism, in which the event became so heavily steeped.

Prior to the analysis constituting the bulk of this thesis, I provide a critical background to this work. In Chapter One: Media(ted) Feminisms: Publishing, News and Media Events, I situate my interdisciplinary thesis in a number of theoretical debates surrounding feminism, media and representation. In particular, I use this introductory chapter to challenge assumptions about media’s inherent hostility towards feminism, which – as Chapter Two also emphasises – have hindered feminism criticism on TFS media event. My project to refigure the event, as this chapter will show, is two-fold, necessitating a re-reading not only of previous ways of speaking critically about the event, but feminist media criticism more generally. In addition to engaging with wider questions of feminism and its mediatisations, this chapter outlines the media event paradigm that I argue is the most appropriate framework through which the debate can be (re)viewed.

In Chapter Two: The Public Life of The First Stone, I engage with both the texts of the event and critical work on the book and its reception. In this chapter I extrapolate on the antinomies that I argue have marred previous criticism: that the media event represents the monologic articulation of conservative voices, or that it represents the successful silencing of its controversial author. These positions need to
be deconstructed and supplanted if this media event and its cultural reverberations are
to be critically reconceptualised. Here, I also engage with attempts to generically
classify Garner’s book during the event, and how this worked to circumscribe the
discussions about feminism it pre-empted. This chapter also identifies some of the
main features of press coverage on the *TFS*, and places commentary and meta-
commentary in its historical and cultural context.

In Chapter Three: Bestselling Feminism – The Textual Politics of *The First Stone*, the background for the subsequent analysis of media texts, I produce a reading of the various discourses upon which the narrative relies. In this analysis, I problematise the text at the centre of the event not on the grounds of its facticity or otherwise but as reinscribing a number of assumptions about gender which feminism has sought to undermine. Furthermore, this chapter unpacks the discursive construction of a homogenous feminist orthodoxy underpinning Garner’s text which the media event itself, through multiple feminist perspectives, troubled. This chapter also pays particular attention to the narrative I’s self-formation and claims to authority. In the context of this thesis, my analysis of the book itself assumes that, while the way texts are taken up is important, so too is the ‘political character of the text itself’ (Giroux and McLaren, 1992: xxi). That said, reader engagement with the text would have been informed by various representations and self-representations of feminism, the book and its author; the remainder of the thesis therefore focuses on detailed analysis of the form and content of these media and so-called ‘popular’ texts to show how *TFS* was a contested narrative.

In Chapter Four: Voices Above Others – Celebrity Feminism in Mid-1990s Australia, I draw upon recent critical work on celebrity to consider how the sign ‘Garner’ came to operate throughout this media event. Garner, as celebrity, helped to raise feminism to the ‘maximum visibility’ (Fiske, 1996: 8) that is a precondition for media events. Rather than simply assuming Garner’s authority or seeing it as a form of feminist ‘imposture’ as other critics have, this chapter explores the discursive processes through which such authority was achieved, and contested. This chapter focuses on the processes of celebrity in foregrounding particular stories, and nostalgic histories, of feminism during the event. However, in order to counteract the assumption that Garner’s celebrity outshone all others, this chapter also considers two ‘minor’ yet key celebrities visible during this event: Anne Summers and Jenna Mead. This expanded focus serves to question both the ubiquity of Garner’s authority and the homogenous nature of celebrity feminism as a mode of public subjectivity. In particular, I will demonstrate the way these three figures attempt to manage the event and representations of feminism circulating therein, with often unforeseen results.
As I will make clear, the media event relies upon audience investment (both literal and symbolic) for its sustenance. For some, TFS event was staged for and between a number of Australia’s most high profile ‘public intellectuals’ (Davis: 1997, Carter: 2004); Chapter Five refuses to privilege such voices as the sole arbiters of public debate, and looks to an alternative site of public communication: letters to the editor of newspapers and magazines. In this chapter, focusing predominantly on a series of letters published in the Good Weekend while also drawing on letters published in various newspapers, I argue that letters to the editor provided discursive forums through/in which understandings of feminism questioning the event’s key voices were permitted to circulate. ‘Reader-writers’ use the discursive space made available for them by celebrity feminists, other prominent journalistic commentators, and TFS itself to further debate broader issues around feminism, identity, representation, and power. Throughout this chapter, as throughout this thesis, both the pessimism and the monologism marking previous criticism are contested.

Generation, as its governing trope, must be part of any critical attention to TFS media event, and it seems fitting to conclude this work by unpacking the politics of its persistent deployment. In Chapter Six: Mothers and Daughters – Mediated History, Feminist Conflict and Generational Tropes, I argue that although notions of generational conflict and familial metaphors dominated and shaped the event, their deployment (and contestation) are much more complicated than previous readings have allowed. This chapter emphasises the ways in which Garner and Summers’ nostalgic contributions limited, not without challenge, the subject positions available for young women within the media event. The media event is further refigured in this chapter through underscoring the role of feminists as news actors (interviewees, sources or commentators) who complicate notions of generational allegiance. Focusing on print media following the publication of TFS and Virginia Trioli’s Generation F (1996) and Kathy Bail’s DIY Feminism (1996), as well as analysing the latter two books, this chapter also examines the relationship between feminism, history and conflict in media culture. Prior to refiguring the event through attention to these four constitutive elements, the following chapter places this thesis in relevant critical debates about feminism, representation, and media events.
Chapter One
Media(ted) Feminisms: Publishing, News and Media Events

A simple cause and effect relationship between a necessarily conservative media and a necessarily excluded feminism does justice neither to the variety of media, nor to the inroads feminists have made in becoming the media themselves (Jane Long, 2001: 4).

A media event ... is a site of popular engagement and involvement, not just a scenic view to be photographed and left behind. Its period of maximum visibility is limited, often to a few days, though the discursive struggles it occasions will typically continue for much longer (John Fiske, 1996: 8).

Introduction
As the critical background to the re-conceptualisation of this media event undertaken in subsequent chapters, this chapter outlines a number of ways in which the relationship between feminism and media culture has been theorised historically. Here, I identify and subsequently critique a series of limiting assumptions that underpin much feminist criticism on this engagement. As I argue, these pessimistic assumptions need to be unpacked and supplanted if TFS media event is to be seen as anything other than an orchestrated campaign by an amorphous, monologic patriarchal media machine to undermine feminism. As TFS media event reaffirms, media culture has been sophisticated in its adaptations of feminism (Dow, 1996: 214), and consequently feminist strategies for interrogating this interaction must display equivalent sophistication. Section One engages with criticism on feminism and media culture, rejecting both condemnatory and celebratory approaches. Section Two links the event to a series of broader changes in the mediasphere, which are to be further interrogated in individual chapters. In Section Three, I demonstrate that a media event paradigm, in contrast to the model of the bourgeois public sphere, provides the most appropriate lens through which to re-view the highly visible debate following the publication of TFS.

Section I: Theorising Feminism and Media
Numerous critics have illustrated that contemporary media culture, through a diversity of representational forms such as film, television, popular writing, and magazines and
newspapers, contributes to an ongoing cultural conversation over feminism. TFS media event can be conceptualised as one such historically specific exchange, where attempts to delimit the meanings of feminism and the cultural change it has wrought inundate the media landscape. The circulation and accreditation of feminism in the mainstream media is part of a broader, continuing process (though not incontestable) of feminism’s institutionalisation (Van Acker, 1995: 178, Vavrus, 2002: 101). Such institutionalisation has complicated feminist identity, as feminists occupy positions simultaneously on the margins and at the centre (Lumby, 1997: 158). Media culture’s explicit deployments of the signifier ‘feminism’ have complicated claims of its exclusive ownership (Ahmed et al., 2000: 11); the term now circulates in a much more broader context than its earliest proponents could have imagined. Some argue that such proliferation has resulted in a state of ‘visible invisibility’: ‘It is as though the more than “feminism” has become a publicly visible term, the less sense both its practitioners and detractors have about what it is “about”’ (Kavka, 2001: ix). In light of this, as Australian feminist critic Kay Schaffer argues, ‘the popular circulation of the term “feminist” deserves more critical attention’ (Schaffer, 1998: 328), particularly given that feminists cannot ultimately control the uses to which it is put or the spaces in which it comes to flow.

In a wider sense, feminist-informed discourses of empowerment permeate contemporary media culture from television to popular music; new generic forms such as ‘chick-lit’ novels and films work to yoke the ideals of feminism with a consumerist, individualist celebratory rhetoric surrounding femininity (see Hindes and Stacey: 2001, Taylor: 2003). In an often-cited article ‘Feminism: Dead or Alive?’ (1990), Andrea Stuart comments (though perhaps too optimistically) on feminism’s ubiquity in mainstream cultural production:

> Popular feminism is all around us. It has everything to do with our day-to-day lives. We hear it on the radio, read it in the newspapers, and watch it on TV. Though it does not name itself ‘Feminist’ it is precisely here (through the media) that the vast majority of women learn their feminism. Feminism comes at most of us through the media … (Stuart, 1990: 30).

However, while these efforts to make sense of shifts in social subjectivity inspired by feminism are evident in contemporary entertainment-based media, news discourse in particular has always functioned as a site for discursive contestations over the meanings of feminism. At times such processes of negotiation become more pronounced, volatile and affective than others; TFS media event is one such point of ‘maximum visibility’ and ‘maximum turbulence’ in culture’s ‘river of discourses’ (Fiske, 1996: 7-8). Although not necessarily claiming the ‘dailiness of feminism’, in terms of

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media culture’s engagement with feminism, as an unproblematic ‘victory for the women’s movement’ (Bulbeck, 1999: 12), such appropriation constitutes the climate in which contemporary feminism is required to operate and thereby requires further critical (and practical) engagement.

The many cultural forms cited above suggest that feminism and ‘mainstream’ media culture are not antithetical, although the relationship remains characterised by tension. As Lisbet Van Zoonen’s use of a militaristic metaphor illustrates, culture and representation have always functioned as important ‘battlegrounds’ for contemporary feminism (Van Zoonen, 1994: 4). Many women access feminist discourse primarily through media constructions (Rhode, 1995: 705, Skeggs: 1997), making interrogation of and intervention into this site of ‘popular knowledge’ (Vavrus, 2002: 25) and analysis of its politics crucial for feminist critics. In her study on popular films that have been informed by feminist discourses but which do not explicitly specify this debt, Jacinta Read argues that ‘the decline of the feminist movement’ means that media culture ‘has become one of the primary sites in which feminism is now “lived” and experienced by the majority of women’ (Read, 2000: 4). In this sense, versions of feminism that circulate within media culture work as forms of ‘textually-mediated knowledge’ (Livingston, 1999: 91) upon which readers’ understandings of feminism can be based and negotiated. Moreover, following the displacement of the notion of an inner core or essence within anti-foundationalist epistemologies, media culture is now foregrounded as central in the ongoing process of self-formation (see Thompson: 1995), providing the materials through which we constitute our gendered – and feminist – selves. In the light of such an acknowledgement, media events such as that following the publication of TFS accumulate an even greater cultural significance. This event provides the opportunity to scrutinise the discursive processes of print media culture in relation to feminism, practices that mediate not only how it is possible to know feminism but to be feminist.

Rather than simply reflecting on societal changes and feminism itself, media culture plays a crucial role in the circulation of emancipatory discourses such as feminism and, therefore, helps to effect social and political transformation (Fiske, 1996: 10, see also Kellner: 1995). However, ‘the print media have never been simply recorders of society but have always been active agents in political change, economic development, and social formation’ (Craig, 2003: 71). The news media, argues Bernadette Barker-Plummer, is not simply a ‘channel for the transmission of information. It is also a complex, knowledge-production system in itself’ (Barker-Plummer, 1995: 308). In terms of news discourse in particular, claims to objectivity and detachment have been thoroughly critiqued, and the social constructivism of news
has been underscored (see Tuchman: 1978). As a later section will suggest, a notion of discourse informed by Foucault yet developed and utilised by a number of media theorists helps to account for how, through the operation of power, particular ways of signifying reality come to be visible over others.

Throughout this thesis, I assume that the print media culture plays a constitutive, as opposed to mimetic, function in terms of social realities and epistemologies. Print media culture does not simply represent contemporary feminism, but is a vital element in the constitution of its public identity (see Van Zoonen: 1992). In addition, in order to avoid the limitations of positivist assumptions about news media acting as a window on the world, a number of critics have emphasised the ‘storytelling function’ of contemporary media culture (Vavrus, 2002: 34, Dahlgren, 1991: 15-16). The stories through which feminism is inscribed in news discourse are a site of contest and struggle, as my subsequent analysis of TFS media event suggests. Douglas Kellner (1995), negotiating a space between cultural pessimism and populism, highlights that contemporary media culture is a contested terrain in which ‘competing social groups attempt to use to promote their agendas and ideologies, and which itself reproduces conflicting political discourses’ (Kellner, 1995: 20). For Kellner, ‘the concrete struggles of each society are played out in the texts of media culture’ (Kellner, 1995: 20). Here, the struggle over meaning, of cultural politics, is seen not as distinct from but as co-terminous with broader political struggle – a point which, following critics like Henry Giroux (2000), underpins this thesis. In this sense, the meanings afforded feminism as part of its movement into the ‘mainstream’ (itself conceptually fraught) continue to be the source of much anxiety, as feminist responses to this media event have emphasised. Such anxieties have fuelled debate over whether feminism’s engagement with ‘mainstream’ media culture is appropriate, viable or necessary.

**The Politics of Media Culture**

In this section I engage with relevant debates about the political implications of ‘mainstreaming’ feminism, a process in which media culture has been central. As Susan Sheridan et al. argue, ‘feminism has always been, at least in part, a media matter’ (Sheridan et al., 2000: 335). In relation to news media in particular, Margaret Henderson observes similarly that ‘from the earliest days, the media has found the women’s movement good copy’ (Henderson, 2002b: 3). This relationship can be described as one of ‘competitive symbiosis’ (Wolfsfeld, 2003: 84) between feminists as political antagonists and the news media that takes them up as sources. In this sense, feminists rely on the press for the circulation of their critique of male dominance and to
reach ‘a variety of publics and the press relies on the antagonists [feminists] for information and events that can be turned into news’ (Wolfsfeld, 2003: 84).

Feminism, as a heterogenous movement, set of practices and discourses seeking to contest the subordination of women, like other social justice movements has had a historically troubled relationship with media culture. Access to its diverse representational spaces is ‘perhaps the greatest obstacle faced by feminists and other progressive social movements in publicizing their needs and interests’ (McLaughlin, 1998: 89). Despite many acknowledgments of the potentialities of the media/feminism relationship, critical commentary (including my own) not surprisingly has been characterised by ambivalence. As Susan Douglas argues, news media attention to feminism itself mirrors the broader ‘cultural schizophrenia’ governing its discursive construction of women (Douglas, 1994: 165). As part of its broad project to question the ideological work of media culture in helping to constitute ‘Woman’, feminist criticism has always been preoccupied with the politics of representation.

Media culture’s purportedly ‘negative’ or ‘sexist’ portrayals of women was one of the main areas targeted by feminist critics and activists in the 1970s, including in Australia (see Edgar and McPhee: 1974). In these analyses of media as a signifying system, women were seen as either mis-represented or under-represented, ‘symbolically annihilated’ (Tuchman: 1978). In a media environment where women had not historically fared well, it is not surprising that some second wave activists approached media with caution and scepticism. Debates about what (if any) the relationship of feminism to news media and the mainstream publishing industry should be have long preoccupied Western feminists, as have questions of how feminism is marketed or packaged for a non-activist or non-feminist audience. As Gaye Tuchman asserted, ‘the answer to the practical question, “Can newspapers be used as a resource for social movements?” is necessarily complex’ (Tuchman, 1978: 209). In his study of the student left in US, Todd Gitlin (1980) concluded that news media will always ‘frame’ social movements in ways that ‘blunt’ their ‘oppositional edge’ (Gitlin, 1980: 281). For some feminists, radical separatism and the creation of a feminist communications network was the only way to ensure that the feminist ‘message’ was not diluted (Murray, 2004: 137-140); others, such as Germaine Greer, strategically cultivated a relationship with the international press in order to reach other women (Spongberg, 1993: 408).

Although underscoring its potential limitations, a number of critics have seen participation in various sites of mainstream media, and its capacity to determine the successes or failures of social movements, as a necessary ‘evil’ (Ashley and Olsen, 1998: 263, see also Akharvan-Majid and Ramaprasad, 2001: 45). Likewise, while emphasising
the limited tropes used to represent feminists in news discourse, Susan Douglas highlights media culture’s pedagogic function. She argues that ‘by treating feminism as a big story, the news media also brought millions of converts to feminism’ (Douglas, 1994: 165). These well-rehearsed questions about feminism and its relationship with the ‘mainstream’, particularly in regard to those authorised to speak therein, are at the heart of TFS media event. In addition to the ambivalence with which feminists have historically treated the news media, ‘mainstream’ non-fiction publications about feminism have also been the source of concern. Given what I argue to be the ideological and ethical limitations of TFS, it is not surprising that critics have condemned the event and the book at its centre as further representative of the inherent inadequacies of ‘mainstream’ publications about feminism. At this point, then, it is pertinent to re-visit debates over publications that have been, not unproblematically, located in the generic category of ‘popular feminism’.

‘Popular’ Feminist Writing

Despite its contribution to public understandings of feminism, TFS is rarely generically categorised as ‘popular feminism’; this can, in part, be attributed to Garner’s status as a prominent Australian author of texts commonly valued as literary (thus ‘high cultural’). Furthermore, as Chapter Two will further argue, critics often attempt to fix the text in the hybrid genre of ‘auto/biography’ rather than that of ‘popular feminism’. However, its at times vitriolic assault on Australian feminism shores up the suggestion that publications in this generic field commonly attack the homogenous feminism constructed within their own texts (Minnich, 1998: 161). Though not commonly identified as ‘popular feminism’, TFS was undoubtedly a 'bestseller'. Following Simone Murray, my usage of the term is the common one; that is, a publication that has ‘figured among the industry’s top ten or fifteen highest selling non-fiction in its year of publication’ (Murray, 2004: 169). As I will demonstrate in later chapters, the ‘bestseller’ lists in Australian Book Seller and Publisher indicate that some of the central publications of the media event (TFS, Trioli’s Generation F and Bail’s DIY Feminism) comply with this definition.

As a specific genre, the feminist ‘bestseller’ has been contemplated by Margaret Henderson and Shane Rowlands in ‘Damned Bores and Slick Sisters: The Selling of Blockbuster Feminism’ (1996). Henderson and Rowlands suggest that the decade of the 1990s sees the production of a new form of ‘mainstream’ feminist text: the feminist ‘blockbuster’ (Henderson and Rowlands, 1996: 10). The ‘feminist blockbuster’ is used by the media as a sign of ‘the health or otherwise of contemporary feminism and the women’s movement’ (Henderson and Rowlands, 1996: 10-11). As a ‘blockbuster’ text,
TFS is seen to cross the high culture/mass culture divide (Henderson and Rowlands, 1996: 11). The key features of this blockbuster are: semi-sensationalistic mode; there is a pronounced authorial role in marketing the text; they are supposedly ‘media friendly’ and open to media appropriation and depoliticisation; and finally, they are often ‘bestsellers’ (Henderson and Rowlands, 1996: 10). For Henderson and Rowlands, the ‘blockbuster’ text is a global phenomenon. With specific reference to TFS and Rene Denfeld’s The New Victorians, they articulate the ideological limitations of the ‘blockbuster’:

We are suspicious therefore, of the kinds of suggestions offered by Garner and Denfeld, when it is obvious from their books’ reception that their ‘colonisation’ of feminism is a media’s marketing dream. Furthermore, we find it difficult to see these texts functioning to reactivate feminist struggles, when their obsessive labelling function serves to reprivatise many of the issues that the women’s liberation movement pushed into a public and politicised sphere (Henderson and Rowlands, 1996: 13).

While Henderson and Rowlands emphasise the limitations of this form of text and the way it is commonly taken up in public discourse, I argue throughout that the public conversations following these controversial texts, and the celebrity of their authors (see Sheridan et al.: 2000), can produce unpredictable discursive effects that may not be entirely negative.

Although critical attention to feminist fiction has been pronounced (Felski: 1989, Lauret: 1994, Hogeland: 1998), the cultural work performed by non-fictional feminist texts does not appear to have attracted as much interest. In terms of its critical history, publishing has been ‘relegated to an academic no man’s land’ (Murray, 2004: 18) within feminist media studies. As a mark of such an omission, apart from Lynne Pearce’s recent study (2003) and much critical analysis of US ‘third-wave’ texts (hooks: 1994, Siegel: 1997a and 1997b, Sorisio: 1997, Henry: 2004), remarkably little has been written on either the reception of ‘popular feminist’ texts, their generic classification, or their textual strategies. This is surprising, given that ‘the mainstream publishing sector [along with print media culture generally] largely dictates public opinion as to what feminism is’ (Murray, 2004: 189). That which has been produced often focuses less on the rhetorical dimensions of texts than on its ideological limitations and analyses theme over form. Those deemed writers of popular feminist texts are thought to deploy rhetorical techniques designed to ‘incite a broad public to weigh in on their side as well as to buy their books in such quantities that the authors will, by logic of the marketplace, be validated as the media, lecture circuit, and popular spokeswomen for feminism’ (Minnich, 1998: 160). Popular feminist writers are often seen to be in ‘attack

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mode’ (Minnich, 1998: 161), and commonly draw upon personal experience to ‘authenticate a position outside of (perceived) feminist ideology’ (Pearce, 2003: 38). Therefore, as a marketing category, popular feminist writing is often positioned against an ill-defined feminist orthodoxy, a ‘retrograde feminist “other”’ (Pearce, 2003: 39), and hence it is often assumed to be \textit{a priori} politically conservative. The positioning of these texts against a putative inadequate feminism may be a common rhetorical technique. However, it is imperative to be cognizant that this type of writing – like all forms of communication – is a ‘contested terrain’ (Farrell, 1998: 2) whose meanings can be struggled over in unknowable and unanticipated ways by increasingly sophisticated cultural consumers.

Susan Grover is one of the few critics to identify the need to re-read \textit{TFS} media event as confirmation of the importance of ‘popular’ feminist publications.\textsuperscript{3} She argues that Garner’s popularisation of feminist debate is most productively seen as a ‘call to arms’ (Grover, 1996: 249). The evangelical rhetoric in the following quotation is clear: ‘The challenge remaining in the book’s wake is for feminists to take their message to a medium as accessible as the one Garner has employed’ (Grover, 1996: 249-250).

Grover advocates the simple transmission of this ‘message’ and here disavows the role of media in its constitution. She also fails to concede that many feminists did in fact take up the space opened by \textit{TFS} in media discourse to ensure the event was not monologic. However, her idea that by taking the event, and ‘mainstream’ media culture in a broader sense, seriously feminists can ‘win new ground’ (Grover, 1996: 250) is worth pursuing. This thesis works as a contribution to this worthwhile, and increasingly necessary, political project.

Earlier in this chapter I emphasised the role of news media in helping to both constitute and circulate second-wave feminist discourses. Similarly, writing as a form of cultural production long favoured by women has also been central in helping to reconfigure patriarchal imaginaries and to activate readers (see Lauret: 1994).\textsuperscript{4} As Stacey Young argues, feminist publishing represents a form of discursive politics: ‘Language acts – including published writings – can play a crucial part in bringing about individual and collective social change’ (Young: 1997: 25). Furthermore, popular understandings of the women’s movement are linked to the products of the publishing industry, a point of which feminists have long been aware. As Simone Murray observes

\textsuperscript{3} See also Curthoys’ essay in \textit{Bodyjamming}, where she reflects on ‘what it is that the ‘Garner debate’ and subsequent public discussion of feminist issues have told us about ourselves, our dilemmas and our possible futures’ (Curthoys, 1997: 189).

\textsuperscript{4} For example, in relation to realist novels in particular, Charlotte Templin argues that such a form worked to ‘spread feminist ideas to people who might not have been part of an organized women’s movement and enabled them to participate in the self-discovery imaginative literature made possible’ (Templin, 1995: 58).
in her discussion of the publishing politics of de Beavouir’s *The Second Sex*, ‘feminists of the early-1970s evinced a clear-eyed awareness of the publishing industry’s power to shape public perceptions of what constitutes the women’s movement’ (Murray, 2000: 146). In Australia, second wave feminists produced a number of polemics and revisionist histories; these include Germaine Greer’s *The Female Eunuch* (1970), Miriam Dixon’s *The Real Matilda* (1975), and Anne Summers’ *Damned Whores and God’s Police* (1975), all of which form part of the Australian feminist canon. Publishing, therefore, like media culture generally, has been important to feminism in moving beyond its own boundaries, for communicating with an audience broader than its self-identified constituents. To signal the importance of this relationship, it has even been stated (or perhaps overstated) that ‘publishing houses are among feminism’s best allies’ (Rose in Richardson and Robinson, 1996: 179).

In the 1990s, the period with which I am preoccupied, there appears to have been an internationally marked growth in texts marketed as feminist by mainstream publishers (Robinson and Richardson, 1996: 179). In the American context, bell hooks refers to the ‘megasuccess of popular feminist books’ during this period (hooks, 1994: 92). Increasingly, the signifier ‘feminism’ is an important marketing tool to boost sales among the female reading public (Felski, 1989: 79). The sales of *TFS* and the books produced in its wake challenge Michele Barrett’s comments that non-fiction books about feminism tend to be commercially unsuccessful (Barrett, 1997: 112), although it does often seem that the most successful are those with questionable politics. In particular, as the success of a number of such ‘popular’ books suggests, ‘internal feminist debates are now regarded as highly saleable’ (Lumby, 1997a: 93). Rather than signifying appropriation by the capitalist-patriarchal literary industrial complex, such popular feminist ‘bestsellers’ testify to ‘the cultural struggles going on in contemporary first world societies on the nature of femininity, masculinity and feminism’ (Van Zoonen, 1994: 5). Having said that, there remains much justifiable debate over the politics of writing marketed as ‘popular feminism’.

In *Chapter Two* I will engage further with the Australian ‘popular’ texts published during this time, but it is worth noting here that, although Australian feminist presses such as Spinifex, Sybylla, and Artemis were well established by the mid-1990s (Poland, 2001: 124), a large proportion of feminist non-fiction texts published during this time have emerged from major publishing houses such as Allen and Unwin, Harper Collins and Picador. Some critics romanticise feminist publishing houses, where committed

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5 The sheer volume, however, of feminist books on publishing lists should not be incautiously celebrated. In relation to academic feminist publishing, Grinsberg and Lennox argue: ‘Despite the boom in feminist book publishing, we want to argue in this essay that feminist scholarship remains under siege on a number of fronts’ (Grinsberg and Lennox, 1996: 169).
feminist women control the means of production. In these accounts, feminist politics and ‘multi-national gatekeepers and profit-driven commodity publishing’ (Poland, 2002: 5) are frequently positioned as irreconcilable opposites. As Simone Murray’s recent study shows, profit-making and politics have been viewed as antithetical by some women involved with feminist publishing (Murray: 2004). Likewise, such ‘mainstreaming’ and institutionalisation is often greeted with critical ambivalence, or seen as antithetical to feminist political goals (Menon, 2001: 182-183).³ ‘Popular’ books about feminism are seen to inevitably buttress the status quo and, like media engagement with feminism, are commonly condemned on such grounds.

As these comments suggest, the question of ‘feminist bestsellerdom’ in the production of feminist epistemologies remains discomforting (Murray, 2000: 147); this is unsurprising given the ‘relentless selectivity’ that promotes some titles over others as exemplars of contemporary feminist writing (Murray, 2004: 210). Feminist critics have pondered the ethical and political dilemmas of such appropriation, particularly in relation to those excluded by the ‘mainstream’ (see Levy: 1991, Ferrier: 1991). bell hooks expresses fears that feminism’s recognition that one is never only a woman and awareness of interlocking oppression will be negated by the types of feminist texts published by larger publishing houses:

as more and more books by individual feminist thinkers (mostly young, white, materially privileged) are marketed to a mass public and become the ‘texts’ that teach these audiences what feminism is or is not, there is a danger that any critical interrogation of the category ‘woman’ will be erased. We may end up where the contemporary feminist movement began: with the false assumption that feminism is primarily for and about materially privileged white woman (hooks, 1994: 102).

For hooks, the racially privileged part will come to signify the whole, and the whiteness of Western feminism will be reinforced. That said, hooks also argues that feminists should not cede this ground to its most privileged spokeswoman (comments that Chapter Four will further examine).

Although not wishing to overestimate feminist publishing’s role in reconfiguring public space, the automatic equation of the ‘mainstream’ with the ‘malestream’ is problematic (Gerrard, 1989: 6) in a context where texts marketed as ‘feminist’ have achieved substantial commercial success. Generally pessimistic about what has been made available via these channels, Imelda Whelehan argues that ‘popular’ feminist books that attempt to make feminism accessible and speak to younger women in particular ‘are important to the survival of feminist politics’ (Whelehan, 2000: 88). Like the feminism-media culture relationship as a whole, ‘popular’ feminists texts pose

³ In Yours in Sisterhood, Amy Farrell argues that Ms editors had to negotiate the contradictory demands of a consumer culture with the oppositional politics of the women’s movement (Farrell, 1998: 2).
a number of concerns and offer a number of possibilities, neither of which can be predetermined. In this sense, the relationship between feminism and ‘mainstream’ (itself an increasingly unstable signifier) publishing should not be automatically condemned as detrimental to feminism. In addition, while the market for TFS is not necessarily a feminist one (Atmore, 1999: 88), the book is marketed as having emerged from within feminism, an assumption central to its (claims to) authority. Whether or not the book can be classified ‘feminist’, something I certainly question, it is positioned as offering salient insights into the health of contemporary Australian feminism, and therefore its contribution to public understandings of feminism is worthy of further critical engagement. In spite of what I and many other Australian feminist critics argue to be the questionable feminist politics of Garner’s book, in this thesis I mine the media event following its publication for its productive aspects, a move which also requires me to challenge much previous feminist criticism on the feminism-media relationship.

A ‘Risky’ Business?: Feminist Media Criticism

Despite shifts in the contemporary mediasphere and feminism itself, the limitations of the feminism-media interaction continue to dominate much feminist media criticism, particularly in relation to feminism and its representation in the news. Remarkably, feminist attention to news has not been as prolific as those studies concerned with re-valuing formerly denigrated so-called ‘mass’ cultural forms, such as women’s magazines (Winship: 1987), romance novels (Radway: 1984), and soap operas. That said, the feminism-media relationship has internationally been the subject a number of substantial critical publications over the past decade (Van Zoonen: 1994, Douglas: 1994, Huddy: 1997, Lumby: 1997, McCluskey et al.: 1997, Vavrus: 2002). The role of the mainstream media in helping to constitute second-wave feminism has also been the subject of a number of feminist media histories (Farrell: 1998, Bradley: 2003). In Australia, however, a comprehensive analysis of news media’s role in either the discursive construction of feminism or active feminist interaction with it has yet to be produced. Studies that have been produced commonly offer content analysis of the representation of women politicians or union leaders (not necessarily as self-identified feminists), as problematic figures in a masculinist news context. Figures such as Jenny George, Kerry Chikarovski and Cheryl Kernot have been used to further shore up assumptions about how the news attempts to trivialise and devalue women in the public sphere (see Deutchman and Ellison: 1999, Muir: 2000, Jenkins: 2000, Baird: 2000). This, of course, raises a number of questions: What is a feminist ‘market’? Can it be separated from a more general, though sympathetic, audience? I will consider further later in this chapter the impossibility of invoking an ‘authentic’ feminism, be it text, discourse or identity.

Some critics have, however, engaged directly with this relationship. Most recently, the work of Susan Sheridan, Susan Magarey and Sandra Lilburn (2000), Sandra Lilburn (1999, 2001) and Margaret Henderson (2002b) has acted to at least partially fill this gap. Furthermore, Sheridan et al.’s forthcoming analysis of nine key moments in the history of the relationship between Australian print media and feminism will be a vital addition to this relatively neglected field of intellectual inquiry. Another exception is Elizabeth Van Acker’s ‘The portrayal of feminist issues in the print media’ (1995), in which she traces the representation of feminists through four Queensland newspapers. She concludes that, through its deployment of a number of problematic frames, this reporting reveals an inability within news discourse to account for the complexities of Australian feminisms. Although the movement may have fragmented and diversified, she argues, news discourse cannot adequately communicate such diversity, and feminists must therefore view it cautiously (Van Acker, 1995: 194-195). Catharine Lumby, too, has contemplated this relationship. While Lumby’s Bad Girls (1997) attempts to reconfigure feminist narratives of media power, her analysis is hindered by an invocation of a straw feminist academic whose position she caricatures and subsequently, rather polemically, deconstructs. Furthermore, her celebratory rhetoric provides little conceptual ground on which to theorise media culture as both constraining and enabling in terms of how feminism comes to mean. As Chapter Two will further suggest, although critics have often invoked it (see Long: 2001, Bulbeck: 2001) or highlighted its inadequacies (Henderson and Rowlands: 1996, Mead: 1997), even TFS media event has not been thoroughly interrogated as an instance of newspaper coverage of feminism. In light of the above, this thesis works to address both the general lack of criticism on press coverage of feminism and the more specific lack of analysis on TFS media event as an instance of the Australian print media’s engagement with feminism.

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8 The ‘Feminism and Media Project’ is being undertaken by Sheridan, Magarey and Lilburn: see http://www.ssn.flinders.edu.au/wmst/media.php.
Feminism and News

News media attention specifically to feminism has commonly centred on politico-cultural performances that have been identified as ‘feminist events’. Prominent feminist protests such as the 1968 protest in Seattle against the Ms America Pageant (Dow: 2003), the infamous Town Hall debate where Germaine Greer took the misogynistic Norman Mailer to task (Deem: 2003), to more recent studies on the Beijing Women’s Conference (Danner and Walsh: 1999). This news focus on singular events is believed to come ‘at the expense of a broad ideological agenda’ (Huddy, 1997: 185) and is privileged over a more protracted consideration of feminist issues (Ashley and Olsen, 1998: 264). In feminist studies of press coverage of these events, feminists are commonly seen to have been Othered, marked as an embodied threat to the stability of the patriarchal symbolic order which news discourse itself works to buttress. The contemporary lack of high profile larger scale events, due the fragmented nature of feminism and the increase in coalitional alliances (as opposed to a unified women’s movement), has left a news gap that the feminist personality (no longer necessarily an ‘activist’) has increasingly come to fill.

This shift from events to personalities is also related to increased attention to celebrities and turn to the personal in the so-called ‘postmodern public sphere’. That said, so-called exceptional women, such as politicians (Baird: 2004), or the ‘first woman to’ (Lilburn: 1999) have always attracted news interest. In addition to such personalities, the homogenised ‘feminist’ has been a problematic rhetorical figure in news discourse since the early representations of the ‘second wave’ to which I have already referred. In feminist criticism, it is common to cite a number of over-utilised tropes as indicative of a universal media contempt for the anxiety-provoking figure of the feminist. For example, Hall and Rodrigeuz’ content analysis leads them to assert: ‘Any survey of media’s coverage of contemporary feminism over four decades reveals a persistent pattern of negative portrayals: women’s lib, man hater, bra burner, unfeminine, lesbian and/or sexual deviant, feminazi (ugly, unable to catch a man, dyke) and whining victims’ (Hall and Rodriguez, 2003: 880). Other historical studies of the press coverage of second wave feminism have likewise found media over-reliance on a series of problematic tropes (Douglas: 1994, Bradley: 1998), so perhaps such critical pessimism is to be expected.

One of the most commonly invoked figures is arguably the ‘bra-burner’ (Rhode: 1995, Stacey and Hindes: 2001). In their recent study, Hindes and Stacey argue that the ‘bra burner’ functions as one of the central icons of feminism to recurrently feature in the press. Hindes and Stacey clarify their usage of the term ‘iconic’:

The iconic figure is one that accrues such a powerful set of associations as to be immediately recognisable, as to produce a visceral reaction, and as to condense a
complex history of contested meanings in one gesture or sentence (Hindes and Stacey, 2001: 136).

As an image frequently invoked in news discourse, the bra-burner functions as a synecdoche for the 'women's liberation movement' (Hindes and Stacey, 2001: 156). The 'bra-burner' is also one of the earliest figures to enact the persistent opposition between feminism and femininity (Hindes and Stacey, 2001: 158), serving to locate feminism in the realm of the aberrant and femininity in that of the 'natural'. The bra-burner, as a mythologised trope associated with second wave feminism, is thought to have been resignified and updated for the 1990s.

For Kay Schaffer, the 'bra-burning, man-hating' tropes of press reports of second-wave feminism have been replaced with puritanical 'feminazis':

in popular feminist discourse ‘feminism’ is a scare word, a word that has been used to evoke (although no dictionary would say so) the 1970s stereotype of bra-burning, man hating lesbians who made up the boiler suit brigade, and now in the 1990s is aligned with the vindicative, puritanical and punishing new generation of ‘feminazis’. They are the ones who employ the sexual harassment laws that their older sisters helped to put in place which threaten to destroy the lives and careers of kindly old men (Schaffer, 1998: 322).

Although not explicitly linking this characterisation to TFS media event, Schaffer’s intertextual reference here is clear. For some, such 'less than complimentary portrayals' of feminists are evidence that the ‘influence of an anti-feminist frame’ dominates within newspapers (Akhavan-Majid and Ramaprasad, 2000: 55). Likewise, in their studies Ashley and Olsen (1998) and Lind and Salo (2002) assume that the level of deviancy attributed to the homogenised feminist signals media fears surrounding her potential for cultural disruption. This ‘othering’ of feminists, as a widespread set of rhetorical strategies through which feminism is contained, has been the focal point of much feminist media criticism and its consequent cultural pessimism. In framing the media as a ‘disciplinary’ mechanism, for example, Melissa Deem argues that such tropes inevitably limit feminist engagement with media and damage feminism itself (Deem: 1999 and 2003). For Deem, this disciplinary impetus is strong enough to place feminists in a ‘double bind’, ‘either refuse to speak or not be heard’ (Deem, 1999: 87). These concerns about the politics of media engagement – that is, what happens to ‘authentic’ feminist speech once it enters the broader mediasphere – appear to dominate much recent criticism in this area. While I will argue that Deem’s false dilemma needs to be recast, below I will highlight that hers is not an isolated example of this dichotomous logic.

In order to refigure TFS media event, I argue here that the feminism-media relationship also requires reconceptualisation. The enduring skepticism about feminist engagement with the media is encapsulated by the following comment: ‘We can sometimes use it [media] to reach the public, but we must never, never trust it’
This profound sense of distrust continues to mark (and mar) studies of this relationship between feminism and print news. In taxonomies of feminist media criticism, following developments in the field of cultural studies, the theoretical trajectory often moves from ‘unsophisticated’ forms of analysis concerned with the ‘un-reality’ of images to Althusserian- and Lacanian-inspired analysis focusing on subjectivity, investment and desire (see McRobbie, 1997: 172, Sheridan: 1995). In these accounts, media culture moves from functioning as an ideological state apparatus (ISA), interpellating docile readers into a patriarchal imaginary, to being a site of flux, contradiction and pleasure through which the subject is made and remade. This tale of progress is generally conceived as a methodological shift in emphasis from content to the complexities of meaning production and subject formation (Brooks, 1997: 163).

Despite these linear narratives about the development of feminist media criticism, much contemporary criticism on the representation of feminists, and issues deemed to be ‘feminist’, in the print media appears to have remained hindered by notions of media distortion, simplification and trivialisation, depoliticisation, under-representation, recuperation and commodification, stereotyping and misrepresentation. These assumptions are overwhelmingly articulated through the trope of risk, and the metaphors of contagion and contamination. To refigure this media event these constraining tropes and metaphors themselves need to be refigured. In this section, I focus on feminist critical accounts from the 1990s and early 2000s to demonstrate the constraints of these particular ways of conceptualising the feminism-print news media interaction, before positing a way of maintaining the ambivalence of such criticism without assuming the a priori negativity of the feminism-media relationship.

In its scope and its overwhelmingly liberal-humanist politics, news engagement with feminism is often marked by significant limitations; this is something with which I do not take issue. However, as I argue here, such cultural pessimism continues to straightjacket studies on the feminism-media relationship, including that on TFS media event. The assumptions made in the following statement remain common: ‘the most effective social movement in the United States has undertaken a great fall in the hands of the popular’ (Kim, 2001: 320). In the Australian context, Chilla Bulbeck juxtaposes ‘the feminism that is popular’, a form of liberal feminism concerned with equal opportunity, with ‘unpopular’ feminism, which ‘depicts feminists as fat, ugly, boiler-suited man-hating lesbians’ (Bulbeck, 1999: 12). Zillah Eisenstein, in likening mass-mediated feminism to ‘low fat’ food, invokes a ‘real’ or ‘full-fat’ feminism existing beyond its media representations (Eisenstein, 1997: 34), a real/cultural politics binary

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deconstructed by many critics (see Giroux: 2000). As these comments suggest, when the signifier ‘popular’ is deployed in relation to feminism, it is often accompanied by the weighty cultural baggage and disdain that critics have been attempting to overcome for decades (see Williams: 1976). ‘Popular feminism’ – signalling its circulation in the ‘mainstream’ media – is seen as a necessarily inferior feminism, with media and feminism always-already positioned as antagonists. It seems that some feminist critics are not immune from binary logic, reinscribing the high/low and academic/popular dichotomies when criticising feminism’s so-called ‘popular’ manifestations. In terms of the news representation of movement politics in particular, critics often assume that feminism has had to ‘moderate its message’ to ‘fit with journalistic demands’, ultimately resulting in its distortion (Huddy, 1997: 185). Furthermore, in such accounts, ‘real’ feminist critics or activists are silenced by media appointment of feminist ‘superstars’ (Huddy: 1997, Van Acker: 1999, Pozner: 2003). In these accounts, a productive dialogue in media discourse either with or about feminism is thought to be impossible. Here, conscious of the potential reductiveness of such a gesture, I will briefly consider a few recent examples as illustrative of such tendencies.

‘Backlash’

Perhaps the most well-known example of this style of media criticism is Susan Faludi’s *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women* (1992). Faludi’s text itself is a form of ‘popular’ feminist analysis whose very appearance in print calls into question its claims of the monovocality of ‘mainstream’ discourse. In her polemic, Faludi invokes a hypodermic model of media effects, where women ‘absorb’ the ‘teachings of the media’ (Faludi, 1992: 21), including those regarding feminism. For Faludi, the backlash was generated within print journalism: ‘The press first introduced the backlash to a national audience – and made it palatable. Journalism cosmetized the scowling face of antifeminism while blackening the feminist eye’ (Faludi, 1992: 101). However, the ‘backlash’ is said to be a cross-genre phenomenon, evident in television and film as well as print media. In media discourse, Faludi argues, feminism is responsible for women’s discontentment and is discredited on such grounds.

For some, the early to mid 1990s represented the peak of ‘backlash’ activity within media culture (Walters, 1995: 141). However, as a frame through which the feminism-media relationship can be interrogated, it has retained its popularity; for example, Imelda Whelehan (2000) appropriates the ‘backlash’ paradigm for an analysis of contemporary British media culture. She argues that, as part of the backlash, ‘feminism has been parodied and misrepresented as a prudish, authoritarian orthodoxy’ (Whelehan, 2000: 12-13). For Whelehan, a mediated backlash against
feminism is inevitable. Similarly, in their article about the Beijing Women’s
Conference, Lauren Danner and Susan Walsh appropriate the backlash thesis to read
responses to the event from the New York Times and the Washington Post, and
conclude that ‘the backlash against women has remained static within media coverage
since Faludi presented her study’ (Danner and Walsh, 1999: 76, see also Walters: 1992,
Baker-Beck: 1998). There are a number of problems with such an assertion, including
its assumptions that media serves only to perpetuate the dominant ideology. As Myra
McDonald notes, ‘conspiracy theory’ readings like the backlash thesis view the media as
a ‘bastion of male privilege’ who are ‘spurred on by the mission of keeping feminism at
bay’ (in Gamble, 2000: 193). However, ‘the backlash thesis is seductive because it
seems such a simple explanation of feminism’s failure’ (Hollows, 2000: 191), and such
failure is often seen to be the responsibility of media culture: ‘When we blame the
media, we smugly exonerate ourselves ... we free ourselves from blame, and place it on
“it” (the media) and “them” (the unwashed masses who have no taste/been
seduced/have not had the proper cultivation)’ (Jensen, 1990: 195). In such narratives,
feminist academics positions themselves as inherently superior to the everyday readers,
who are convinced of feminism’s inadequacies by an anti-feminist media culture
(Hollows, 2000: 196-197). As a form of media criticism, backlash simplifies complex
communicative processes, and obscures the heterogenous, often contradictory,
ideologies mobilised in and by media culture (see Collins: 1989). In the logic of the
backlash, media culture is inherently anti-feminist and accordingly works to develop
ever sophisticated tactics for feminism’s delegitimation. Here, feminism and media are
fixed in an unhelpful antithetical relation. It is such fixity, I argue, that acts as a barrier
to the critical recognition of the potentialities of this engagement – including in TFS
media event. Though similarly condemnatory, other critics personify feminism as a
body infected by media culture.

Contagion and the Body of Feminism
In these dominant critical narratives of the representation of feminists in media
culture, journalists either misrepresent, erase feminists from view, or actively resist
coverage of feminist issues. For some critics, each of these positions is believed to have
material effects on an authentic feminism beyond media boundaries. Given the
importance of the struggle for visibility in which feminism, like other social
movements, has been engaged (Thompson: 1995), such erasure is seen to be even more
alarming. To substantiate these assertions, a number of feminist media critics have
engaged in quantitative analysis, measuring the presence of ‘feminism’ and other
related signifiers in percentage terms, to extrapolate about media’s elision of, and
subsequently its contempt, for feminism (see Huddy: 1997, Ashley and Olsen: 1998, Lind and Salo: 2002). As Deborah Baker-Beck argues, ‘when feminists aren’t being portrayed as freaks of nature, these women (and men) and their issues are frequently ignored by the mass media. The effects of seeing their work ignored or distorted in the press can effectively stifle feminism’s progress’ (Baker-Beck, 1998: 143). Other critics invoke a debilitated feminist body, whose growth has been stymied by its engagement with media: ‘From the first days of the women’s movement, the mainstream media have done their utmost to stunt feminism’s growth’ (Pozner, 2003: 31). Through its engagements with media culture, then, the body of feminism is conceptualised to be profoundly at risk. Here, the media symbolise a form of contagion, infecting a vulnerable feminist body. As Joli Jensen comprehensively shows, the idea of media as a contaminating force has a long heritage. According to this logic, ‘the media can spoil and pervert what already exists, and deflect and deform what would otherwise naturally develop’ (Jensen, 1990: 85). In these accounts, a unified patriarchal print media work to diffuse the threat posed by feminism. Furthermore, media culture’s ‘trivialisation’ of feminist issues, like the individualisation of feminism by news focus on remarkable women politicians or business women (see Muir: 2000, Jenkins: 2000, and Baird: 2004), is seen to further undermine feminism (see Rhode: 1995, Baker-Beck: 1998).

In the ultimate, and logical, extension of the trope of risk, these critics condemn media coverage of feminism on the grounds that it prematurely declares feminism ‘dead, dying or permanently disabled’ (Rhode, 1995: 695). For Rhode, feminism’s ill-health operates along a continuum. Similarly, another critic argues that feminists have been ‘demonized, pathologized, and eulogized by media for decades’ (Pozner, 2003: 37). As these comments indicate, critics argue that media culture’s desire for tales of feminism’s demise is longstanding. Genealogies of the term ‘postfeminism’, focusing on the way it has circulated through various forms of media, have been produced by a number of feminist academics (Modleski: 1991, Brooks: 1998, Gamble: 1999, Vavrus: 2002, Nurka: 2002). Moreover, feminist media criticism is replete with commentary on media culture’s role in defining feminism as ‘post’ (Coppock et al.: 1995, Walters: 1999, Whelehan: 2000, Kim: 2001, Hall and Rodriguez: 2003). In this criticism, the ‘posting’ of feminism represents media culture’s most pernicious strategy to undo modern feminism. In such narratives, feminism is figured as the ‘corpse/dead matter upon which “postfeminism” performs its autopsy’ (Nurka, 2002: 177). In Postfeminist News, Mary Vavrus argues that a ‘postfeminist hegemony’ circumscribes the representation of women and provides a context in which feminism will always-already be attacked (Vavrus, 2002: 168). Though ‘postfeminism’ itself is a shifting signifier – at times meaning the intersection of feminism with poststructuralism or postmodernism
(Brooks: 1997), at others the assumption that feminism is no longer necessary or viable – TFS event renders problematic these assertions that media only offers textual death notices for feminism. While critics argue that ‘feminism is always being prematurely autopsied in order to understand and render impotent is remains’ (Deem, 1999: 90), both the signifier ‘post’ and the assumptions underpinning it are remarkably absent from the event. On the contrary, anxieties exhibited by some conservative commentators emphasise that TFS media event represents a highly visible reminder of feminism’s presence, resilience, and longevity. In this vein, Camille Nurka argues that ‘the emergence of postfeminism signals not the death of feminism, but its affective force and potency’ (Nurka, 2002: 188). If, therefore, some critics figure feminism as a body whose contamination by media has reached its end point, death, for others the effects of this engagement manifest more materially in readerly disidentification with feminism.

Media Consumption = Rejection of Feminism

As Chapter Two will further demonstrate, critics of TFS media event consistently rearticulate concerns about the effects of the feminism-media interaction, leading to this media event’s wholesale dismissal. However, such critics fear the effects of this alleged representational inaccuracy, not just on feminism, but on supposedly unwitting readers whose interpretation of feminism is shaped by the narratives offered in news discourse. Therefore, although the ‘media effects’ tradition has been thoroughly problematised (see Curran: 2003), its assumptions are still evident in much feminist media criticism. Kay Schaffer fears that feminist politics has suffered through its media interaction: ‘It could be argued that the ongoing scourge on feminists in the media (as opposed to advances in feminist theory in the academy) has been a significant factor in reducing the efficacy of a politics of feminism’ (Schaffer, 1998: 321, Vavrus: 2002). For Schaffer, media culture not only misrepresent, but significantly damages feminism and diminishes its efficacy as a force for social and political change. In Mass Media and the Shaping of American Feminism, Patricia Bradley likewise argues that it is the press coverage of ‘strident’ feminist women during the second wave that continues to function as the source of contemporary young women’s rejection of feminism (Bradley, 2003: vx-xviii). In such accounts, media culture has an overwhelming influence over women, acting as the prime deterrent against identification as a feminist.

Young women, in particular, are thought to be particularly susceptible to the negative tropes through which feminism is discursively constituted. In the wake of popular culture’s circulation of ‘girlpower’ type discourses, young women are believed
to fervently reject the feminist label. The following quotation, from young feminist critics lamenting their peers’ failure to identify as feminist, exemplifies this tendency:

Through subtle and blatant attacks, the media have been successful in pushing many of our generation away from identifying as feminists who are portrayed as anti-sex, man-hating extremists. Their words are taken out of context and their message warped so that no women would want to identify with a feminist cause (Carraher et al., 1991: 197).

Here, despite the widely accepted critical faith in audience activity and media literacy, it is feared that readers will assume that media culture offers an accurate reflection of reality which is passively imbibed. These commentators imply that otherwise sympathetic women are repelled by media’s representation of feminism. While now less frequently seen as cultural ‘dupes’ of feminised forms of culture such as romance fiction and soap opera, women readers are still thought to be subject to the ‘effects’ of news media representation of feminism (i.e., failure to identify as feminist). As a young woman who obviously ‘escaped’ this anti-feminist brainwashing of media culture to identify deeply with a feminism based in activism, such demonisation cannot adequately account for how media is consumed, the polysemy of its products, or the contradictions of its own ideologies. These fears about how young women will be discouraged from identifying with feminism through media representations are also evident in feminist media criticism referring to feminism in their titles as the ‘f’ word (Baker-Beck: 1998, Whelehan: 2000, Kim: 2001); for such critics, the media position feminism as unspeakable, as a signifier that will cause offence and, by implication, whose explicit articulation would jeopardise their commercial success. This apportioning of blame to media culture for women’s failure to identify with feminism, or as feminists, effectively frees feminists from interrogating how our own exclusionary practices may be the cause of such disassociation. Such criticism also imposes an artificial stasis on the interactions of feminism and media, resulting in a failure to conceptualise this relationship as shifting, dynamic, and evolving. Finally, the notion of an authentic feminist discourse against which media representations can be evaluated relies upon a number of assumptions about feminism and signification that, although perhaps providing comfort and certainty, are questionable in the current theoretical, cultural and political climate.

Reconceptualising the Feminism-Media Nexus

As the above examples suggest, some critics assume that any feminist intervention into the ‘mass media’ will inexorably function in a reductionist manner, or that feminism must be rendered somehow facile in order to enable its insertion into these texts. As Margaret Henderson has argued, writers of Australian feminist history – though not exhibiting much anxiety about the past they narrate – articulate a ‘deep uncertainty
about feminism’s future’ (Henderson, 2002c: 325). In the work of Chilla Bulbeck and Marilyn Lake, Henderson argues, such uncertainty is attributed to ‘the current media-driven depoliticisation of feminism’ (Henderson, 2002c: 325). While prevalent, this is not to suggest that critical narratives positioning media culture as a pernicious patriarchal machine decimating feminism have gone unchallenged.

In the Australian context, a number of feminists have emphasised the untenability of such uniform condemnation. As Kylie Murphy observes, ‘there is a propensity to analyse the media as a tool of domination rather than a hegemonic mechanism’ (Murphy, 2002: 55). Susan Sheridan has likewise argued that this ‘naming the enemy’ represents ‘a limited strategy’ (Sheridan, 1995: 88), and her own work with Susan Magarey and Sandra Lilburn refuses a simple condemnation of this relationship (Sheridan et al.: 2000). For the feminist critic, such an assumption has particular ethical consequences and has been troubled most recently by Simone Murray. She argues that ‘feminist media critics have been predisposed to analyse disempowering representations of women or to deconstruct negative stereotypes of feminists’ (Murray, 2004: 210). In Murray’s reading, the possibilities of this relationship are commonly eschewed in favour of analysis that further supports media hostility towards women and feminism. For Julia Baird, whose recent work, *Media Tarts*, diachronically analyses the dominant frames through which news media has constructed Australian women politicians, it is a ‘lack of historical research into feminism and the media’ which has resulted in assumptions of ‘a hostile and impenetrable media’ being left largely intact (Baird, 2004: 5). As I suggest here, ‘leaving intact’ such a critical approach would not permit TFS media event to be refigured, and would instead reaffirm its status as a high profile attack on Australian feminism. Furthermore, as a coming section will suggest, changes in the mediasphere itself have also altered the way in which debates relevant to feminism are staged.

As my above survey has suggested, it remains the case that media culture – and what is dubbed ‘popular feminism’ – is often critically conceptualised as incapable of providing, or sustaining, the type of systemic critique upon which feminism is contingent (see Dow: 2003). Perhaps this is true. However, there are some conceptual problems with this outright condemnation that need to be briefly addressed. Despite having been thoroughly critiqued, the notion that media misrepresents women remains dominant in some contexts (Probyn, 1998b: 58); as I have mentioned, one such context is criticism on the media representation of feminists themselves. The most problematic assumption of this style of criticism is that media images are seen to have a direct and unmediated relationship with the ‘reality’ they supposedly reflect: ‘The first problem with this model should be obvious. In the first place, who is to say what is more “real”
or “positive”? (Walters, 1995: 45). Dawn Currie too suggests that the notion of ‘mis-
representation’ assumes a reality beyond the text that is ‘evoked as a measure of the
adequacy of cultural representation’ (Currie, 1999: 90). For the critics in the previous
section, media representations of feminists remain woefully inaccurate and inadequate.
In the logic of this type of criticism, then, feminists must simply call for the
replacement of negative images of women – or feminists – with positive ones. Jensen
critiques such positivist assumptions, preferring a framework which is concerned, not
with the alleged ‘truthfulness’ of a representation, but with an interrogation of the
version of reality that comes to be privileged over others: ‘Whose “reality” is being
promoted and whose is obscured is a more fruitful line of inquiry, since so-called reality
seems multiple, shifting, and capable of being told in various ways’ (Jensen, 1990: 142).

Like the assumed mimetic capacity of media, not surprisingly even more
pronounced in studies of news, this model’s assumption about the passivity of viewers’
engagements with the texts of media culture is also untenable. The linear transmission
model of communication has been problematised for its failure to take into account the
contingencies of reading, such as social context and interpretive agency (see Torfing:
1999, Hall: 1980). Moreover, the notion that the consumer of mass media is a tabula
rasa, manipulated by the culture industries, has long been relinquished in cultural
studies (Wallace and Yell, 1998: 81). However, Todd Gitlin’s comments underscore that
‘the paranoid belief that We are being drugged, mesmerized, or programmed by Them
is one of the abiding fears of our times’ (Gitlin, 2001: 144). Furthermore, as my review
of criticism on TFS will demonstrate, these claims about the pernicious effects of media
on seemingly inactive readers continue to be mobilised in mainstream and academic
contexts. Such criticism fails to recognise the unpredictability of signification and the
active labour of audiences (Hall: 1980). As Mary Vavrus argues, such contingency of
meaning ‘ensures that even at the level of production and distribution the most
carefully controlled events may take on quite unforeseen lives of their own at the level
of reception’ (Vavrus, 2002: 12).

In addition to these charges of representational inaccuracy, critics such as those
mentioned in the previous section have characterised the feminism-media nexus in
terms of ‘co-optation and vulgarization’ and depoliticisation (Walters, 1992: 189). In
feminist media criticism, the terms co-option, and recuperation seem to be deployed
interchangeably – each term, however, is used pejoratively to signal mass media
contamination of a feminism existing beyond such processes of commodification. The
notion of co-option, where the subversive potential of an authentic feminism is always-
already undermined by the evils of a commercial mass media machine, makes an
assumption about both communication processes and feminism that is difficult to sustain. As Amy Farrell suggests, ‘the notion of “co-optation” suggests that feminism itself, as a social and political movement, exists as a pure space, uncontaminated by struggles among its participants for power and resources until it comes into contact with commercialism’ (Farrell, 1998: 9). As I have already observed, in such accounts media is seen to be a contaminating force. These charges of contamination are most problematic for feminist critics, particularly as they can be seen to effect a reinscription of a cultural pessimism impeding early work on ‘mass culture’ by associates of the Frankfurt School. As a means of conceptualising the way feminism comes to be negatively altered by its forays into media culture, co-option, recuperation and contamination presuppose what it is effectively a one way flow; in such frameworks, critics assume that the conservative ideologies of the media industries permanently leach feminism of its oppositional potential. One of the most valuable ways that these assumptions about a monolithic, homogenous antifeminist media can be reconceptualised is to view media culture as constituted by competing discourses.

*Discourse and Media Studies*

The concept of ‘discourse’ theorised by Michel Foucault has dissipated to such a degree in the contemporary humanities that it is commonly mobilised without reference to its author (a gesture entirely consistent with his formulation). Indeed, a fixed definition of the term is not in itself possible. That said, it is valuable here to flesh out the idea of discourse which underpins this thesis. Discourse refers to all the possible ways of thinking, including its visual and verbal manifestations, about a particular subject at a given historical juncture: ‘discourse then would be *whatever* constrains – but also enables – writing, speaking, and thinking within such specific historical limits’ (McHoul and Grace, 1993: 31). In ‘The Discourse on Language’, Foucault considers the limits placed on the proliferation of meaning and the spaces in which social subjects are able to speak: ‘We know perfectly well that we are not free to say just anything, that we cannot simply speak of anything, when we like or where we like; not just anyone, finally, may speak of just anything’ (Foucault, 1972: 216). Rather than assuming a reflectionist position, an analysis based on the notion of discourse presupposes that discourse brings into being the very objects of which it speaks. This is not to deny an extra-discursive reality, a commonly held misconception, but that this reality can only be spoken about in and through particular discursive regimes (see Torfing, 1999: 94). The analysis of news media through this frame does not seek to uncover the truth

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10 Historically, ‘mass culture’ has been gendered feminine, representing a threat (of emasculation) to the ‘authentic’ work of the male artist (Huyseen: 1986, Felski: 1989, see also Sheridan: 1995).
obscured in media representation. As Lois McNay argues, ‘with respect to the problem of truth, discursive analysis does not seek to uncover an objective truth, rather a discursive analysis seeks to examine the particular way power/knowledge complexes operate at a micro-social level in order to produce regimes of truth’ (McNay, 1992: 27). As I will show, a notion of discourse informed by Foucault also underpins Fiske’s work on media events. In focusing on how feminism is discursively constituted within the terms of the media event, I am able to highlight the representational practices that see feminism come to mean in particular ways over others, through particular speakers. As Jim Collins observes, ‘discourses as mechanisms of power in their own right attempt to control what can be said, in which ways, by which speakers’ (Collins, 1989: 85).

Throughout this thesis I am attentive to the ways in which speakers are positioned, and position themselves, within the discourses circulating through the media event frame. The deployment of the concept of discourse in media criticism, as a means of theorising the way particular constructions of reality are foregrounded over others in news discourse, has become common (see McDonald: 2004). Most valuably, news’ claims to objective knowledge can be unpacked through underscoring the discursive constitution of reality. For instance, in attempting to challenge the ‘violence which disguises itself as a benign objectivity’, Robert Alexander turns to the concept of discourse to help challenge news’ claims to transparency and referentiality (Alexander, 1999: 229). Through applying such a framework to the analysis of news discourse, it is possible to trouble ‘the epistemological security which journalism derives from its conceit of an Archimidean point of objectivity’ (Alexander, 1999: 233). Conceptually, discourse helps to account for the delimitation of meaning, of the nodal points in which the slide of the signifier is halted (Torfing, 1999: 98). As a media event, TFS debate comes to be actualised, and sustained, within and through particular discursive fields. TFS media event (like the book itself) helped to circumscribe – not without contestation – the types of discourses through which feminism came to be spoken. As I have suggested earlier, though the concept of ‘truth’ has been relativised, it is possible (and desirable) to continue to evaluate competing discourses (McDonald, 2004: 21). In addition, rather than assuming the expression of an inner self, discourse offers specific subject positions that can be occupied by speakers (see Weedon, 1987: 164). In this sense, I also foreground throughout the way particular discourses permit certain types of feminist subjects to come into being throughout the course of the event.

As I have suggested, contra earlier interpretations, this thesis argues that a number of contradictory discourses were mobilised and intersected throughout the media event to produce particular narratives about Australian feminism. Such discourse analysis ‘enables us to understand the deeply political nature of what we
consume every day, via the media, as real life’ (Mead, 1997b: 253). These discourses are an effect of power, but are also intertextually commented upon and contested by participants who routinely situate themselves in relation to the event’s dominant discourses. Moreover, the move away from pure referentiality signalled by the Foucauldian idea of discourse is valuable in particular for eschewing the limitations of the misrepresentation paradigm identified in the previous section and also in emphasising the constructivism of all forms of signification. That discourse both constrains and enables renders it especially relevant to the meaning-making processes tracked by this thesis.

As part of this turn to discourse, rather than appeal to notions of ‘free and undistorted’ communication, media messages need to be seen as discursively constructed through power-knowledge complexes (Torfing, 1999: 223). Accordingly, the questions that must be posed of media culture should not seek to unmask the distortions of communication. On the contrary, such questions should recognise the discursive limitations of what can be said, where, when, by whom, and with what authority (Torfing, 1999: 223): ‘Who permits whom to talk from which positions?’ (Torfing, 1999: 220). Feminist historian, Susan S. Friedman, also poses a series of questions concerned with who is authorised to speak about feminism:


Such questions regarding the politics of how such authority comes to be granted ground this thesis. It is imperative not only be attentive to who speaks, but what such speakers (are able to) say within the constraints of media discourse. Such questions do not invoke an authentic feminism, but foreground the necessarily ideological processes via which feminism comes to mean in particular ways over others. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge how the specificities of news discourse in particular help determine what comes to count as feminism (and who comes to count as ‘feminist’) at specific temporal junctures. Feminism as it is made to mean in the texts examined here is neither a priori progressive nor regressive (Hennessy, 1993: 104); this relationship is too complex to enable a fixed critical position. In this regard, Jennifer Wicke’s comments regarding celebrity feminism are applicable to the entire media/feminism relationship and even to TFS media event itself: ‘good things happen in this zone and bad things happen in this zone’ (Wicke, 1998: 391).

*Diffusing Feminism: The Impossibility of ‘Authenticity’*
The above survey of feminist criticism on the feminism-media nexus has identified the inadequacies of figuring this relationship in terms of contamination, a tendency that has dominated in feminist media criticism over the last decade. While acknowledging its limitations, many theorists continue to conceptualise feminist engagement with the media in terms of a ‘risk’ worth taking (hooks: 1994, Farrell: 1998); raising the question, however, of what it is that is allegedly being jeopardised. The increased ‘media mediation’ (Genovese: 2002: 150) of feminism requires that the critical narratives which emphasise its marginality be refigured. As Murray notes, ‘traffic between the margins and the mainstream of cultural production is now so plentiful and complex that any such attempts at watertight classifications obscure more than they illuminate’ (Murray, 2004: 218). Furthermore, the question of an ‘authentic’ feminism has been problematised by a number of feminist theorists who emphasise that feminism is always-already implicated in that which it challenges (see Felski, 1989: 75, Wilson, 1995: 41).

Chapter Two will also outline the many critiques of the exclusions of a totalising feminist discourse or identity, which make the invocation of a singular, authentic feminism impossible (and ethically undesirable). In addition to this recognition that feminism ‘always carries with it traces of hegemonic discourse against which it rallies’ (Robinson, 1991: 148-149), feminist discourse is characterised by its (necessary and unavoidable) intersection with other discourses with which it often exists in tension (Mills, 1999: 100): ‘As a porous public discourse, feminism is messy, conflicted, and impure’ (Felski, 2000: 201). This thesis’ focus on the intertextual field in which these public stories about feminism circulate underscores the impossibility of considering any text, or discourse, in this isolationist fashion.

As this chapter’s epigraph from Jane Long suggests, it is not tenable to assume that media is always conservative and feminism always progressive (Long, 2001: 4). Such assumptions also fail to concede that media culture itself works as one of the central discursive arenas in which contemporary political debate is itself, not only represented, but conducted (see Thompson: 1995, Lilburn: 1999). In addition to being discursively constituted in particular ways therein, feminists are not simply represented by news media; in many cases, they are the news media, as my analysis of Anne Summers and other frequently overlooked ‘expert’ feminist sources will further suggest (Bulbeck, 2001: 2). As I have suggested in the Introduction, throughout this work I will be concerned the self-representational practices of those who are authorized to speak on, for or about feminism during the event.

The idea that traces of feminist discourse pervade the various texts of media culture in some form or other make it impossible to sustain the notion of a unitary discourse which exists outside its ‘mainstream’ articulations. Given media culture’s
colonisation of the everyday, it is simply not viable to opt out of engagement with its traditional or new technologies. With specific reference to TFS event, Ann Curthoys argues: ‘Whatever else one may want to say about feminism, it now seems hard to characterise it as a marginal movement, in either the media or in society generally’ (Curthoys, 1998: 98). In particular, as Chapter Six will demonstrate in detail, the failure to conceptualise the feminism/media interaction in terms of the agency exercised by feminists as news actors (be it as commentators or sources) has seen media discourse demonised for its role in distorting feminism. In this vein, I will draw upon the work of critics such as Bernadette Barker-Plummer (1998), who refuse to view media representation as something done to passive feminists. My assertion that a condemnatory approach is inadequate need not lead down the slippery slope of relativism.

Any Feminism? Value Judgements and Media Culture
Although I have suggested that it is not possible to posit a singular, authentic feminist discourse distorted by media culture and concomitant processes of commercialism, it is not necessary to take this position to a relativistic extreme, uncritically celebrating any form of feminism constructed in media culture (see Lumby: 1999, Hopkins: 2002); a simple reversal of the condemnation/celebration binary is not as desirable as its actual destabilisation: ‘the fact that the most dire predictions of separatist feminist media theorists have failed to eventuate should not tempt feminists into the opposite response – an unduly sanguine embrace of the mainstream’ (Murray, 2004: 192). Cultural studies has long rehearsed these debates about condemnation/celebration, and Dawn Currie suggests that this binary has produced a significant impasse in feminist cultural analysis (Currie, 1999: 53-54). TFS media event, as the site for the circulation of a number of conflicting narratives about feminism’s past, present and future, provides fruitful ground upon which to further negotiate the equally limited (and limiting) poles of condemnation/celebration. Following her observation about the proliferation of feminist discourse in commercial media, Angela McRobbie asserts: ‘There remains the question of what sort of feminism is found in these spaces and to whom is it speaking?’ (McRobbie, 1994: 72). Despite my criticisms of risk, contagion and contamination as forms of cultural pessimism, I believe McRobbie’s question to be necessary, urgent and particularly pertinent to TFS media event and its politics. While feminism can mean many things, it cannot mean just anything; it is not, nor should it be allowed to become, an empty signifier.

The relationship between feminism and media culture (in which I include so-called ‘popular’ feminist publications and news constructions) may be at times
problematic. While not denying that feminism can change or be effected by its media forays, as media can by feminism’s presence, it is the assumption that such a change is *a priori* negative, irreversible and inevitably results in the de-politicisation of feminism with which I take issue. Throughout this thesis, I assume the need to differentiate between, and self-reflexively critique, the multiple feminist stories such as those of *TFS* media event, that circulate in the contemporary mediasphere. As American feminist philosopher Susan Bordo remarks, while conscientiously avoiding absolutist ideas of truth, feminists need to ‘rehabilitate the notion that not all versions of reality are equally trustworthy, equally deserving of our assent’ (Bordo, 1999: 13). In this sense, despite the contemporary suspicion of feminist value judgements in relation to the products of media culture of Australian cultural critics like Catherine Lumby (1997a, 1999) and Susan Hopkins (2002), the ability to discriminate and to question how and why particular ways of conceptualising feminism become authoritative or not must be retained (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2000: 215). My critique of work on the feminism-media relationship does not imply that the ambivalence signalled by the trope of risk should be discarded. Rather, it suggests that assertions about the limitations of this relationship should represent the end point of analysis, not its point of origin. Before outlining the model of the media event adopted in this thesis, it is necessary to consider some shifts in the media landscape of which aspects of the event are symptomatic.

**Section II: Public Spheres and ‘Postmodern’ Journalism**

As I have noted in the *Introduction*, changes in the mediasphere itself – shifting configurations of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ news, the ‘personalisation’ of news, greater opportunities for participation and citizenship, and increased attention to celebrity – also require a reconceptualisation of the feminism-media relationship. These changes provide the context in which events such as that following *TFS*’s publication can be staged. Some critics credit feminism with such developments in news production (Lumby 1997b), while other feminists are more cautious (Chambers et al.: 2004). In keeping with my general focus on constraints and possibilities, in the appropriate chapters I will evaluate these changes and assess how the feminism-media relationship has been reconfigured through them. Before considering divergent responses to these shifts in the mediasphere, it is valuable to briefly engage with these changes.

Firstly, signalled by the neologism ‘infotainment’, it is assumed that there has been a loss of clearly delineated boundaries between forms previously thought to access ‘truth’ (i.e., news) and those thought to function mainly as entertainment (McNair, 2000: 2-4). Secondly, in light of the situatedness of all knowledge claims and the
inability to offer a reflection of an extra-textual reality, journalistic ideals of objectivity and transparency are thought to have been eroded (Turner, 2003: 94). Thirdly, the destabilisation of boundaries between producers and consumers is seen to represent a challenge to traditional news hierarchies. In such a context, the mediasphere is emphasised as a site for the performance not just of identity, but of citizenship itself. Fourthly, there has been an increased attention to celebrities and aspects of the everyday formerly identified with the separate realm of the ‘private’ sphere (see Wark: 1999, Turner: 2004). Such changes are commonly characterised as ‘postmodern’ due to their destabilisation of traditional models of power, the de-centring of authority, and the prevalence of the voices of so-called ordinary citizens (see Chambers et al.: 2004).

These changes are commonly referred to as the ‘postmodernisation’ or ‘tabloidisation’ of media culture. However, as Graeme Turner has most recently argued in regards to the latter, ‘it has become a portmanteau description for what is regarded as the trivialisation of media content in general’ (Turner, 2004: 76). These changes, too, are not only evident in the ‘tabloid’ press. In his study, Tabloid Television (1998), John Langer makes the point that the so-called “quality press” has itself gone through a period of ‘tabloidisation’, to the point where one now finds, with some degree of consistency, regular and extended reportage on celebrities, victims, personal tragedies, the plight of communities and so on’ (Langer, 1998: 165). Similarly, Colin Sparks argues that the ‘majority of serious papers contain substantial tabloid elements alongside their more orthodox material’ (Sparks, 2000: 32). In terms of print media upon which this thesis focuses, the debate was conducted largely in both state and national broadsheets, and therefore the subsequent analysis focuses mainly on these texts.11 The dialogue following the TFS’s publication – with its emphasis on scandal, gossip, celebrities and highly personalised conflict – further suggests that the ‘tabloidisation’ of media culture is not confined to those genres problematically constituted as such.

There seems to be little dispute that contemporary media culture has experienced changes in form and content since the early 1990s. However, such changes, and their ethico-political ramifications, have been the subject of intense critical debate within media and cultural studies over the past decade (see Hallin: 1994, Sparks and Tulloch: 1998, Chambers et al.: 2004). In terms of how such changes have been critically evaluated, including their implications for public debates such as that

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11 However, this is not to reinforce the quality journalism/tabloid binary; like Catharine Lumby, I believe ‘it is not always useful or indeed possible to distinguish between the ‘quality’ and the ‘tabloid’ media’ (Lumby, 1997b: 17). Furthermore, there are substantial differences between Australian print media and myriad tabloids circulating throughout the UK and the USA, making the appropriation of such a frame not entirely relevant to the local context.
following *TFS*, there appear to have been two prevalent frames. This binary way of conceptualising these changes is encapsulated in the title of Steve Barnett’s article on the subject: ‘Dumbing down or reaching out?’ (Barnett: 1998). For critics sympathetic to the former part of this binary, *TFS* media event exemplifies writ large the inherent failings of the mediatised public sphere in Australia (Turner: 1996, Davis: 1997, Mead: 1997). In these critical accounts, this media event is seen in terms of a ‘crisis’ (Carter, 2004: 25), where media culture is incapable of hosting the type of ‘rational’ and robust debate constitutive of the bourgeois public sphere theorised by Jurgen Habermas.\(^\text{12}\) It would be easy to adopt a Habermasian frame to analyse the conversation following *TFS*, particularly given that the prototypical public sphere was a literary one (see Habermas: 2003, Eberly: 2000).\(^\text{13}\) Contra Habermas, I am not concerned with whether *TFS* event enabled ‘genuine’ public debate; the adoption of such a perspective would merely reinforce the pessimism through which the event has been most commonly viewed. That said, as a means of theorising public debate, the notion of the public sphere is central in media studies (Hallin, 1994: 2).

The limitations and exclusions of the Habermasian ideal have been widely canvassed, by feminist theorists in particular (Felski: 1990, McLaughlin: 1993 and 1998, Landes: 1995, Fraser: 1997) so I will only consider here briefly why this framework is not the most appropriate way to reconceptualise *TFS* media event. In Habermas’ account, the bourgeois public sphere is conceived as a space where ideas relating to common good freely circulate; where those participating in it do so on an equal footing; where through communicative discourse citizens come to agree on the type of ideal society they envisage – all this public discussion and consensus building is, in turn, thought to tangibly influence government policy (Curran, 2001: 233, see also Fraser, 1997: 101). For Habermas, in the public sphere ‘private people come together as a public’ and therefore act as citizens with shared interests (Habermas, 2003: 27). As various feminist critics have underscored, to fulfil this dream of unity leading to consensus, participants were required to deny their difference. The private, including ‘private’ gendered selves, were not welcome in this space of disembodied rationality and so-called objective debate (Lee, 1993: 403).

\(^{12}\) Habermas’ *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, written in German in 1964, was not translated into English until 1989.

\(^{13}\) Although its elision of difference, condemnation of media culture and an artificial separation of the mediatised literary public sphere from other forms of public debate, Rosa Eberly turns to the model of the literary public sphere to read debates over four controversial books (Eberly: 2000). Following Habermas, the ‘citizen critics’ of her title are required to ‘bracket their differences’ and communicate in terms of their shared interests through public discussion of literary texts (Eberly, 2000: 9).
Habermas maps (and laments) the discursive movement from the coffee houses, salons, clubs and meeting houses of the bourgeois public sphere, to the contemporary context where ‘newspapers and magazines, radio and television are the media of the public sphere’ (Habermas, 2003: 170). This shift is seen as one from a ‘public critically reflecting on its culture to one that merely consumes it’ (Habermas, 2003: 175). In particular, Habermas laments the increased attention to celebrity and the destabilisation of public/private boundaries, both of which mark TFS event; the hypervisibility of the personalised celebrity narrative symbolises the ultimate distortion of the public sphere, an idea further problematised in Chapter Four. For supporters of Habermas’s position, this shift – commonly identified as the ‘tabloidisation of media’ – is often seen in terms of a broader crisis of democracy. Here, the surface-focused, depthless media cannot possibly host the type of critical rationality that the idealised public sphere is thought to have facilitated. Critics articulating a crisis in public communication argue that contemporary media culture is moving away from the normative, ideal public sphere theorised by Habermas: ‘In this sense, the theses of dumbing down/tabloidisation /Americanisation can be characterised as narratives of decline’ (McNair, 2000: 10, author’s emphasis). The changing public sphere is, therefore, conceptualised in terms of ‘a sorrowful voyage from reason to mediatised consumption’ (Landes, 1995: 93).

In such pessimistic narratives, increased attention to celebrities, the destabilisation of public/private boundaries, and the prevalence of scandal and gossip within news media are symptomatic of the public sphere’s unfortunate demise. Supporters of the Habermasian ideal often critique media and ‘tabloid news’ for the ‘upsurge in irrationalism in public life’ (Hallin, 1994: 8). In these narratives, journalism’s role as a ‘watchdog’ in the public sphere is in demise (Lumby, 1997b: 34). Such critics fear that media represents a powerful site of opposition to participatory democracy, not its conduit. Democracy, and its citizens, are suffering in this relativised, less certain, media context. The rise of such so-called ‘postmodern journalism’ is seen as representative of the feminisation of news, emphasising ‘personal writing styles, sensationalism, and celebrity’ (Chambers et al., 2004: 13), and has been of grave concern to some feminists. For example, in the recently published Women and Journalism (2004), Chambers et al. argue that the rise of women in journalism has effectively been undermined by a depoliticised redefinition of news, one which they believe entrenches hierarchal divisions between hard (masculine) and soft (feminine) news rather than destabilises them (Chambers et al., 2004: 239).

In contradistinction to the above lamentations about the decreased potential of the contemporary mediasphere, others view such reconfiguration of the public sphere to be inherently positive and democratising. Most prominent in this critical camp are Australian media theorists John Hartley and Catharine Lumby, both of whom have celebrated the democratising opportunities offered through what they characterise as the ‘postmodern public sphere’ (Hartley: 1996, Lumby: 1999). From this perspective, the idea of a unitary public sphere has been superseded by the operation of multiple, diverse publics which are themselves brought into being through contemporary media culture. In such a ‘postmodern public sphere’, traditional distinctions upon which the bourgeois public sphere was assumed to be based have collapsed: formal/informal, intra-mural/extra-mural, public/private, universal/particular, factual/fictional, and real/illusory (Hartley, 1996: 155). These changes are evidence that culture and politics have been reconfigured, a move thought to cause anxiety in critics from both the left and right: ‘Confronting this new public space means grasping the fundamental changes the mass media has wrought in the way we conceive of politics and culture ... in a world which is no longer defined according to these received polarities’ (Lumby, 1999: 244). Furthermore, in this space more people have access and are able to participate in media culture: ‘Western public spheres have become a forum for voices and interests which were largely excluded from public debate even thirty years ago’ (Lumby, 1999: 247).

In this context, the voices of the public supposedly pervade the mediasphere, enriching it with a diversity precluded by a singular, normative public sphere: ‘If Habermas’s public sphere is founded on the exclusion of the private sphere, the contemporary public sphere might be defined as the implosion of these realms’ (Lumby, 1997b: 40). In this realm, all that has been repressed or excluded from the traditional public sphere, returns (Lumby, 1997b: 41). Hartley argues, not that democracy will suffer without the public sphere’s reinvigoration, but that a reconfigured democracy and politics need to be seen to occur within these sites, not simply within the realm of electoral politics and parliamentary institutions. This position, while on the surface offering a productive way of re-theorising the feminism-media relation, potentially under-estimates the asymmetries of contemporary media culture and the way some narratives (and voices) come to be foregrounded over others. While concurring that the opportunities for public participation can be seen to have increased in such a context, throughout this work I am conscious of the continued exclusions of many subjects’ voices from these expanding cultural spaces and that even the appearance of multiplicity can function to mask real social inequity. The dizzying

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15 See for example Hartley’s work on the reconstitution of contemporary citizenship (Hartley: 1999).
proliferation of difference proselytised by many critics of the post-modern bent is often not borne out in the localised practices of media culture.

As a means of theorising public debate over feminism, aspects of both these perspectives have the potential to be valuable. In terms of how they differentially value these changes in media culture, one over-estimates media culture’s potential for democratisation and equitable public dialogue, and the other is guilty of its underestimation. In the above accounts, critics either lament the demise of the traditional public sphere or rejoice in the democratisation purportedly enabled by its ‘postmodernisation’. As a means to evaluate media-produced shifts in the actualisation of public debates, these positions are equally inadequate; I have already remarked upon the need for feminist cultural critics to negotiate between the equally inadequate poles of condemnation/celebration in theorising its interactions with news media, and the recent debates about a changed mediasphere also require such careful negotiation. In this thesis, I want to suggest that in order to reconceptualise the mediatised debate following the publication of TFS, both these positions need to be eschewed. To aid in such a project, I turn to John Fiske’s (1996) work on ‘media events’. As I will demonstrate, although he does not explicitly engage with either of these theses about the decline or ‘postmodernisation’ of the public sphere, his model of media events – where the often hidden cultural work of contemporary media is exposed and magnified – permits a dual recognition of the potentialities and the constraints of mediatised debate precluded by both the above frames. In the chapters where these shifts appear most evident, I will further engage with them and their implications for the feminism-media interaction. In Chapter Five in particular, I will return to these debates from the perspective of the formation of publics and opportunities for mediated citizenship.

Prior to outlining Fiske’s ‘media event’ model, it is necessary to briefly consider the wider field of media event theory.

Section III: Theories of the Media Event

As the first section of this chapter suggests, feminism is more or less a steady presence in contemporary media culture. However, as in events such as those following TFS’s publication, this presence intensifies and underscores the struggle over meaning in which a variety of actors are implicated. As this thesis demonstrates, feminism is both constrained and enabled within media culture. One particular discursive frame illustrating, and hosting, such duality is the ‘media event’. In this section, I narrow my theoretical focus to comment on relevant literature relating to ‘media events’ and develop the model deployed throughout this thesis. The four elements through which I refigure the highly visible discussion following the publication of TFS work together in
an intertextual field to constitute this media event. In a climate where the terrain of the political has shifted, where traditional sites of political participation are increasingly rejected and supplanted by mediated citizenship, media events become invested with even greater cultural significance. In this vein, Chouliaraki and Fairclough argue that media events ‘come to be significant political events in their own right’ (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999: 103). The dialogue following TFS’s publication has previously been referred to as a ‘media event’, including within its own parameters (Mead, The Age, 16/8/95: 17, see also Wark: 1997, Genovese: 2002), but has not received sustained analysis as such a media phenomenon. Throughout this work, I am most concerned with the following questions: What makes TFS debate a media event? What are its discursive and rhetorical features? How does the media work to manage this event? And how does the event itself exceed such attempts at management and ideological closure? Prior to such a reading, I will place this work in the broader theoretical context of previous work on ‘media events’.

In Fictions of Collective Life: Public Drama in Late Modern Culture (1993), David Chaney suggests that ‘a media event is rarely enclosed within a single cultural form but is rather being continually echoed and developed inter-textually with other media’ (Chaney, 1993: 136). In this thesis, I am preoccupied with how Garner’s text worked in such a network, and how other texts supported or contested her initial narrative. The notion of the media event and that of ‘eventfulness’ itself (Scanell: 1996) has been contemplated by various theorists, including Daniel Boorstin (1971), Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz (1992), Mackenzie Wark (1993), Paddy Scannell (1996), Wanning Sun (2001), and Yaacar Yadgar (2003). Media events are often seen as those ceremonial, ritual, internationally and nationally symbolic occasions, such as Royal coronations, John F. Kennedy’s death, the first moon landing, royal wedding of Charles and Diana, and later Princess Diana’s funeral, the British handover of Hong Kong, and the 2000 Sydney Olympics. Perhaps the most well-known full-length study of the media event phenomenon is Dayan and Katz’s study of televised events of international significance, Media Events: Live Broadcasting of History. Dayan and Katz (1992) develop, largely within an anthropological framework, a topology of contemporary media events. Many other critics have appropriated, expanded and critiqued their framework (Hallin: 1994, Scannell: 1995, Sun: 2001), and therefore it is impossible to deploy the term ‘media event’ without taking account of this work – and its limitations for an analysis of print media.

For Dayan and Katz, the media event is best subdivided into three narrative forms: Contests, Conquests, and Coronations (Dayan and Katz, 1992: 25). Following Emile Durkheim, Dayan and Katz underscore the role of media in processes of ritual,
with media events under-emphasising social divisions to bring community members
together around a common set of values and identity (Hallin, 1994: 153). The function
of such events is to minimise conflict and maximise social cohesion. Although TFS
media event could be seen as significant in terms of national identity,\textsuperscript{16} it resulted – not
in the galvanisation envisaged by Dayan and Katz – but in conflict and fierce discursive
struggle. Moreover, in contrast to the events above, the TFS media event’s relevance to
the majority of the population is debatable. As I have previously remarked, the media
event’s inherent ‘whiteness’\textsuperscript{17} and middle-class preoccupations should always temper
any claims about its productivity and broader cultural resonance.

Following Dayan and Katz, most critical work on the media event has focused on
those involving a live broadcast. For example, either through radio or television of
events with national or international significance that effectively interrupt the flow of
There has been little critical attention to the non-televisual aspects of such events,
almost Yadgar recently extended this framework to ‘radiophonic media
events’.\textsuperscript{18} For Dayan and Katz, media events alter the cultural space of the everyday,
effectively ‘declaring a holiday’ (Dayan and Katz, 1992: 16) from the normal rhythms of
life. Further, in their topology, such events are unique to television as ‘they intervene in
the normal flow of broadcasting and our lives’ (Dayan and Katz, 1992: 5). TFS media
event did not interrupt the flow of everyday life, but rather became its backdrop, a
steady presence of which readers were made continually aware.

In contrast to the type of events interrogated by Dayan and Katz, TFS event is not
a mediated event, in the sense of denoting a public, ceremonial event, occurring in ‘real
time’ beyond its media manifestations (Dayan and Katz, 1992: 5). Rather than the event
being primarily organised by forces external to the media industries, ‘media event’ as I
deploy it here takes place entirely within the print media texts upon which I focus. In
the context of his analysis of ‘media spectacles’, Douglas Kellner argues that spectacles
where media commentators play a central role in their actualisation can be referred to
as ‘media-mediated’ (Kellner, 2003: 100), a term which seems applicable to TFS event
(Genovese, 2002: 150). Of course, the debate did occur extra-textually at universities, at
social gatherings, and through staged public forums and television current affairs
programs. However, this thesis illustrates, not that media culture re-presents these
conversations, but rather also itself hosts them (see Lilburn: 1999); as I have argued,

\textsuperscript{16} Sheridan et al. include it in their nine key moments of media engagement with feminism on
the basis of its ‘national impact’.

\textsuperscript{17} For an analysis of how the privileges of whiteness are codified in media, see John Gabriel’s

\textsuperscript{18} I should note here that TFS event, like most media events, took place not only in print media
sites upon which I focus, but also on radio and television.
such recognition of media’s role in staging debate and contests over cultural politics therefore requires a critical refiguring of the feminism-media relationship.

While aspects of Dayan and Katz’ work may be of benefit in my analysis of TFS media event, the focus on the televisual in their study and ‘integrative’ events with national and international significance, such as the coverage of a Royal funeral, considerably limits the value of their work to this study. The idea of the ‘media event’ has been developed by other critics, including in the Australian context. In Virtual Geography (1993), Wark critically revisits four of what he describes as ‘weird global media events’: the Persian Gulf war, the fall of the Berlin wall, the Tiananmen Square massacre, and the 1987 stockmarket crash. Like other critics, Wark argues that these moments are classified as ‘events’ in that they work as ‘irruptions into the regular flow of media’ (Wark, 1993: vii). He continues:

They are ‘weird’ in that something about them seems to break out of our conventional mappings of the relationships between political, economic, or cultural events and their representation in the media (Wark, 1993: vii). Although the type of events he interrogates are, like Dayan and Katz, of a global nature and occur materially beyond their representation, Wark’s above comments seem applicable to TFS event. In his later work, Virtual Republic, Wark posits that the intense media focus on TFS constitutes it as one in a series of ‘strange cultural media events’, which includes Helen Demidenko’s The Hand That Signed The Paper (1995).

As Wark outlines, these media events are strange as media commentators did not know how to ‘pigeon hole’ them; cultural as that they were about ‘tensions within people’s structures of feeling’; media in the sense that ‘the story broke out of the review pages and engaged more than the usual specialised, professionalised, culturati’; finally, they can be seen as events as they take on a life of their own ‘independent of who got the ball rolling and why’ (Wark, 1997: 122). Wark’s sense of the event, as signifying the debate’s assumption of an independent existence which mobilised and affected a broad spectrum of cultural actors, alludes to the way in which the public conversation following the book could not be controlled – despite even authorial efforts to reign it in.

Wark, however, does not produce a detailed reading of TFS debate as a ‘media event’, and in the next section I show that John Fiske’s work (1996) provides the best grounds on which to build an analysis of TFS media event.

John Fiske’s Media Matters: Race and Gender in U.S. Politics (1996)

As I suggest, it is not possible to simply map extant theories of media events onto an analysis of the dialogue following the publication of TFS. However, John Fiske’s recent work in particular provides a solid ground from which to develop an analysis of TFS’s publication as a (print) media event. In contrast to his earlier cultural studies work in
the 1980s, where active consumers were always cast as victors in semiotic warfare,¹⁹ Fiske’s later work – including *Power Plays, Power Works* (1993) – is tempered by a consciousness of the material and discursive inequities complicating production and reception. In *Media Matters* (1996), he uses four specific phenomena to theorise the media event. In each case, these events relate to extra-textual politico-cultural events which punctuated the early-mid 1990s in the United States: the Anita Hill/Clarence Thomas sexual harassment trial and his appointment to the Supreme Court; the Rodney King beatings and the civil unrest which followed in Los Angeles; Dan Quayle’s commentary on Murphy Brown’s single motherhood; and the OJ Simpson murder trials. Such events, as negotiations of privacy and publicity, focus on how cultural change is being lived and mediated through such highly visible events. Although Fiske focuses, like Dayan and Katz, on the televisual aspects of media events, his framework readily lends itself to application across other forms of contemporary media culture such as print journalism. Here, then, I extend his model into the print journalistic field, an integral yet neglected site in the constitution of media events.

In Fiske’s framework, the products of media culture do not simply reflect upon events existing beyond their textualisation. In this sense, he implicitly challenges theorists such as Daniel Boorstin, whose work, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo Events in America* (first published in 1961), juxtaposes ‘pseudo-events’ orchestrated by the media with ‘spontaneous events’, which such events are commonly thought to overshadow (Boorstin, 1971: 39). Pseudo-events are staged by the culture industries and are characterised by their conspicuous artifice; they substitute for ‘real’ news and as such are indicative of a shift lamented by Boorstin and others (Gitlin: 1980, Habermas: 2003). Fiske, in contrast, commences his work by questioning the separability of ‘real’ events from their media representation: ‘Can we separate media events from non-media events, or are all events today, or at least the ones that matter, necessarily media events?’ (Fiske, 1996: 1). Rather than posit that a media event is a media representation of something occurring elsewhere in ‘real’ time, Fiske troubles the invocation of such a reality/representation binary. In the following quotation, he explicitly links the media event to the ‘postmodernisation’ of media culture discussed in the *Introduction*:

The term media event is an indication that in a postmodern world we can no longer rely on a stable relationship or clear distinction between a ‘real’ event and its mediated representation. Consequently, we can no longer work with the idea that the ‘real’ is more important, significant, or even ‘true’ than the representation. A media event, then, is not a mere representation of what

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¹⁹ For a particularly valuable critique of this celebratory cultural studies and its limitations for feminism, see Susan Bordo’s ‘Material Girl: The Effacements of Postmodern Culture’ in *Unbearable Weight* (1993).
happens, but it has its own reality, which gathers up into itself the reality of the event that may or may not have preceded it (Fiske, 1996: 2).

Here, the media event need not be conceptualised as the communication of a pre-existing event but is given an independent existence within the media itself. In Fiske’s framework, unlike that of Dayan and Katz, the media event need not necessarily be physically or organizationally situated outside media culture (Dayan and Katz, 1992: 11). Media events are not simply the extended reportage of newsworthy incidents. As Fiske notes, such an idea is indebted to Baudrillard’s work on hyperreality and the simulacrum. In such an economy, the distinction between the mediated event and its extra textual referent is unsustainable (Fiske, 1996: 3).

Fiske, however, also suggests that Baudrillard’s notion of the hyperreal does not provide adequate space to theorise the way in which media culture operates as a site of ongoing struggle between dominant discourses and those they attempt to repress. Specifying his partial debt to Foucault, Fiske differentiates the type of discourse analysis offered in Media Matters from linguistic modes of analysis, suggesting that he is ‘not concerned with tracing the regularities and conventions of discourse as a signifying system, but with analysing what statements were made and therefore what were not, who made them and who did not’ and with the media ‘by which they were circulated’ (Fiske, 1996: 3). This study, insofar as it is preoccupied with how feminism comes to mean in particular ways and the operation of power inherent in such a signifying process, must account for instances of (temporary) delimitation and legitimation of particular feminisms; as I have already suggested, such is the work of discourse. As I have mentioned in the Introduction, the identification of such moments of stabilisation is the first step in their contestation. In this sense, media events can exceed attempts to control them, particularly given that the event cannot dictate ahead of time the types of discourses through which it will be actualised. Furthermore, as Fiske argues, no ‘discourse event’ or ‘media event’ is ‘ever complete in itself but carries traces of the other, competing, discourse event that it is not’ (Fiske, 1996: 4-5).

Therefore, an event can always be made to function otherwise; that is, it can always be put into discourse differently (Fiske, 1996: 4-5): ‘The struggle over whose discourse events should be put into is part of the reality of the politics of everyday life. The discursive patterns of domination, subordination, and contestation are where the weaving of the social fabric is politicised’ (Fiske, 1996: 7).

As the above comments suggest, Fiske does not advocate an artificial separation between the media event and the socio-cultural conditions that give rise to it: ‘The most significant relations of any piece of discourse are the social conditions of its use’ (Fiske, 1996: 3). While emphasising the centrality of the media industries in manufacturing the
media event, he also argues that it is imperative to place such events in their socio-
political context:

The media obviously play a central role in turning events into media events, for
their saturation coverage is necessary. Central though their role is, however, the
media are not the sole, or even the main determinants. The prime determinants
of which events become media events must be sought in the social order of which
the media are only a component (Fiske, 1996: 263).

Fiske, therefore, assumes that media culture possesses a diagnostic potential. As
Douglas Kellner argues in *Media Spectacles*, diagnostic critique represents a way of
approaching the texts of media culture in terms of their disruption of wider discursive
regimes (Kellner, 2003: 27). For Kellner, as for Fiske, highly visible media events ‘put
on display the politics of representation, encoding current problematics of gender, race,
and class’ (Kellner, 2003: 27). Such representational politics, however, are not
themselves static. Fiske, therefore, theorises the perpetual contest over meaning
characterising media events in terms of discursive ‘currents’ and ‘countercurrents’,
jockeying for position on a field that is never level (Fiske, 1996: 5): ‘Discursive struggles
are an inevitable part of life in societies whose power and resources are inequitably
distributed’ (Fiske, 1996: 5). Although not accounting for internal struggles within
these respective ‘currents’ and ‘countercurrents’, this ongoing process of contestation is
central to Fiske’s governing ‘culture as a river of discourses’ metaphor. For Fiske, media
events are symbolic of ‘maximum visibility’ in this river. However, this ‘visibility’ is
always inevitably accompanied by ‘maximum turbulence’; it is in such turbulence that
the media event’s possibilities can be most readily located:

At times the flow is comparatively calm; at others, the undercurrents, which
always disturb the depths under even the calmest surface, erupt into turbulence.
Rocks and promontories can turn its currents into eddies and countercurrents,
can change its direction or even reverse its flow (Fiske, 1996: 7).

Media events, as Fiske’s extended metaphor implies, do not simply buttress the
hegemony of the media industries through which they are staged. This framework is
also useful, then, in accounting for the intervention of non-hegemonic voices in the
event, such as those writers of letters to the editor considered in *Chapter Five*.
However, Fiske does not address the question of how publics come to be formed within
the media event, and I will draw on the work of other critics to develop this aspect of
how media events rely upon – and provide the opportunity for – intervention by what
Rosa Eberly calls ‘citizen critics’ (Eberly: 2000).

Media events are also markers of cultural investment, reliant upon the agency of
consumers and producers for their longevity. The debates precipitated by such
turbulence:

are useful to the cultural analyst because their turbulence brings so much to the
surface, even if it can be glimpsed only momentarily. The discursive currents
and countercurrents swirling around these sites are accessible material for the analyst to work upon: from them s/he must theorise the flows of the inaccessible and invisible currents of meaning that lies deep below the surface (Fiske, 1996: 7).

Furthermore, media events are insightful not only in terms of cultural politics and the operation of power, but in exposing the workings of media culture itself. In this sense, the form of the media event is as important as its content. Fiske’s paradigm is also relevant to the increased, extended feminist visibility characteristic of TFS media event:

A media event, then, as a point of maximum discursive visibility, is also a point of maximum turbulence. ... Its period of maximum visibility is limited, often to a few days, though the discursive struggles it occasions will typically last for much longer (Fiske, 1996: 8).

The discursive struggles occasioned by TFS media event do indeed exceed the few days mentioned by Fiske. As the next chapter suggests, cultural and legal reverberations continued well into the new millennium. More recently, print media engagement with a series of high profile national and international sexual harassment and assault cases has also resulted in a re-invocation of the book and the event itself, as has the publication of Garner’s most recent work of non-fiction, *Joe Cinque’s Consolation* (Garner: 2004).

Throughout, following Fiske, I argue that previous criticism has focused solely on the ‘currents’ characterising this event at the expense of ‘countercurrents’. This endless struggle between ‘currents’ and ‘countercurrents’ also serves as an appropriate metaphor for the processes of hegemony, of efforts of those in power to secure their ideological dominance, in which contemporary media is heavily implicated (see Louw: 2002). However, in recognition of the inherent limitations of such binary logic, rather than simply reversing it, I seek to hold the two aspects of the event in tension. The flow between (and the contradictions within) these ‘currents’ and ‘countercurrents’ offers substantial resistance to such simple polarity. While Fiske provides the basis for my own framework, I build upon his work by identifying and analysing the four constitutive elements of TFS media event: narrative, celebrity, audience, and history and conflict. Although certainly making no broader claims about whether such elements are constitutive of *all* print media events, as part of my project to extend this analysis beyond the immediate event, in each chapter I will suggest that these four elements are integral to the symbolic work carried out by contemporary media culture. Here, I will underscore how the high visibility, turbulence, ongoing struggle over meaning, asymmetrical power of its participants, and efforts of those from below to change its direction, which are the foundations of Fiske’s notion of the media event, occur within and through these four constitutive elements. Moreover, the ambivalence with which he views media events and their cultural politics resonates with my own
sense of ambivalence, not just over TFS event, but regarding the feminism-media intersection in a more general sense.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has provided the theoretical and methodological foundations of this thesis. In Section I, it was necessary to situate this work in the context of relevant debates regarding feminism and its complex, often ambivalent, relationship with media culture. Furthermore, I emphasised that dominant ways of figuring this relationship – through the tropes of risk, contamination and contagion – need to be eschewed if TFS media event is to be reconceptualised. I also argued that, while coming to mean many things through its intersection with media culture, particular narratives about feminism receive cultural legitimation and must therefore be recognised as the effects of a power whose commonly obscured cultural work must be laid bare. In Section II, I introduced some of the issues to be pursued in this thesis relating to changes in the media environment of which TFS media event is symptomatic. In Section III, I explicated the model of the ‘media event’ illustrated in my subsequent analysis. The media event examined here exceeds recent theorisations of this contemporary phenomenon, and the quadripartite model I propose – while building on the work of Fiske – was generated from the event itself. The four constitutive elements of TFS media event – narrative, celebrity, audience, and history and conflict – will accordingly be analysed in the coming chapters. The first analytical focus will be the actual narrative of TFS, a narrative supported and challenged during the course of this extended media event. Prior to commencing this analysis, the next chapter is devoted to both ‘mainstream’ and ‘academic’ commentaries that functioned simultaneously as part of, and responses to, TFS media event.
Chapter Two
The Public Life of *The First Stone*: Production, Circulation, Consumption

This narrative touched a nerve, and *The First Stone* provoked huge discussion, debate and multifarious reading positions, both within feminist and university circles and in the broader Australian community. ... It didn’t matter what the context, Garner was there, in every imaginable form, but mostly couched in terms of debates around sexual harassment legislation, legal and non-legal recourse, feminism’s sexual puritanism, its punitiveness, and even its continuing validity (Ann Genovese, 1996: 147).

For months after the publication of *The First Stone* in March 1995, accusations that Garner had ‘betrayed feminism’ – and counter-accusations of beserk feminist extremism – flew about on campuses and on radio stations, in cafes and in the pages of Australian broadsheet dailies, at literary gatherings and, it often seemed, at random. Dinner parties were enlivened or ruined, opinions dissolved or congealed, friendships cemented or destroyed ... (Kerryn Goldsworthy, 1996: 2).

Introduction
Ann Genovese’s and Kerryn Goldsworthy’s interpretations of *The First Stone* (TFS) represent the conflicting reading positions of which they each speak, and offer insights into the varied spaces of the media event, as well as its intensity and its multi-vocality. This chapter, and this thesis in its entirety, is preoccupied with the publicly circulating responses that textually mediated such lively, affectively organised debates. In the previous chapter, I placed this thesis in the context of general feminist and media criticism and theoretical debates of particular relevance to this study. Here I commence this thesis’ engagement with the way TFS, the book and the media event, came to be spoken about in both academic and mainstream contexts. This chapter provides the opportunity to undertake a broader evaluation of both academic and media responses published during and after the event, a critical gesture which has not yet been undertaken in such detail. This chapter, in considering newspaper, academic and literary journals, and books in response, seeks to provide what Charlotte Templin refers to in her study of Erica Jong as a ‘valuational history’ (Templin, 1995: 13). Such a valuational history emphasises that literary and/or cultural value is not intrinsic to a text but is produced, renewed or contested in its public readings (see Templin, 1995:
This chapter illustrates that particular ways of speaking about TFS call forth a particular text and author.

Given the hundreds of newspaper pieces and a number of critical essays published in the academic, literary, and ‘alternative’ presses, the following survey of the texts in response to TFS is by no means exhaustive. This chapter, however, does identify a number of the major preoccupations surrounding discussion of the book and/or the event. Through this chapter, I provide a sense of the dialogism that characterises the entire event, a dialogism which some critics of the event see print media being unable (or unwilling) to actualise. One of my primary goals here is to expose a series of critical limitations that have hindered discussions of the event as a vibrant, albeit at times limited, discursive struggle over the meanings of feminism. This chapter will also outline the antinomies of earlier criticism, that this media event represents either the triumph or the downfall of feminism. Such fixed positions fail to account for the shifting ideological positions of commentators during the course of the event, and disallow the divergent and shifting reading positions that consumers of the event may have adopted.

There have been surprisingly few studies to interrogate the intertextual arena that constitutes this media event. During 1995-1996, in addition to the reviews cited in this chapter, numerous articles about the book appeared in academic publications (Levy: 1995, Cossins: 1995, Albury: 1996, Genovese: 1996, Henderson and Rowlands: 1996). In 1996, Kerryn Goldsworthy’s critical publication, Helen Garner – the first book length analysis of Garner’s work and what literary critic John Rodden refers to as ‘reputation history’ (Rodden: 1989) – devoted an entire chapter to TFS and its reception. Aside from these contributions, academic work that offers detailed analysis of its media reception appears relatively scant. Even when the question of feminism and generationalism has been more recently considered, this event is invariably mentioned, but is often dealt with in a cursory fashion (Bulbeck: 2001, Harris: 2001, Maddison: 2002). While literary journals devoted much space to the book, critical discussion of the media event in Australian journals such as Media International Australia, Continuum, Australian Studies in Journalism, Australian Journalism Review, and Journal of Australian Studies has been surprisingly absent. Prior to looking further at some of the early media responses, the next section attends to the textual spaces in which TFS media event was conducted.

Although I focus on Australian responses, it is wrong to assume that this text and subsequent media event was of concern only within this context. See Daphne Patai (1998) and Rosalind Coward (1999), who – in the US and the UK respectively – both used the book to further their arguments about a global misguidedness that was plaguing feminism in the 1990s.
**The Textual Locations of the Event**

*TFS* media event was conducted largely in the broadsheet press. As Kath Kenny observes:

The broadsheets, which for a long time had an unofficial code against reporting the private affairs and sexual misdemeanours of public figures ... took to Garner’s *The First Stone* more vigorously than most other media (Kenny, 1996: 144). Such attention itself troubles the boundaries between so-called ‘serious’ and ‘tabloid’ journalism, as even broadsheets devote increasing amounts of space to celebrities and matters formerly deemed ‘private’. While some may dismiss it as a debate held in the elitist ‘Arts’ or ‘soft’ news sections of papers, *TFS* media event was not simply staged in the more acknowledged subjective parts of newspapers, such as reviews, opinion pieces, editorials or letters to the editor. Rather, the publication of the book and its response in various circles – including within the media itself – featured consistently in the more overtly ‘factual’ sections of newspapers around the country. Far from being ‘trivialised or reported in sections of the paper which lacked distinction’ (Van Acker, 1995: 194), a criticism commonly made of media engagement with feminism, *TFS* event troubles the hard news/soft news dichotomy. Moreover, the media event occupied a number of front pages; on the news hierarchy, such a location is prime and serves to literally position Garner’s book and the reaction to it as more newsworthy than the events in the pages which follow (Allen, 1999:61).

Although certainly prevalent, it is wrong to assume that the dialogue following *TFS*’s publication occurred only in state and national based newspapers. On the contrary, the book was taken up in diverse cultural spaces. Ann Curthoys comments on the various textual sites in which the media event played out:

In retrospect, the most striking aspect of *The First Stone* debate was how and where it occurred – in the mainstream media, in newspapers, on television and radio. Journalists, male and female, sought out feminist stories, and expressed opinions on feminism’s character and future (Curthoys, 1997: 198).

Not surprisingly, literary journals also acted as a central site for discussion of the book and subsequent media commentary. Furthermore, a number of Australian and international law journals, such as *Melbourne University Law Review*, *Alternative Law Journal*, the *Australian Feminist Law Journal*, and the *Wisconsin Women’s Law Journal* also used the book as the basis for broader ruminations about women, sexual harassment, and legal discourse (Cossins: 1995, Grover: 1996, Parker: 1997, Duncanson: 1998). Generalist news magazines such as *Time* and *The Bulletin* were also preoccupied with the constitutive elements and ideologies of modern feminism at this time, while the more tabloid style magazine, *Who Weekly*, also engaged with the book by profiling its author. Surprisingly, it was the unlikely *Vogue* magazine in August 1993 which offered the only print media articulation of the Ormond women’s voices. Even
television contributed to, or rather sustained, this media spectacle, with the ABC’s *Lateline*, *The 7.30 Report*, *Four Corners* and *A Current Affair*, each devoting significant space to discussion of the book and the controversy it generated. There was even a public announcement regarding plans for a commercial telemovie based on the book (Butcher, *The Age*, 1/7/95: 8), plans which never came to fruition. In addition to this multitude of textual locations, a number of public ‘author events’ (see Chapter Four) provoked audience engagement which in turn generated further media attention.

The media event itself, in addition to earlier media attention to the actual event at Ormond College, was constituted as news. In this scenario, what was occurring within the news became the news; more importantly, what feminists were saying became the news. Furthermore, the response was not simply to *TFS*, but to questions which this ‘media frenzy’ (Lewis, 1996: 152) generated about the role of media discourse in Australian public life, and particularly its privileging of some voices over others. In contradistinction to Graeme Turner’s assertion that ‘media criticism is almost invisible in the media’ (Turner, 1996: 53), commentators frequently expressed their dissatisfaction with the contributions of other media authorities. While all language is dialogic in the sense of being double-voiced, always carrying traces of its other (Allen, 1998: 134), the event more literally manifested as a dialogue (albeit asymmetrical) between journalists, celebrities, academics, students and broader newspaper readerships. Throughout the event, reviews and other media texts persistently feedback into each other and commentators question the logic (and politics) of their peers. In light of this persistent feedback, questions of meta-commentary, self-reflexivity and intertextuality within media culture are therefore foregrounded throughout this thesis.

Before considering the academic and print news media responses to *TFS*, I will position it in the context of contemporary Australian feminisms.

*Australian Feminisms in the 1990s*

*TFS* media event represents a struggle over the meanings of contemporary Australian feminism, meanings that are difficult to fix or contain. As the diversity of perspectives encompassed by *Australian Feminism: A Companion* (1998) suggests, it is neither possible nor desirable to provide a singular definition of ‘Australian feminism’. Rather than seeking definitional closure on the equally problematic, slippery and shifting

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signifiers ‘Australian’ and ‘feminism’, the Companion offers a series of thematic articles centring on major preoccupations in both feminist thought and activism in modern Australia (i.e., post British invasion). In her essay in the volume, Jan Larbalestier suggests that there are a number of self-reflexive, ethical questions with which feminists in contemporary Australia are preoccupied: ‘What is a woman? What is feminism? Whose feminism is it? Who are feminists? How is feminism possible?’ (Larbalestier, 1998: 149). TFS media event attests to the open-endedness of questions. The posing of these questions is linked to the work of Indigenous feminist critics, such as Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2000) and Jackie Huggins (1998), and postcolonial critics like Ien Ang (1995) who have each exposed the whiteness and concomitant exclusions of Australian feminist discourse – exclusions reinscribed by this media event.

As a challenge to the idea of a singular, authentic feminist discourse of identity, much recent feminist work has recognised that the category ‘woman’ is not a homogenous empirical identity, but an historically specific (and thus shifting) discursive construct which, as Rosemary Hennessy suggests, is ‘traversed by more than one differential axis’ (Hennessy, 1993: xii). In terms of a representative feminist subject, feminist theorists have acknowledged the limits of the essentialist logic upon such which claims are predicated (Spelman: 1989, Butler: 1990). The recognition that ‘woman’ itself is not a stable signifier, and that gender always intersects with other modalities of difference, such as race, sexuality, class, ethnicity, and regional identities (Butler, 1990: 3), renders impossible a uniform, essential feminist subject. Following the recognition of such fictions of unity, either within feminism or within the self, ‘the ongoing existence of the movement is now subject to a lively, visible and legitimate politics of contestation as to how this movement is to be represented and by whom’ (Yeatman, 1995: 54). In particular, the assumption of a universal, shared feminist discourse elides geopolitical specificities and takes western feminism as normative (see Ang: 1995). As she reflected on this media event, Ann Curthoys emphasised that ‘the divergences within it [feminism] in Australia today are so great that the sense of a common project has gone’ (Curthoys, 1997: 208).

The problem of feminist ‘representativity’ within media culture, a crisis of which is thought to mark TFS event (d’Arcens, 1998: 104), in effect mirrors that within Western culture generally and within feminist discourse itself. Rather than accentuating the difficulties inherent in such conceptual and political upheavals, Nancy Miller suggests that:

feminism needs to be self-critical in order to evolve, and that these volleys offer an occasion to re-examine the assumptions of its operations. The dislocations within feminism, moreover – the refusal of a hegemonic and unitary feminism –
have already instituted this process. In this sense, I would argue that representativity is a problem within feminism itself ... (Miller, 1991: 102).

_TFS_ media event, said to be ‘a conflict about what counts as feminism and who runs it’ (Mead in Lohrey, 1995: 169), represents a very public playing out of such a crisis of authority. The politics of ‘speaking for’ has preoccupied many feminists arguing for a greater self-consciousness or reflexivity in the formulation of epistemological claims on behalf of the Other (Alcoff: 1991, Hennessy: 1993). The political and practical implications of these conceptual shifts themselves remain a site of contestation among feminists.

Contemporary feminists often contrast their own perceived heterogeneity with an earlier form of feminism, whose meanings are by contrast characterised as stable and uncontested. As Megan Jones argues, ‘1970s feminism’ is often invoked as a ‘simplistic and homogenous precursor to complex and variegated feminism of the present’ (Jones, 1998: 119). However, such narratives of theoretical progress fail to concede that the term ‘feminism’ has always been contested, especially among feminists (Caine, 1995: 2). Larbalestier too suggests that, despite assertions to the contrary, there has never been a singular ‘Australian feminism’. Instead, ‘the meanings and substance of Australian feminisms (like Australian cultures) have always been diverse, problematic and problematised’ (Larbalestier, 1998: 157-158). She continues: ‘Australian feminisms have been and continue to be possible because of their shifting and indeterminate boundaries and invariably contested substances, continually in the making’ (Larbalestier, 1998: 157-158). During _TFS_ media event, attempts to both delimit and liberate the signifier ‘feminism’ are evident, and the dynamic ‘conflict and contradiction’ identified above by Larbalestier can be seen to drive the entire event.

In particular, perhaps due to the number of second-wave anniversaries, in the 1990s attempts to historicise Australian second-wave feminism became more pronounced (see Ion: 1998, Henderson: 2002c). One textual site where such impetus manifests is in so-called ‘popular’ feminist publications. Along these lines, Margaret Henderson contemplates the 1990s as the historical moment from which ‘the delayed yet clustered publication of a number of major histories and assessments’ of the Australian women’s movement emerged (Henderson, 2002c: 305-306). She charges Summers’ ‘Letter to the Next Generation’ (1993 and 1994) and _TFS_ (1995) with the articulation of a number of anxieties within and around feminism which act as the precondition for the ‘temporal rupture supposed to be necessary to write the past’ (Henderson, 2000c: 306). These texts attempt to fix the referent “the Australian women’s movement” and offer ‘strategic lessons for the future’ (Henderson, 2002c: 306). In Australia, popular texts of the last decade include Anne Summers’ 1994 edition of _Damned Whores and God’s Police_ (including its epilogue, ‘Letter to the Next

These so-called ‘popular’ 1990s publications employ a wide range of textual strategies and generic elements, including history, autobiography, the liberal feminist success narrative, general non-fiction, and self-help and empowerment rhetoric. As Chilla Bulbeck argues, writers such as Garner, Summers, Lumby, Trioli and Bail all weigh in on the generational debate in what she identifies as the “popular-personal mode” (Bulbeck, 2000: 1): ‘Personal because writers use their stories to talk about feminism; popular because many of the writers are either journalists or newspaper commentators’ (Bulbeck, 2000: 1). Personalised stories and life narratives are central to this media event, as they increasingly are to media culture more broadly. In addition to the above publications, autobiographies – or ‘regulative fictions’ (Henderson: 2002a) – have proven to be the favoured genres of ‘femocrats’ seeking to write themselves into the history of the Australian second-wave: Anne Summers’ *Ducks on the Pond* (1999), Susan Ryan’s *Catching the Wave* (1999), and Wendy Macarthy’s *Don’t Fence Me In* (2000).

Reviews of these ‘popular’ books often placed them in a broader socio-political context through the invocation of *TFS*. For example, in a review of Cox’s *Leading Women*, Beatrice Faust concludes by reading Cox’s book in terms of both *TFS* controversy and broader public interest in ‘accessible’ feminist publications:

> I think, too, there is a hunger for general books about feminist issues – not specialised academic treatments but readable books reporting on the bigger picture. This hunger contributed something to the unprecedented success of Helen Garner’s *The First Stone* (Faust, 1996: 10).

In the few years with which this thesis is preoccupied, a number of these ‘popular’ publications relating to feminism became highly visible in the Australian print media. Virginia Trioli observes that ‘in a little country of 18 million people’ it seems remarkable that ‘four major books critiquing contemporary feminist thought and action came to be published to genuine interest and attention within two years (*The First*
Stone, Generation F, Kathy Bail’s DIY Feminism and Catharine Lumby’s forthcoming Bad Girls)’ (Trioli, 1997: 67). This period, therefore, is certainly remarkable in terms of the output of works marketed as ‘popular’ contributions to feminist thought. None of these ‘popular’ texts, however, received either the same visibility or cultural legitimacy as Garner’s TFS.

The ‘Public Life’ of The First Stone

In order to make some broader claims about the feminism/media relationship, as the title of this chapter suggests, I am concerned here with what can be referred to as the ‘public life’ of the book (Carter and Ferres: 2001). In any study preoccupied with the public circulation of narrative, a number of materialist questions need to be foregrounded. These include ‘how they are produced, how they circulate, what routes they take, how they get into people’s hands, what institutions they circulate in and through’ (Smith and Watson, 2003: 79). Accordingly, I am not focused on how a hermetically sealed narrative comes to be received by its readerships, but how both the publics brought into being by the event and the meanings of the narrative are constituted by the contexts in which it comes to circulate. From newspaper reviews to biographical profiles of the author, print media is central to the creation and dissemination of a number of texts that inform a narrative’s consumption.

Reviewers, feature writers, regular and freelance columnists, writers of letters to the editor, ‘expert’ sources, and cartoonists attempt to delimit the interpretive possibilities of, and attribute particular forms of value to, Garner’s text throughout the event. In this sense, they are all central texts in the ‘valuational history’ of TFS (Templin, 1995: 13). In Bourdieu’s terms, TFS media event is central to the ‘symbolic production of the work’ (Bourdieu, 1993: 37). As he argues, critics need to:

consider as contributing to production not only the direct producers of the work in its materiality (artist, writer, etc.) but also the producers of the meaning and value of the work – critics, publishers, gallery directors and the whole set of agents whose combined effort produce consumers capable of knowing and recognizing the work as such (Bourdieu, 1993: 37).

As the above comments suggest, the role of the mainstream media in the interpretation of any form of cultural production, including writing, cannot be overestimated. Despite this, as with feminism, it is common to view literature’s entrance into the field of media culture through the metaphor of contamination (Jensen, 1990: 166). However, rather than ‘Art’ transcending supposedly crass commercial processes, in the contemporary context it is impossible to separate the production, consumption or reception of any cultural product from what Adorno and Horkheimer (1979) describe disdainfully as the ‘culture industries’.
While some attempt to see literature as purely aesthetic and thereby secure its place in an elitist hierarchy of value, I am sympathetic to Carter and Ferres’ critical aim of reaffirming ‘literature’s participation in the public and commercial spheres rather than its power to transcend or subvert dominant structures’ (Carter and Ferres, 2001: 141-142). As they continue, the history of literature in authorising public debate is long and complex (Carter and Ferres, 2001: 142), and TFS event can be seen as part of this historical process. In another article, Carter argues that while the ‘cultural significance of literature and literary criticism has been defined by their relationship to print journalism’, in the contemporary context ‘the public life of literature’ can be seen as ‘governed by its more complex relationship to the ‘media’ and media industries’ (Carter, 1999: 140). TFS event is indicative of such shifting complexities, particularly the reconfiguration of the contemporary author-as-celebrity, shifts about which some literary critics remain ambivalent (see Turner: 1996). In light of Carter and Ferres’ comments, there has been surprisingly little analysis of ‘how literature actually circulates or fails to circulate through the social structure’ (Carter and Ferres, 2001: 143), a vital aspect of which is journalism. The TFS media event brings the need for such attention into sharp relief. Not surprisingly, one of the most important series of texts in the book’s circulation is newspaper reviews. The reviews published in the mainstream media are central to the event’s actualisation, and to the book’s commercial success. Reviews can be seen as a form of ‘urgent cultural news’ (Daniel, 1997: 37), functioning as one of the means by which various ‘artistic and communicative fields’ are brought to the attention of a large market of potential consumers (Cranny-Francis, 1990: 216). However, ‘whether or not reviews sell books’, argues Dennis Altman, ‘they are the first step in the process whereby the lit.crit industry creates “important” writers’ (Altman, 1997: 23). As well as their role in the establishment of ‘reputation histories’ (Rodden: 1989), critics and reviewers clearly attempt to shape the cultural use and value of writing, including writing about feminism (Lauret, 1994: 89). The entire TFS media event can be broadly seen in terms of such a process of delimitation. In his study of the reception of Monkey Grip, Kevin Brophy argues that early newspaper reviews, as the book’s first public readings, functioned to set the parameters for subsequent discourse surrounding both the book and the author (Brophy, 1992: 279-280). As Brophy notes, a central though ‘near invisible’ reviewing device is to present readers with ‘the “self evident” fact of what a book is “about”’ (Brophy, 1992: 271). In terms of what TFS was ‘about’, reviews fell loosely into four categories: an expose on feminism’s limitations; the tragic fall of an innocent man at the hands of archetypal vengeful women; a melodramatic story of
mother/daughter conflict; and a transparent rendering of a series of (unpleasant) events in Helen Garner’s life.

In reviews, these assumptions about the book’s themes led to the deployment of a number of descriptors that sought to inscribe its truth. The book was variously described as ‘courageous, confronting and a first class piece of journalism’ (Geason, 8/4/95, *Sun Herald*: 12), ‘provocative and stimulating’ (Jaivin, 12-13/8/95, *The Australian*: 23), ‘a stunning literary performance’ (Campion, 4/4/95, *The Bulletin*: 89), ‘sincere’ (Faust, 12-13/8/95, *The Australian*: 26), ‘an exploration of the writer’s own sensibility’ (Kissane, 27/12/95, *The Age*: 17), and ‘a brilliant and moving account full of social observation and compassion’ (Craven, 25-26/3/95, *The Australian*: 7). In broadsheets in particular, ideological investments in ‘literary realism’ and ‘authorial omniscience’ were obvious (da Costa, 2002: 76). Generally speaking, under the gaze of media reviewers, the book’s technical aspects were overshadowed by the passionate commentary on its thematic dimensions. In this sense, the debate was not primarily one of aesthetics. Moreover, the event was based largely, not on traditional assumptions regarding newsworthiness or even objectivity, but on opinion. Therefore, print media in this instance exposed, rather than concealed, the subjectivity of its contributions. Media commentators’ affective investments in the event are often transparent. Rather than minimising modal expressions to create a sense of objectivity and lack of emotional investment or dispassion traditionally associated with news discourse (Allen, 1999: 91), much media commentary on *TFS* appears affectively motivated. In a broader sense, the presence of ‘opinion pieces’ in the general news section of papers (as opposed to the ‘Op’ Ed pages) was increasing markedly during this time (Craig, 2003: 80).

Despite conflicting assumptions that either feminist critical opprobrium or conservative acclaim reigned during the months immediately following the book’s publication, responses to the text varied. In the country’s newspapers, women and men of various political persuasions and backgrounds struggled to provide the interpretive framework for the book’s future readers. In the mainstream reviews and commentary published early in the event, oppositional feminist readings appeared from authors, journalists and academics. Cassandra Pybus, Carol Ferrier, Virginia Trioli, Helen Elliott, Rosemary Neill, Vivienne Porsoltz, and men such as Don Edgar, Graeme Duncan and Paul Gray, all problematised the ideological underpinnings and ethics of

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4 In her reception study of four controversial American works of fiction, Rosa Eberly argues that such displacement is common in media criticism of literary texts (Eberly: 2000). See also Templin: 1995.
Garner’s text. Many other critics, such as Rosemary Sorensen, Morag Fraser, Deborah Hope, Christine Jackman, Peter Craven, Luke Slattery, Robert Manne, P.P. McGuinness and Terry Lane, were deeply sympathetic to Garner, praising her bravery in exposing the excesses of contemporary feminism. These reviews and opinion pieces all possessed a significant commercial function.

By 1996, TFS had sold approximately 70,000 copies (Trioli, 1996: 14), a widespread circulation that was cause and effect of its extensive media visibility. Informed by Foucault, Sara Mills (1997) notes that public commentary on written texts is part of the process via which certain works are literally kept in circulation (Mills, 1997: 68). According to Australian Bookseller and Publisher’s ‘Bestseller’ lists, The First Stone reached number one in both May (ABP, 1995: 50) and June 1995 (ABP, 1995: 54). During the event, one commentator tenuously argued that the book’s commercial success evidenced reader approval of its critique of feminism: ‘Judging by the sales, readers liked her account’ (Carlyon, 4/7/1996, SMH: 13). This media commentator fails to recognise the role of the media event itself in defining TFS as ‘controversial’, a move responsible for boosting the book’s sales. There is little doubt, as Lynne Pearce observes, ‘that publishing houses – like newspapers – are extremely influential in determining which issues, debates ... take off’ (Pearce, 2003: 8).

The media event arises from a combination of the commercial publicity machine (which itself relies upon mainstream print media) and provocative media commentary. Claude Martin makes explicit the marketing processes underpinning media events based upon ‘bestselling’ literary texts:

The marketing of bestsellers is different from that of other books. They receive special treatment, more copies are printed, promotional budgets are higher, authors are pushed onto the television stage ... . Each of these features aims to create a social and media event, to foster a ‘bestseller environment’ around the book. They weld together links of production and distribution of a book, establishing confidence in the performance of a book (Martin, 1996: 5).

The broader context of ‘bestselling’ books is constituted by all these promotional practices. Furthermore, in addition to the book, the media event itself was highly saleable. In terms of news dramas with celebrities at their centre like this event, ‘the media will draw out the saga if it continues to sell’ (Rein et al., 1997: 99). Consequently, the media event was sustained by its commercial viability; readers returned daily to newsagents for the next instalment of this textually performed feminist melodrama. In reference to the ‘Garner affair’, one commentator remarked cynically on this patent display of the usually obscured connections between the literary and the commercial: ‘What are the arts good for? Selling newspapers of course’ (Wark, 13/9/95, The Australian: 35). This, as I argue, does not provide sufficient grounds for the event’s dismissal – nor do the political limitations of the text itself. Whether or not one concurs
with Garner’s politics, extensive media attention to TFS ensured that its presence was publicly felt in ways granted few other publications by women.\(^5\)

**A Genealogy of the Event**

Although I do not seek to fix an originary moment, it is clear that the media event commenced long before the book itself was made available publicly. Prior to the book’s publication, the 1992 Ormond court case had been the subject of much media attention.\(^6\) These earlier media texts acted as intertexts when Garner’s book was eventually published (Mead, 1997b: 245). In terms of the public life of the book, the print media’s earliest engagement occurred in May 1993, when *The Australian* ran a piece announcing that Garner was writing a work based on the events at Ormond College (Gunn, 27/5/93, *The Australian*: 5): ‘The 18-month saga at Ormond will be the subject of Garner’s first non-fiction work – a study of the people and events, exploring the themes of sexual politics, class conflict and what the scandal said about contemporary feminism’ (Gunn, 27/5/93, *The Australian*: 5). Of the impact of such pre-release publicity on the book’s sales, Virginia Trioli observes: ‘Garner’s book was a triumph even before it was released’ (Trioli, 1996: 27).

These earliest news engagements with the book commonly emphasised that its publication had been jeopardised a number of times. In this sense, the book is seen to have had a traumatic gestation, with its publisher Hilary McPhee later arguing: ‘“There was a lot of tension around publishing the book, and there was a lot of pressure on (Pan Macmillan) board members to drop it’” (in Ketchell and Dunn, 3/6/2000, *The Age*, ‘News Extra’: 1). As Chapter Four will suggest, the personal strain on its author is also one of the event’s central thematic preoccupations. The legal processes – attempts by the Ormond complainants to view the manuscript prior to its publication – were also the subject of intense media attention and scrutiny (‘Defamation fear on book’, 15/3/95, *SMH*: 10, Hill, *The Age*, 17/3/95: 3 and Sculley’s ‘Women’s bid to vet book fails’, *SMH*, 17/3/95: 3). In ‘Judge rules in favour of author in book case’, the presiding Justice is quoted as saying that his judgement was based on the ““principles of free speech”” (Hill, *The Age*, 17/3/95: 3). Through the complainants’ desire to see the book, Garner’s forthcoming work was thought to offer ‘hidden truths’ which feminism was

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\(^5\) Bronwen Levy suggests women authors in particular are less likely than their male counterparts to receive such concentrated attention. As she notes, it is ‘unusual for ideas in books by women to be taken so seriously that not just the literary pages, but the editorial pages of newspapers pronounce on them’ (Levy, 1997: 1). In this vein, Anne Cranny-Francis’s 1990 study of the semiotics (and politics) of reviewing found women literally and visually marginalised in mainstream reviews (Cranny-Francis, 1990: 214-246). However, TFS media event substantially troubles Cranny-Francis’ argument of the automatic devaluation of women’s writing through the en-gendering practices of newspaper reviews.

\(^6\) See Mead 1997b for an analysis of media representation of the Ormond women.
seeking to hide (hooks, 1994: 107), a theme that runs throughout the event and which is common in ‘popular’ feminist books. As Barry Oakley argues: ‘If the book preventers had had their way, we wouldn’t just have lost an emblematic tale – we’d never have known how extreme and foolish some feminists have become’ (Oakley, *The Australian*, 12-13/8/95: 23). Garner’s text, therefore, was popularised as an internal feminist critique; many commentators argued that feminists were branding her a heretic. In terms of this representation of a beleagured author, more remarkable still are the recurrent comparisons of Garner to Salman Rushdie. For example, *The Advertiser* suggested:

> There are a few fierce feminists out there who would surely love to slap a fatwa on author Helen Garner. As with novelist Salman Rushdie, who for five years has endured an Islamic death sentence, Garner’s perceived crime is that of heresy. ... Rushdie in the *Satanic Verses* and Garner in *The First Stone* were guilty, say their accusers, of blasphemy: Rushdie challenged Islam and Garner betrayed the Feminist Faith (*The feminist agenda is on the line*, *The Advertiser*, 12/8/95: 20).

This assumption that Garner spoke out at grave personal risk was further reinforced by the Eros foundation designating *TFS* their ‘Book of the Year’. The *Hobart Mercury* suggests, through the title of an article, that ‘Garner wins Eros award for ‘exposing political correctness’ (*Hobart Mercury*, 18/12/95: 4). For some, then, *TFS* took on the intriguing air of a banned book, though of course, despite its author’s assumptions about a censorious feminist interpretive community, such literal banning never actually occurred.

In media discourse, all of Garner’s subsequent publications have been read intertextually through *TFS* and the media furore following its publication. Although at its peak in 1995, media engagement with *The First Stone* re-ignited in 1996, not only with the publication of books in response from Kathy Bail and Virginia Trioli, but also with the launch of Garner’s collection of essays, *True Stories*. All reviews and features published in response to *True Stories* (1996) invoked *TFS* and its ‘controversy’ (see, for example, Haigh, 30/3/96, *The Australian*, Craven, 6/4/96, *The Australian*, Capp, 13/4/1996, *The Age*, Wyndham, 3/6/96, *SMH*, Fraser, *ABR*, April 1996). In many of these pieces, *TFS* is thought to prove Garner’s ability as a writer of non-fiction, further demonstrated in the later collection. As one journalist suggested, *TFS* led Garner in a different literary direction: ‘Had it not been for the recent harassment debate in Melbourne’s academia, into which Helen Garner jumped, or at least moved resolutely, we might not have seen this collection, or at least in this format’ (Riddell, 30/3/96, *SMH*, ‘Spectrum’: 10). These linkages are unsurprising given that the collection appeared to reinforce Garner’s move into the field of non-fiction. Moreover, one of the essays published in *True Stories*, Garner’s defensive speech to the Sydney Institute, directly relates to *TFS*. ‘The fate of *The First Stone*’ was a crucial part of the media
event, having been published in *The Age*, *The Australian* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* in August 1995. As in the mainstream media, Garner’s Sydney Institute speech also re-invigorated the literary press.\(^7\)

Media attention also continued sporadically, not only with the publication of books such as *Bodyjamming* and Garner’s own works, but with its publication in the United States. Australian cultural critic Mackenzie Wark used ‘*The First Stone* in America’ (Wark, 17/7/97, *The Australian*, ‘Higher Education’: 36) to comment on how ‘useful’ he believed the book to be, while also suggesting the inclusion of the Sydney Institute speech as an afterword in the US edition effectively weakened the preceding narrative. The book’s reception in America was also considered to be newsworthy. In Andrew Clark’s ‘Garner’s book slated in the U.S.’, it was Janet Malcolm’s critique of the book that was afforded news value (Clark, 10/7/97, *The Age*: 3, Craven 16/7/97, *The Australian*, ‘Higher Education’: 39). Furthermore, *TFS* itself has been re-viewed in mainstream print media as recently as 2002. In ‘Second Look’, Peter Craven was still defending the author and her work:

*The First Stone* is a book that tries to get to the bottom of a moment of collective moral bewilderment and in the process delineates a kaleidoscope of shifting ethical faces, in a state of disarray, including that of the author (Craven, 10/11/2002, *The Sunday Age*: 10).

It seems noteworthy that seven years after the event, one of its prominent commentators chose to revisit, and reiterate, his earlier interpretation of both the book and the event. That the book continues to inspire news stories is evidenced by the ways in which Garner’s subsequent works have been invariably framed in the journalistic context.

In 1998, her collection of short fiction, *My Hard Heart*, also re-activated the event: ‘Although it was a bestseller [*TFS*] and catapulted Garner into the public arena, it achieved what she could never have expected – it threw her off her course as a writer of fiction’ (Condon, *Sun Herald*, 31/5/98: 26). In *The Australian*, *My Hard Heart* (much of which was written prior to *TFS*) is nostalgically seen as ‘A reminder of Garner’s world before *The First Stone*’ (Davison, *The Australian*, ‘Review’, 6/6/98: 11). Her next book of essays, *The Feel of Steel* (2001), likewise facilitated a renewed, though limited, engagement with *TFS*. For example, in Fiona McFarlane’s interview with Garner following its publication, *The Feel of Steel* is seen as contiguous with *TFS*; the caption accompanying photographic inset of the ‘notorious’ Garner is indicative here: ‘Helen Garner: still throwing stones’ (McFarlane, 2002: 1). For other critics, both ‘mainstream’ and ‘academic’, Garner’s literary career is temporally divided into pre-

\(^7\) *Australian Book Review*, following Garner’s Sydney Institute speech, devoted a section of its September edition not just to one response to *TFS*, but to three: Marilyn Lake and John Hanrahan criticised Garner and the book’s politics, while Graham Little was more sympathetic.
and post-TFS. For example, a feature article and extract of True Stories entitled ‘True Voices’ appears with the following by-line: ‘Gideon Haigh spoke to her [Helen Garner] about life since – and before – The First Stone’ (Haigh, 30/3/96, SMH, ‘Review’: 3). In a later analysis, Cath Darcy similarly views TFS as something from which Garner has had to recover, but from which she has emerged triumphant. Likewise, for Helen Elliot in ‘Look Back in Anguish’, the TFS event is seen to have quietened Garner, leaving a heavy stain on all her subsequent publications, such as The Feel of Steel (Elliot, 1/9/01, Weekend Australian, ‘Review’: 11).

Her first full-length work of non-fiction since TFS, Joe Cinque’s Consolation (2004), has seen critics revisit the earlier book and the highly visible public discussion in which it (and its author) became embroiled. As Susan Wyndham observed in a feature article previewing the book: ‘this is the first all-new book since The First Stone crashed into the pool of feminist discourse in 1995 and spread ripples that almost drowned her’ (Wyndham, 17/7/04, Good Weekend: 24). Like Wyndham, Diana Bagnall focuses on the psychic scars worn by Garner as a result of TFS and uses her most recent work as further evidence of the author’s resilience and enviable stoicism (Bagnall, The Bulletin, 17/8/04: 64). The similarities between the two books are bound to be emphasised in future commentary – two young law students with whom she did not speak, a male ‘victim’, ethical dilemmas, and a narrative dominated by Garner’s personal reflections. In Joe Cinque’s Consolation, Garner makes unavoidable connections between the two publications and the ethical dilemmas into which the respective stories propelled her:

Four years earlier I had published a book of reportage called The First Stone, about two young women law students who had brought charges against the head of their university college. By questioning the kind of feminism that had driven the story, and by writing it against the determined silence of the two women and their supporters, I had opened myself to long months of furious public attack. The parallels between that story and this one were like a bad joke (Garner, 2004: 13). Here, the ‘author under siege’ trope reasserts itself, as it did throughout the event. It appears, therefore, that the victim subjectivity claimed by and for Garner during TFS media event has endured both in her own writing and in media discourse. For example, in a recent article in the Women’s Weekly focusing on Joe Cinque’s Consolation, David Leser observes that following the publication of TFS Garner ‘found herself cast as the traitor, a feminist who’d sided with the patriarchy and all its blunt instruments of power’ (Leser, August, Women’s Weekly: 84). In relation to Garner’s assertion that TFS loomed large in her psyche as she wrote her most recent work, Maryanne Dever argues: ‘Despite the fact that she goes on to declare, “no way was I going back there”, that is precisely what she does’ (Dever, 2004: 1).
In a broader sense, the cultural and legal reverberations of *TFS* continued to be newsworthy throughout the 1990s (see Gregory, *The Age*, 30/5/95: 4), and in 2000 the 'two students involved in one of Australia’s most famous sexual harassment cases were named in open court for the first time’ (Gough, *The Australian*, 30/5/2000: 3). In June 2000, an *Age* journalist remarked: ‘Like Dracula, the Ormond Affair has resisted a natural death’ (Kissane, 3/6/2000, *The Age*: 33). *The Age* also published a reassessment of the affair, and its implications for Ormond College, universities more broadly and, of course, Australian feminism. The article speaks of an enduring bitterness from all the event’s central protagonists: the women involved, the former Master (Alan Gregory), Helen Garner, and Jenna Mead (Ketchell and Dunn, 3/6/2000, *The Age*, ‘News Extra’: 1).

Other newsworthy events involving sexual harassment or assault have seen the book resurface in media discourse. Most recently, the allegations of American 'celebrity feminist', Naomi Wolf, that the arch defender of the canon, Harold Bloom, sexually harassed her while she was an undergraduate at Yale University have led to reinvocations of the Ormond case and *TFS* (Overington, 28-29/2/04, ‘Crying Wolf’, *SMH*: 33). Similarly, allegations of sexual assault against National Rugby League team, the Canterbury Bulldogs, resulted in extensive media coverage in early 2004, with at least one commentator referring to *TFS* to suggest that not much has changed since the publication of Garner’s book in 1995: ‘Much remains confused about men, women, sex and power’ (Cannold, *SMH*, 19/3/04: 13). Even immediately prior to the submission of this thesis, *TFS* was again invoked in an article about young people’s changing attitudes to sex, wherein the 1990s are characterised as a decade consumed with the identification of sexual harassment and ‘political correctness’. The article suggests that if the events at Ormond College were to happen now, the young women involved would be more likely to turn to their friends for succour (Delaney, *SMH*, ‘Summer Spectrum’, 6/1/05: 19). All the above pockets of discursive activity around the book are indicative of its continuing cultural reverberation.

**TFS, Genre and ‘Truth’**

One of the most important aspects of the event, in terms of a changing news climate, is its meta-commentary and the self-reflexivity of its commentators. In this sense, the entire event speaks of wider cultural shifts, where scepticism towards media discourse and the legitimacy of its claims has resulted in a greater self-consciousness within the mediasphere itself. For some critics, as mentioned in the previous chapter, this ‘postmodernisation’ of media culture is to be lamented (see Blumler and Gurevitch: 1992, McCheshney: 1999). In contrast, more progressive critics welcome the
widespread recognition of the exclusions of totalising notions of journalistic objectivity and neutrality. Although the media event at points witnesses the destabilisation of a number of Western discourse’s constitutive binaries, including objective/subjective and public/private, one of the more enduring binaries structuring the event was fact/fiction or truth/falsehood. Many critics invested much energy in the maintenance of this strict demarcation, particularly when it came to questions of the book’s truth-claims in relation to feminism.

Generic classification, as a form of framing, works to ‘curtail the reader’s interpretive licence’ (McLachlan and Reid, 1994: 85); there is much at stake therefore in these attempts to definitively label the text. Like Kate Foord, however, I suggest that ‘policing the genre-boundaries more strictly is not the answer to finding ways of critiquing these hybrid texts’ (Foord, 1998: 45). Reviewers needing to pin down their ‘product’ for potential consumers were, however, in the business of such restrictive genre policing. The book was generally classified as ‘non-fiction’, the slipperiness and transience of which Webb eloquently articulates: ‘many of the non-fictions of the past generation have become the fictions of ours’ (Webb, 2000: 48). That being the case, at the point of publication such easily comprehensible classification appears a marketing imperative (see Hoeks, 2000: 38). It is not remarkable to suggest that ‘the labelling of books (for practical and marketing reasons) according to genre’ has the potential to ‘carry over into the currency of critical exchange by suggesting ways of reading’ (Lamb, 1992: 14). In mainstream and academic contexts, while many concede Garner’s use of fictionalising technical strategies, most reviewers seldom question that the book purported to represent ‘real’ historical events beyond their narrativisation and, therefore, warranted the non-fiction classification.

David McCooey observes that ‘even if texts can never truly represent the world, they are often treated as if they do’ (McCooey, 1996: 167), as the following print media attempts to classify the text attest. For example, in ‘Fighting the Furies’, Peter Craven asserts: ‘It should be emphasised that The First Stone is in no sense a work of fiction, even though it uses the full-armoury of a fiction writer’s technique’ (Craven, 25-26/3/95, The Australian: 7). The book has been classified as a ‘factional account’ (Spongberg, 1999: 380; see also d’Arcens, 1998: 104), ‘highly personal reportage’ (Capp, 13/4/96, The Age, ‘Saturday Extra’: 2), ‘speculative essay’ (Fraser, 25/3/95, The Age, ‘Saturday Extra’, p.7), ‘new journalism’, ‘a non-fiction novel’ (Slattery, 13/1/96, The Australian, ‘Review’: 6), ‘investigative journalism’ (Pybus, 9/5/95, SMH: 15), “journaliction”, a special genre of fiction passing as reportage (Hanrahan, 1995: 25), and ‘heart-on-the-sleeve reportage and personal disclosure’ (Haigh, 30/3/96, SMH, ‘Review’: 3). TFS has also been satirically likened to a detective novel, with a number of
critics characterising the narrator ‘as the bicycle-wielding middle aged detective’ (Lever, 2000: 112), ‘a kind of Miss Marple’ (Docker, 1995: 16), and a ‘feminist sleuth’ (Henderson and Rowlands, 1996: 12). This ‘detective’ is on a very literal search for her very subject (Rutherford, 26/3/95, *Sunday Age*: 9). In a broader sense, her use of the first-person pronoun – a common narratorial strategy in both feminist academic and popular writing – can also be seen to authorise her text in a particular way. As Lynne Pearce observes, ‘not all feminist texts have visible, or assertive, first-person narrators, but those that we remember most tend to’ (Pearce, 2003:23). *TFS*’s narrator is certainly highly visible and assertive. The book is also seen to offer a deep insight into the author’s troubled psyche, an assumption governing much print media and Garner’s presence therein. Fiona Giles, for example, argues that *The First Stone* is an abjectly personal and painfully honest confessional narrative (Giles, 1997: 2). Moreover, both John Hanrahan and Delys Bird argue that the book is actually about ‘Helen Garner’ (Hanrahan, 1995: 25, Bird, 1996: 48), a form of autobiographical searching, not for the (necessarily unavailable) truth, but for her very self. For some critics, this self-imposed vulnerability is cause for much admiration (McDonald: 1995, Giles: 1995). The narrator-protagonist and Helen Garner were conflated throughout; in *Chapter Four* I explore the practical, ideological and aesthetic implications of such persistent, un-nuanced, conflation, and how particular stories about Australian feminism consequently came to circulate through the event.

Print media investment in establishing the ‘truth’ of Garner’s text is further evidenced by an article referring to how the book came to be interpreted by an American psychotherapist – ‘Helen Garner was right, says U.S. psychotherapist’ (Watkins, 20/10/95, *The Age*: 9). Thus, the legitimacy of Garner’s claims are thereby provided with pseudo-scientific backing. This article also makes it clear that interpretations of the book by those deemed authoritative effectively sustained the event. Here, the act of reading and the different reading positions taken up by ‘authorised knowers’ (Ericson et al., 1989: 3) were afforded a particular news value. In this context, even the presentation of academic conference papers on the book attracted newspaper attention (see Helass, *Courier-Mail*, 20/1/95: 12).

Garner is seen to be on a quest for truth, a search that endears her to journalists – themselves marked by investment in such a quest – who review her work (Coombs, 1997: 49). Such readings focusing on what Gaye Tuchman would refer to as the book’s ‘facticity’ (Tuchman: 1978) are also a product of the forum in which such reviews are housed: the newspaper, a form assumed to reflect (upon) ‘reality’. Mary Coombs argues that for non-fiction to receive positive newspaper reviews, or to be accorded value, it must be seen to accurately portray the events at its centre: ‘The assessment of the
book’s value necessarily turns in large part on how well, in the opinion of the reader/reviewer, the author has captured the truth of the event’ (Coombs, 1997: 42). Likewise, in his study of Australian film reviewing and race, Alan McKee argues that those operating within ‘popular aesthetic discourse’ have a tendency to read all forms of cultural production through such a realist lens (McKee, 1999: 154); *TFS* media event substantiates these observations.

These concerns about the effects of claiming that *TFS* possessed a privileged relation to truth continued to be mobilised in criticism after the media event. One critic, who was at pains to emphasise the book’s basis in fact, suggested that the book failed in its truth gathering strategies: ‘The stony fact is that the book deals with real events in a real place at a real point in time’ (Ricketson, 1997: 80). For Ricketson, Garner simply lacked the cultural competencies to facilitate a smooth transition from ‘author’ to ‘journalist’, a point also made explicit by Mathew Condon in the *Sun-Herald*: ‘When author Helen Garner wandered from the world of fiction to that of journalism, she had no idea what she was letting herself into’ (Condon, 31/5/98, *Sun Herald*: 26). Rather than seeing Garner as a storyteller, Ricketson attempts to call her to account on her failures as a truth-teller. As Joli Jensen observes, ““real” authors are sanctified by their connections to Art, while journalists are sanctified by their connection to Truth’ (Jensen, 1990: 170). It is either Garner’s failure or success in establishing this relation to ‘Truth’ which concerns many critics, both during the event and beyond, and which will be further explored in Chapter Four. In relation to the book’s ‘truth’, legal theorists read the book as making an important contribution to public understandings of sexual harassment (Grover, 1996: 243, see also O’Neill, 1995: 54).

The attribution of non-fictionality is not only facilitated by the text’s realist mode, but by the diegetic world’s relation to events which themselves were widely publicised in news media throughout 1992 (i.e., the Ormond ‘incident’ and subsequent court cases). Given its claims to represent the ‘Real’, on the occasions that the text was criticised, it was often on the grounds of Garner’s (ethical) failure at verisimilitude (see Pybus: 1995, Mead: 1995, Frost: 1995). Later in the debate, when Garner’s textual strategy of splitting Jenna Mead into six characters to create the impression of a feminist conspiracy was exposed (a strategy purportedly based on legal advice), some critics sought to hold Garner accountable for the text bearing her signature. Refusing to accept the book’s classification as ‘New Journalism’ because it fails to foreground ‘the status of any knowledge it comes across or creates’, John Docker argues that *TFS* is a novel, a ‘fully fictional text’ (Docker, 1995: 15). Likewise, in later commentary, Ann Curthoys stated: ‘To me, it had always been a novel, albeit alluding quite openly, as many novels do, to well-known ‘real’ events’ (Curthoys, 1997: 191). Marion Halligan,
too, asserts that ‘the book is not a piece of journalism, it’s a novel whose main character
is Garner, acting out the role of journalist’ (Halligan, 1998: 5). In the additional
paragraph to her Sydney Institute speech published in True Stories (1996), Garner
defiantly responds to such claims: ‘It is not a novel’ (Garner, 1996: 178). This critical
challenge to the book’s truth-claims concomitantly also represents a challenge to
Garner’s ability to speak authoritatively about Australian feminism. That is, Garner’s
truth-claims about the inadequacies of contemporary Australian feminism lose their
legitimacy if the book’s very status as (a form of journalistic) truth is called into
question. In Chapter Four I further demonstrate how Jenna Mead undermines such
truth-claims within the media event through invoking the factual errors in Garner’s
account.

As noted above, however, most print media attention to the book refused to
separate the authorial ‘I’ from Helen Garner, and her own interventions and self-
representations during the event do little to dispel such biographical reading practices.
Such readings can also be seen in terms of marketing imperatives, where the personal is
seen to be profitable (Douglas, 2001: 821). Furthermore, the book’s narrative mode and
autobiographical vignettes facilitate such readings. So, rather than seeing the illusion of
self-presence as a textual effect, the ‘traditionalist danger of equating the writing with
the life’ (Lauret, 2001: 98) structures much public discussion on the book. These
biographical readings are indicative of a common tendency in Western, first-world
cultures. That is, TFS circulates in a broader cultural context governed by the
articulation and consumption of various forms of autobiographical narrative:

If we are not telling our stories, we are consuming other people’s lives.
Consuming personal narratives on an everyday basis, we imbibe the heterogenous
‘lives’ authorized by and authenticated in the institutions through which we
negotiate our daily existence (Watson and Smith, 1993: 3).

In such a context, the use of first person testimonies to ‘mediate, and illustrate, the
historical present’ prevails (Pearce, 2003: 104); readings of TFS as the unmediated
inscription of Garner’s self reflect and enact such a climate. TFS was seen as ‘a pointer
to something new’ in Australian writing (Slattery, 13/1/96, The Australian, ‘Review’: 6).
As Docker and Curthoys argue, TFS is a hybrid text that is best seen in terms of the
‘burgeoning life-writing industry’ found attractive by general readerships (Docker and
Curthoys, 1996: 34) and which experienced a marked increase in the 1980s and 1990s
(Douglas, 2001: 809). Similarly, David McCooey placed TFS in the generic category of
‘ficto-memoir’, signalling the use of ‘private stories’ to illustrate ‘public issues’
(McCooey, 31/8/2000, SMH, ‘Spectrum’: 8), a move criticised by some critics. For
Richardson, the authorial decision to ‘place herself at the centre of the text skews the
argument of the book’ (Richardson, 1997: 102). Others have conversely argued that
even though it breaches the key journalistic principle – ‘never make the story about yourself’ – Garner’s presence in the text is responsible for TFS’s ‘unprecedented popularity’ (Trioli, 1996: 43). This increased preoccupation with the personal is also evident in changes in news values over which some critics have been anxious, others celebratory. In Chapter Four in particular I will return to how such changes have altered the modes of representation available to feminists in news discourse.

In what has been labelled a ‘post-representational’ critical climate (Burke, 1992: 51), the impassioned assertions of referentiality dominating critical conversations over TFS can be read as a challenge to the unmooring of the subject and the text articulated within poststructuralist and postmodern critical discourses. Moreover, the question of authorship, authenticity and ethics was a central preoccupation in mid-1990s’ public discourse, particularly as TFS media event was concurrent with the controversy over Helen Demidenko’s The Hand that Signed the Paper (first published in 1994) and its receipt of the Miles Franklin Literary Award in 1995. In this sense, discourses relating to identity politics, representation and (the possibility of ‘ethical’) writing were already circulating in the Australian mediascape when TFS entered the ‘journalist field’ (Bourdieu: 1998). To mark the prominence of these debates, one commentator referred to 1995 as ‘the year of the Helens’ (Daniel, The Age-Saturday Extra, 19/8/95: 7), and at least one feminist critic has analysed the two events in tandem (Levy: 1995).

To signal the ethical dilemmas prompted by both books, Luke Slattery coined 1995 ‘the year of writing dangerously’ (Slattery, 21/9/95, The Australian: 1). The Demidenko debate functioned as a ‘media event’ in much the same manner as that surrounding TFS, although its area of cultural politics was primarily ethnicity. Despite this difference, that they seeped into the intertextual field of the other is undeniable and inevitable. Both Robert Manne (1996) and Andrew Reimer’s (1996) books on Demidenko engage with TFS event; the former sees the abuse suffered by Garner at the hands of feminists as similar to that suffered by Demidenko, whereas the latter regards such comparisons as offensive due to the more ‘serious’ subject matter of The Hand That Signed The Paper (Levy, 1997: 2, see Manne, 1996: 91). However, even if the newspaper contributors to these two literary spectacles were the same, the questions asked of the of two works differed markedly; as Mark Davis observes, ‘most commentators made a dogged effort to keep discussion of the two books apart’ (Davis, 1999: 213). Despite their obvious disparities, Graeme Turner notes:

It would be hard to find a more signal example than these books provide of the influence the media exert on Australian literary studies, how they help form popular conceptions of Australian writers, how they frame and reframe the context of reading and reception, and how they participate in the construction of literary reputations and the canon (Turner, 1996: 28).
Such comments indicate how both books and their media events, in different senses and for different reasons, have been positioned as significant cultural markers in both ‘popular’ and ‘academic’ contexts.

The Publication of *The First Stone* as Cultural Marker

No other book in recent memory has been greeted with such effusive and extensive media coverage (Duffy, 8/11/97, *The Australian*: 34).

Through the type of coverage described in this quotation by Michael Duffy, the media event in which the book became implicated certainly helped to circumscribe its cultural value. In the course of the event, *TFS* is valued as an instance of insightful social commentary. The media discourse surrounding the book focus on its broader socio-cultural, rather than aesthetic, resonances. Throughout its prolonged reception period, the book was represented as a significant cultural marker or barometer in two senses; first, it was seen as a catalogue of broader societal shifts and, second, as responsible for a monumental cultural conversation over the nature of such shifts and the anxieties they evoked. As Bronwyn Levy observes, ‘the mass media have taken the book up as a *cause celebre*, as a turning point in contemporary Australian feminism’ (Levy, 1995: 1).

It also needs to be emphasised, however, that it is not only media discourse that has constructed the book in such a fashion. In various studies, and indeed undergraduate History, Women’s Studies, and English (including non-fiction writing) courses, the publication of Garner’s text is constituted as a significant cultural marker, in terms of feminist history and Australian public life. Mackenzie Wark, a regular press commentator and cultural studies academic, here argues the book’s pedagogical merits:

> as an honest attempt to render the writer’s own subtle and conflicting sensations, thoughts and feelings, it strikes me more and more as an extraordinary achievement, and one well worth learning from and teaching in the classroom (Wark, 17/7/97, *The Australian*: 36).

While I do not concur with Wark’s assessment of the book or its supposed accomplishment, his comments are indicative of the way the book is used to exemplify feminist debate in Australia.

In the context of *TFS* media event, assumptions about the book’s general cultural significance also dominated. Proclamations about the book’s success abound. In ‘The Painful Fallout When Eras Collide’, for example, Robert Manne commences: ‘It is said that Helen Garner’s book on the Ormond College affair, *The First Stone*, sold 30,000 copies in its first fortnight. Clearly there is something in her story that touches a contemporary nerve’ (Manne, 12/4/95, *The Age*: 13). Likewise, an editorial in *the Sydney Morning Herald* suggests that the book ‘tapped into uncertainties felt by many men and women about what it means to be men and women today’ (9/8/95, *SMH*: 10).
Moreover, a number of commentators argue that the book is ‘one of the most controversial – and successful – books in Australian publishing history’ (Editorial, 9/8/95, *The Australian*: 10, see also Capp, 13/4/96, *The Age*, ‘Saturday Extra’: 2). Others still have positioned the book ‘tapping into deep anxieties in academic feminism’ (Goldsworthy, 1996: 77, see also Levy: 1995). However, in the immediate context of the event a number of commentators appeared outraged that Garner’s book displaced the focus from ‘real’ news such as ‘war, hunger, and oppression’ to a battle within feminism (Daniel, 14/4/95, *The Age*: 8). Helen Daniel continues: ‘I marvel that in 1990s Australia, this book, this topic, this issue, should command such intense, heated views. Is this really the most vital issue of the moment?’ (Daniel, 14/4/95, *The Age*: 8). Daniel’s comments are underpinned by assumptions about the negative effects of increasingly unstable boundaries between the ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ in news discourse. For Daniel, the debate – as primarily involved with the field of cultural politics – appears unworthy of its status as an *event*. Daniel’s view is echoed by Beatrice Faust who, in a piece following Garner’s speech entitled ‘Sins of *The First Stone*’, sees the media debate over feminism as a distraction from real feminist politics:

If I wanted to destroy feminism, I could think of no better way than to organise a series of controversies about wrong-headed books such as *The Female Eunuch*, *Backlash*, *Fire with Fire* and *The First Stone*. This would tie up enormous energy and give a satisfactory sense of political engagement while distracting attention from major issues such as the casualisation of labour – mainly female labour – and the feminisation of poverty’ (Faust, 12-13/8/95, *The Australian*: 26).

For Faust, engagement in cultural politics is even a poor, even dangerous, substitute for ‘real’ political issues; a position problematised throughout this thesis (see Giroux: 2000).

The book and the media event have been institutionalised in a number of senses, and used to exemplify feminist debate. The event’s characterisation as an important cultural moment in reference guides and women’s studies textbooks and its placement on university courses are central to its institutionalisation (see Hughes: 1997, Caine et al.: 1998). Furthermore, such an institutional position guarantees that the book continues to remain in print (see Mills, 1997: 68). One of the most important textual sites in the book’s institutionalisation is the literary journal. Literary periodicals, as the ‘front-line between writing and the market place’ (Carter, 1991: 1), played a central role in the public visibility of the text. However, as a result of their limited readership with specialist cultural competencies, they are peripheral to the mainstream media event and I will therefore briefly address them here as part of literary critical engagement with the text.
**Reviews in the ‘Literary’ Press**

Following TFS’s publication and throughout 1995-1996, Australian literary journals engaged with a number of issues akin to those that came to dominate in mainstream media. Reviews appeared in Australian journals such as RePublica, Quadrant, Eureka Street, Arena, Australian Book Review, Meanjin, Overland, and Southerly.

Additionally, the boundaries between the mainstream and the ‘literary’ press must also be recognised as somewhat fluid, as book reviews from the former came to be reprinted in the latter, and many commentators moved freely from one discursive site to the other. For example, Cassandra Pybus’ ‘Examining a Photo is not Enough’ is cited as an ‘edited version of an article that appears in this month’s Australian Book Review’, while Robert Manne’s May Quadrant ‘Editorial’ also re-appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald. Importantly, the implied reader of both sets of texts did not seem to shift.

In the academic context, some critics identified the book’s primary merit as its refusal to proffer any definitive answers to the questions about ‘sex and power’ it purported to ask. These writers were supportive of the book, as they stressed its ambiguities and lack of definitive answers to its governing ‘questions about sex and power’ (Garner: 1995). It is common for critics inclined to support Garner ideologically to mask such alignment by claiming lack of narrative closure. Similarly, for a number of mainstream commentators, ambiguity is characterised as the book’s most valuable attribute, and is central in defences of the book. Critics such as Giles celebrate what is thought to be Garner’s postmodern relativism (Giles, 1995: 388) and moral ambiguities, and support her on ideological grounds:

> one of the great strength of Helen Garner’s new book *The First Stone* is the way it views the complex issue of harassment in an equally complex light, and calls implicitly for a more sophisticated paradigm of power to describe the interaction between men and women (Giles, 1995: 384).

In *Arena*, Kevin McDonald also sees Garner as positing a series of open-ended questions, while making a case for its universal cultural significance: ‘It engages with dilemmas, fears and possibilities at the centre of our culture. It captures and amplifies them in a way that makes us uncomfortable. It asks more questions than it offers answers’ (McDonald, 1995: 48). For such commentators, criticism of Garner was unfounded as it required an ideological fixing of meaning which the text itself is seen to resist. Although more critical than Giles and McDonald, Delys Bird welcomes the public space opened by the book, arguing that it creates an ‘often violent field of debate’. She speaks from a point of greater historical distance than Giles and consequently uses her article to comment, not just on the book, but on the event itself:

> Narrated as it is through self-reference and within slippery structures of relativism, *The First Stone* has textualised ‘some questions about sex and power’...
Garner’s supporters, through recourse to the language of flux and instability, often invoke an Other kind of reader, who – in contrast to Garner and her nuanced, complex and implicitly apolitical account – were constrained by their dogmatic ideology. For example, Robert Manne argues that Garner’s book is, unlike her dogmatic feminist critics, ‘apolitical’ (Manne, 12/4/95, The Age: 13). In contrast to the hysterical feminist against whom she is defined, Garner offers a measured response to sexual harassment; her writer’s insight allows her to ‘see both sides’ (Geason, 8/4/95, Sun Herald: 12). In contrast, many other critics refused to concede that Garner’s text was characterised by such uncertainty, and accordingly sought to hold her accountable for her book’s politics and the ethical limitations of its construction. Quadrant’s initial review, by Graeme Duncan in May, argued: ‘One reason for its popularity is that it reads as a book written to please a man. It does please men’ (Duncan, 1995: 77). Moreover, feminist critics questioned her positioning as a legitimate speaker on Australian feminism. In her review in Australian Feminism Studies, Curthoys is unequivocal as she asserts that Garner’s:

aim is not so much to help us think what to do better next time, as to moralise with a strange excess of emotion and passion about hard-faced punitive young women (whom she too often infantilises as ‘girls’) who should not have gone to the police (Curthoys, 1995: 209).

She also, somewhat prophetically, expresses a hope that the debate it generated would avoid ‘the blind alleys Garner would lead us into’ and not lead to the manufacture of a generational war (Curthoys, 1995: 210). The mediatised ‘generational war’ prophesied by Curthoys will be the subject of Chapter Six.

In Quadrant, in the later stages of the event, David Parker identified four central ‘holes’ in Garner’s narrative: her failure to ‘engage adequately with the perspective of the women at the centre of the Ormond affair; her inability to understand why they went to the police; her failure to grasp the seriousness of what the Master is alleged to have done; and her fictionalisation of Dr Jenna Mead into six or seven characters’ (Parker, 1996: 33). That said, like some commentators in the ‘mainstream’ press, he sees the book as a vehicle ‘to ponder in order to understand more about ourselves as a culture’ and argues that the debate evidenced a resurgence in ethical discourse (Parker, 1996: 33). For such critics, despite its flaws, the book could be recuperated through subsequent debate; others however assumed that the work’s ethical limitations rendered impossible any productive dialogue. Two of the event’s most prominent critics of Garner’s ethics (apart from Jenna Mead) are Lucy Frost and Cassandra Pybus.

In Australian Book Review, Lucy Frost pondered the politics of Garner’s appropriation of the Other’s narrative. In so doing, Frost remarkably and
problematically likened the complainants’ experiences to those of indigenous women from Hindmarsh Island. For Frost, Garner’s ‘getting of story’ – its theft from its rightful owners – is decidedly unethical (Frost, 1995: 23). Likewise, Cassandra Pybus’ review, which appeared in both the SMH and ABR, took Garner to task for her appropriation of the Ormond women’s story. For Pybus, whose authority was based on her own textual practice in Gross Moral Torpitude (a study of the Sydney Sparks Orr sexual harassment case in Tasmania in the 1950s), Garner’s text was beyond recuperation. In ‘Examining a photo is not enough’, a ‘cross-over’ review published in both Australian Book Review (May 1995) and the Sydney Morning Herald, Pybus uses the metaphor of the vulture to symbolise Garner’s textual practice:

> talking to your friends, listening to hearsay and reading Jung may be useful in grappling with ‘one of the most difficult and confounding issues of our time’, but it is no substitute for rigorous engagement with the multi-faceted context of the issue, especially when you are feeding off the devastation and distress of your fellow citizens (Pybus, 9/5/95, SMH: 15).

As Chapter Four will illustrate, the ethics of Garner’s textual practice resurfaced through one of the event’s most prominent speakers: Jenna Mead.

As the above comments illustrate, there is a clear preoccupation with the book’s effects from the moment of its publication. Throughout criticism on the book and the debate, certain assumptions are made about writing, particularly ‘non-fiction’, the media and their respective functions and use-value. As Goldsworthy observes, many academics and journalists expressed concerns about the negative and reactionary ideological effects that a book of such wide circulation could have (Goldsworthy, 1996: 80). Consistent with the effects-tradition of media power,8 such critics feared that the book, through its immense mass-mediated visibility, would work in antifeminist ways. As Goldsworthy suggests, some feared the effects of Garner’s celebrity and the authority it apparently conferred (Goldsworthy, 1996: 80). Susan Grover summarises these fears, which are based primarily on its wide circulation:

> Garner’s book threatens feminists because large numbers of people who are unlikely to read academic feminist scholarship have read and will continue to read The First Stone. The broad accessibility of Garner’s chosen medium is what renders her ideas dangerous (Grover, 1996: 248).

Here, the book’s very popularity is that which feminists most fear. For conservatives, it was not the book that should be feared, but the feminist prescriptivism that it was thought to catalogue. In this sense, binary logic has governed much talk – ‘popular’ and academic – on TFS and the subsequent media event. This binary logic, however, has not gone unchallenged.

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8 See Curran: 2003 for a critique of ‘media effects’ tradition in media research.
**Binary Logic and the Event**

Both mainstream articles and those produced by academics in other contexts often assume that media necessarily simplifies the complexities of the book and feminism, as they criticise in particular the governing binary logic of the media. As I have argued, criticism of the media from within characterises the event. Helen Daniel, for instance, (Daniel, 19/8/95, *The Age*, ‘Saturday Extra’: 7) argues that the media attention to the book was marred by the ‘two team mentality’ of the media. Media attention, according to Daniel, derives from media desire for an easily delineated battle; these binarising tendencies provoke Daniel’s disdain: ‘I have to say that I find it appalling that in the 1990s, we still resort to the old fundamentalist either/or thinking’ (Daniel, 19/8/95, *The Age*, ‘Saturday Extra’: 7). Jenna Mead, in her response to Garner’s speech, suggests that the book functioned to ‘polarise public opinion into absolute baloney and non-existent political correctness on the one hand and hysterical accusations of heresy on the other’ (Mead, 21/9/95, *SMH*: 13).

This binary logic is thought to have stifled debate, and works as one of the grounds on which the event has been dismissed. In keeping with the publication of the book as a significant, historical marker, Anne Summers remarks: ‘I can’t remember a debate which has had people so opinionated, and so polarised’ (Summers, 4/4/95, *SMH*: 13). Marilyn Lake too observes:

*The First Stone* has popularised this significant shift in the naming of feminism; subsequent media discussion has consolidated and expanded on the new dichotomies. Thus Paddy McGuinness in *The Age* distinguishes between ‘wimminists’ – ‘priggish’ and ‘doctrinaire’ occupants of the ‘publicly subsidised trenches of the universities’ – and the broad movement of feminism, represented by Garner (Lake, 1995: 26).

Here Lake makes explicit the dichotomy of feminism in the real world/feminism in the academy that persists throughout the debate.

News media’s tendency to dichotomise feminism into the type it sanctions and that which it condemns (see Sheridan et al.: 2000) has meant that feminist critics have failed to see the media event as offering feminism an opportunity to use such high visibility for its own purposes. Bronwen Levy, for instance, underestimates the contradictions and tensions besetting the event, as she argues that the press’s desire to ‘establish distinctions between “good” and “bad” feminisms’ sees feminism represented within the event as either ‘the “good” sensible kind represented by Garner; the “bad” by the two young women complainants and their supporters’ (Levy, 1995: 2, Rhode: 1997: 18). Levy assumes that Garner’s authority within the media event received little scrutiny, and works to fix binaries that I show to be less than stable during the event. The dichotomies structuring media engagement with the text include second-wave/third-wave, pro-sex/anti-sex, activist/academic, victim/power feminism; such
dichotomies readily lend themselves to the discursive construction of a feminist battle. However, as I will argue, media deployment of such binaries was explicitly challenged during the event, as was Garner’s authority.

Another important dichotomy within the event is mobilised by Robert Manne. He suggests that: ‘With the reading public Garner’s book was a great success. Within parts of the feminist movement it occasioned the deepest anger’ (Manne, 3/11/97, SMH: 19). Thus, he draws a distinction between the general reading public and feminists reading within the homogenised interpretive community of the ‘feminist movement’. This opposition between feminists and ‘ordinary’ (non-ideological) readers is also deployed by Garner, particularly in her speech to the Sydney Institute (Garner, SMH, 9/8/95: 11). This establishment of a gulf between ‘ordinary women’ and feminist activists is said to be a common feature of news reporting of feminist events (Van Zoonen, 1992: 467). In a similar vein, Kay Schaffer argues that the ‘distinction between feminists and “real” women is another familiar ploy invoked by the media to retain “feminism” as a category of transgression while still maintaining an audience ... whose lives have been affected by the women’s movement’ (Schaffer, 1998: 322). Such policing of the border between ‘real women’ and feminists is fundamentally a manifestation of fears about identity and difference; fears which are projected onto ‘feminism as a dangerous force which cannot be controlled’ (Schaffer, 1998: 323).

Throughout the debate, conservative commentators contrast feminists with the ‘ordinary’, ‘rational’ readers, who like Helen Garner herself are assumed to take the ‘commonsensical’ position that legislation should not impinge upon essentially private, sexual matters.

**Conservative Media Commentators and the Event**

Following the book’s publication, some media commentators homogenised feminist interpretations of the book, emphasising an immense hostility towards Garner: ‘Within parts of the feminist movement it [TFS] occasioned the deepest anger’ (Manne, 3/11/97, SMH: 19). Commentators predicted that Garner’s would ‘probably enrage some doctrinaire feminists’ (Johnson, 5/4/95, Courier-Mail: 20). Given the type of feminist readers discursively constructed in some media accounts, it is not surprising that the event has often been used as further proof of media culture’s disdain for feminism. However, as I argue here, emphasising such representations over the diverse ways in which feminists, and those sympathetic to feminism, worked to challenge such assumptions presents a limited view of the event.

For many conservative commentators, the book offers an unobstructed view of the excesses of contemporary feminism. The fears of conservative critics related to the feminist excess seen as ‘objectively’ represented by Garner, which feminist response to
the book was believed to substantiate. Feminist criticism of Garner is said to be ‘of such a bruising nature that it is hard to see whether they are attempts to silence, if not Garner, then debate’ (McDonald, 1995: 45). For some, TFS’s publication provides the discursive space for the circulation of pre-fabricated anti-feminist sentiments (Mead, 1997: 21). This assumption of overpowering conservative columnists is made explicit by Margaret Henderson, who argues that TFS produced ‘widespread media controversy, healthy sales, offering an aestheticised and potent refrain for anti-feminist diatribes. Remember the Op.Ed columnist frenzy’ (Henderson, 1998: 324). Commentators in this category include the ‘usual feminist bashers’ (Trioli, 1996: 51): Terry Lane, P.P. McGuinness, and Luke Slattery, while women such as Deborah Hope and Rosemary Sorensen used the book’s representation of feminism to further their own arguments regarding feminism’s inherent inadequacies. For Jenna Mead, it was the ‘melodrama of celebrity journalism’ that took the debate in its most problematic direction, towards ‘hate-speech’ (Mead, 1997: 28).

While fruitful dialogues over sexual harassment were kept to a minimum during the event, it tends to be within the context of conservative columns that the very premise of sexual harassment – seen as indicative of immense feminist power and the detrimental politicisation of the everyday – is most vigorously contested. For example, in ‘Sex, Power and the Ivory Tower’, Luke Slattery reinscribes a number of Garner’s assumptions about the power exercised by young female students and the impossible regulation of the sexual field. He also uses his piece as a broader defence of ‘consensual’ relationships amongst students and academics (Slattery 28/3/95, The Australian: 15).

Feminism is, according to Slattery, responsible for this unnecessary politicisation of the personal; Drucilla Cornell observes that such a notion is far from uncommon: ‘the entrance of sexual harassment into the legal sphere has recently become the favourite target for those who wish to point out the so-called “oppressive” power of feminism’ (Cornell, 1995: 169). As my reading of the book will suggest, such a fear underpins TFS.

It is undoubtedly the case that anti-feminist commentators berated the (absent) Ormond women. The Ormond women were ‘pilloried’ by some critics as ‘producers of unreliable narratives’ (Davis, 1999: 230). For example, in arguably the most offensive comment from the entire debate, radio ‘Shock Jock’ John Laws suggested: ‘these feminist bitches (you won’t mind me using that word because that’s what they are), these feminist bitches who told lies to destroy a man’s career’ (cited in Pybus, 1996: 6). In Chapter Three I will detail how Garner aligns herself with the ‘vulnerable’ Master of Ormond, a strategy reinscribed by Laws in the above comment.9 Furthermore, feminist

9 While I do not focus on it here, it is worth noting that many studies have been produced on the rhetorical strategies mobilised to undermine (the claims of) victims of sex crime in print media
critiques of media often centre on how it can operate as a ‘forum for attacks on feminism’, where a ‘cadre of right-wing media figures’ seek to alienate its audience from feminism (Young, 1997: 4). These ‘pockets of antifeminism’ within print media (Hall and Rodriguez, 2003: 882) by no means overwhelm the event, as has commonly been assumed.

Conservative critics also construed the event as a silencing of Garner by a homogenous, oppressive monolithic sisterhood. Having helped bring intimacy and affect into public discourse, feminism is often so ‘disciplined’. Central to such a disciplinary project, as Melissa Deem argues, is nostalgia:

A nostalgia permeates public discourses for a time when the zone of privacy was intact and feminism had not yet destroyed the political. Feminism stands as the cause of national suffering and disciplining feminism becomes part of the cure (Deem, 1999: 88).

In these accounts the body politic is infected with the ‘disease’ of sexual harassment (Deem, 1999: 89), where feminism has shifted the terms of masculinity and its articulation within the national imaginary (Deem, 1999: 88). The un-ease of Lane, Craven, Slattery and McGuinness could be the basis of attempts to ‘discipline’ feminism (Deem, 1999: 88-89) – for its accommodation of particularly troublesome women – within media discourse. As this thesis suggests, however, such deeply ideological disciplinary efforts are not (nor can they be) entirely successful. In later chapters, I demonstrate the ways in which Garner and Summers (like these conservative commentators) use nostalgia as a rhetorical strategy through which to critique the Ormond women (as synecdoches for young feminists) and to privilege particular feminist practices over others. For many feminist critics of TFS media event, Garner’s voice deafens all others.

‘Distortions’ of Feminism

In contrast to those who saw the event as a sustained attack on Garner, many feminist commentators argued that she was overwhelmingly successful in delimiting public understandings of feminism and in stifling the voices of those with whom she ideologically conflicted. In this sense, critics such as Vivienne Porzsolt feared Garner was ‘helping the misogynists’ (Porzsolt, 29/6/95, The Australian: 11). Garner, it was thought, ‘peddle[d] the backlash discourse’ (O’Brien, 1997: 29) and, consequently, her conservative politics endeared her to the media: ‘The establishment press has hardly been able to contain its joy’ (Gelber, Green Left Weekly, 26/4/95). Academic feminist

assessment of TFS media event has likewise been largely condemnatory. The textual field surrounding TFS has come to be dominated by ‘enormous anger among feminist women who oppose it’ (Bird, 1996: 49). This is not surprising, particularly due to what has been called the book’s ‘disturbing slide between feminism and anti-feminism’ (Foord, 1998:41).

To signal their perception of the silencing of non-hegemonic voices throughout the event, Henderson and Rowlands characterise TFS as activating the ‘zoom lens effect’. Through this effect, they suggest that Garner’s text ‘functions monolithically to silence and erase other versions of feminist history and struggle. The part becomes the w/hole into which feminism falls’ (Henderson and Rowlands, 1996: 12). In this sense, the representation of feminism in TFS and all its subsequent intertexts, became metonymic. The Ormond women, too, come not only to ‘stand for a generation of young women’ (Mead, 1997: 245) but young feminists in general. However, these comments by Henderson and Rowlands and Mead are telling in the way they position Garner’s text as having effectively ‘silenced’ all other forms of feminist discourse in media culture. They over-estimate the power of any text or discourse, and assume that audiences do not possess the interpretive agency to challenge the ‘truths’ of media texts. Moreover, this position also sees the debate as monologic, with all commentators within news discourse necessarily re-affirming Garner’s presuppositions.

Many critics have read this event as the product of a univocal attack on feminism and, thereby, fail to concede any of its potentially productive aspects. To this end, Kath Kenny asserts:

What I found so intriguing – and infuriating – about the reception to Garner’s book was that it became a launching pad for a full-scale attack on the perceived extremes of feminism. From a case that involved serious allegations by two women at one university, it suddenly seemed that every editorial, every columnist, talkback radio host and TV current affairs reporter was denouncing a whole class of ‘feral’, ‘Stalinist, ‘priggish’ and ‘pitiless’ feminists (Kenny, 1996: 145).

Jenny Morgan too views the event as a ‘media circus’ that offered nothing but ‘victim feminists, vindictive feminists, women victimised by feminists, men victimised by feminists, vitriolic feminists, vilified feminists’ (Morgan, 1997: 101). For critics such as Kenny and Morgan, assumptions about feminism’s oppressive power overshadowed anything else that may have emerged as a result of the media event. Moreover, to sustain this argument, they also obscure the active role of feminists as news sources or commentators in the media event. As the above examples indicative, critics appear to have been seduced by the idea that the debate was monologic, either in support of or against Garner. However, attempts to fix the event function to reduce its complexities to an ideologically pre-packaged position and fail to concede that the closure implicit in
such positions is impossible. One element of the media event that cannot be easily dismissed is the multi-layered privilege of its participants.

**The Elisions of the Debate**

Popular feminism has been criticised by various theorists because it is predominantly white, middle-class, and heteronormative (see hooks: 1994). The questions posed by Garner, and others manifest during the entire debate, may be dismissed by some critics as ‘middle-class agony’ (Fiske, 1993: 265). These are valid criticisms which must be addressed because, as Robert Manne suggests, *TFS* offers ‘an eminently middle-class story of sexual politics’ (Manne, 1998: 238). In particular, the feminism under contestation during this debate assumed a particular type of (feminist) subject. It is impossible, not to mention ethically undesirable, to interrogate this event without attention to its absences. As Rita Felski observes, ‘some women – the white, educated, heterosexual middle-class – have had a much greater chance to set the agenda for feminist debate than other women’ (Felski, 2001: 201). Felski’s comments are applicable to ‘academic’ and ‘popular’ varieties of feminist discourse in Australia (see Moreton-Robinson: 2001, Huggins: 1999), where it is particularly problematic that the event’s ‘whiteness’ appeared to be so persistently obscured. Other stories about feminism and Australian women were repressed, as particular raced and classed stories came to be privileged.

The limitations of this event in terms of race and class, however, have not gone unnoticed. For example, Fong Ling Kong (1997) problematises Garner’s normative whiteness and class privilege, stressing in particular that only those similarly placed were afforded the opportunity to speak and did so within the framework provided by Garner:

> The complexities of race or difference have been circumscribed in general; someone reading about harassment in Australia would not be far wrong to think that it happened to white women. The many women writing about the case in the media, whether responding directly to Helen Garner’s book *The First Stone* or not, have, by and large, looked at it through the lens of middle-class white feminism; following the pattern set by Garner: first to declare their own stories of harassment, as if it is one way of squaring the women’s stories with their own, then proceed with the argument. Few realise that not all women have access to these traditionally useful constructions of race and class (Ling Kong, 1997: 68).

Rosi Braidotti, too, challenged Garner on these grounds (Braidotti: 1997). Furthermore, the lack of participation either during or after the event from Indigenous feminist critics also suggests that the media event (or the issues at its core) had little practical or theoretical relevance to less privileged women. In this sense, the event performs the ‘whitewash’ identified by John Gabriel as constituting contemporary media culture (Gabriel: 1998).
In addition to its obvious elisions in terms of race, others have foregrounded the class privilege of Garner and other prominent commentators. Susan Lever, for example, argues that ‘Garner speaks to and for the rising class of women of her own generation – middle-class women with access to educations denied their mothers and grandmothers’ (Lever, 2000: 114). During the event itself, Garner’s privilege and her overestimation of the universality of feminist successes was also called into question:

Although there have been huge, exciting shifts in theories about relations between men and women, real, practical change has occurred only in the tiniest proportion of lives. The women who have benefited from the feminism of the recent feminist movement have been the middle class, well-educated women like Helen Garner. ... But the world isn’t made up of middle class, highly educated people. In the real world, the power structures, and the expectations, remain fairly unchallenged (Elliott, Herald Sun, 11/8/95: 13).

Such oppositional voices, however, cannot be silenced during the event. One of the most frequent ways to read both TFS and the media event, in academic and ‘mainstream’ contexts, is in terms of similar debates that have occurred internationally. In this sense, the rhetoric of importation has become one of the dominant ways of speaking about both the book and the media event.

**Challenging ‘Importation’**

With The First Stone, Ms Garner joins a predominantly American contingent of modern feminist writers who have condemned a strain of ‘victim feminism’ which has recently emerged from the women’s movement. Prominent authors Naomi Wolf, Camille Paglia and Kate Roiphe have all recognised and discussed the trend (Jackman, Courier-Mail, 31/3/95: 18)

As I will argue in Chapter Six, conceptualising difference along mother/daughter lines serves to universalise conflict, making it an inevitable part of individuation. In addition, it serves to remove feminism from its culturally specific time and space. As a model that has been thus universalised, it is not surprising that critics commonly place generationalism in a global context. One of the most problematic aspects of much previous criticism on the event is its elision of the book’s cultural specificity and the debate through its alignment with American ‘blockbuster’ texts. In this sense, TFS media event is often interpreted as the Australian exemplification of a global phenomenon. Although such cross-cultural comparisons can often be valid and insightful, it is my contention that an over-utilisation of this frame has led to a failure to engage with any of the opportunities for Australian feminism provided by this culturally specific event.

For Henderson and Rowlands, in their article mentioned in Chapter One, ‘blockbuster feminism is an American neo-imperialist phenomenon’ (Henderson and
Rowlands, 1996: 10). They argue that Rene Denfeld’s book, *The New Victorians*, and the machinations of her own promotion tour act as a conduit for the ‘local version’ – *TFS* – to achieve ‘blockbuster status’ (Henderson and Rowlands, 1996: 11). However, it should be noted that this comparative strategy is not specific to their article, but pervades much talk – both so-called ‘mainstream’ and academic – about the book and its representations of feminism. For example, Mark Davis’ search for the event’s origins leads him to the U.S. Like Henderson and Rowlands, Davis locates *TFS* in an American-based ‘victim panic genre’ and compares its rhetorical strategies and thematic aspects by citing lengthy paragraphs from Wolf, Roiphe and Paglia (Davis, 1997: 78). He continues:

Like so many shoddy goods bought wholesale off the international journalistic tracks, the victim panic formula turns out to be mostly imported. As a media product it rides on the tail of the US ‘culture wars’ (Davis, 1997: 84, see Bulbeck, 1997: 221).

It has not been uncommon to read *TFS* as ‘our own version of these [culture] “wars”’ (McKeirnan, 1999: 239), once again invoking the rhetoric of importation.

This tendency to suggest that the debate has been ‘imported’ from the United States or that it is a local manifestation of an international phenomenon (Giles: 1995, Henderson and Rowlands: 1996, Kenny: 1996, Ling Kong, 1997, Hughes: 1997, Davis: 1997, Bulbeck: 1998, Van Acker: 1999, Bulbeck: 2001) often means that the geopolitical and cultural specificities of this instance of debate are elided in favour of a simplified narrative of the global mis-representation of feminism by celebrity (anti)feminists. Such a move, while questionable, is unsurprising; the rhetorical and ideological similarities between Garner’s text and Kate Roiphe’s *The Morning After: Sex, Fear and Feminism* (1993), Naomi Wolf’s *Fire With Fire: The New Female Power and How It Will Change the 21st Century* (1993), and Rene Denfeld’s *The New Victorians: A Young Woman’s Challenge to the Old Feminist Order* (1995) are remarkable. Each of these texts base their critique of feminism on a homogenised, monolithic ‘victim feminism’, one that deters women from embracing empowerment to instead exaggerate their helplessness. Feminism’s invasion into the social, its calls for renegotiated models of femininity and masculinity, is seen to be excessive and misdirected and is rejected in favour of a liberalist focus on individual freedom and calls for gender equality. These ‘popular’ writers are seen to redirect their energies; they are ‘not concerned with what is wrong with patriarchy so much as what is wrong with women (or, more specifically,
feminism)’ (Kenny, 1996: 142). They speak hyperbolically of a feminism which is anti-sex, and thereby (in their heteronormative logic) irrelevant to most women. In the rhetoric of (re)possession critiqued earlier, they each seek to reclaim feminism from the previous generation. As McCluskey notes:

>The mainstream media often constructs the controversy over ‘victim feminism’ as an intergenerational split: young feminists who want to celebrate sexuality and independence are supposedly rebelling against certain feminist foremothers who have advocated sexual protection (McCluskey, 1997: 69).

It is the work of these young women that is often quoted to emphasise the limits of ‘popular feminism’. Given these similarities, though not ideal, it is not surprising that the event is read in terms of these international debates.

Participants in the actual media event attempted to read TFS through the American context in particular, comparing Garner to like-minded feminist renegades Camille Paglia (Rutherford, 26/3/95, Sunday Age: 9), Katie Roiphe and Naomi Wolf (Slattery, 28/3/95, The Australian: 15). In ‘The Second Stone’, Virginia Trioli suggests: ‘The First Stone is a significant contribution to an argument that was born in America by feminist authors such as Camille Paglia and Katie Roiphe and lives on in Australia under the guise of a generational split in the feminist cause’ (Trioli, 29/3/95, The Age: 13). The association of Garner’s ideas with those of Paglia seems a particularly favoured rhetorical gesture: ‘Repeatedly she stakes out something like Camille Paglia’s line that emphasising the victim role in sexual harassment, far from being empowering, actively reduces women’s ability to cope with confronting behaviour’ (Rutherford, 26/3/95, Sunday Age: 9, see also Leser, 18-19/3/95, Good Weekend: 24). The local specificities are elided, as this narrative of feminist excess is globalised. Likewise, ‘War Between the Women’ – a title indicative of the media tendency to view the event it was hosting as a battle between (generations of) feminists – attempts to situate the Australian generational debate in a transatlantic trend: ‘Naomi Wolf started it when she had a big go at victim and puritan feminists in her second book, Fire with Fire’ (Neill, 24-25/6/95, Weekend Australian, ‘Review’: 1). Moreover, the high media visibility of Rene Denfeld, one of these oft-cited American celebrity feminists, during her promotional tour for The New Victorians facilitated such readings about the similarities between the two countries. In her own opinion piece, ‘Don’t let the extremists spoil feminism’ (Denfeld, SMH, 15/4/95: 19), Denfeld aligns herself with Helen Garner and makes the sort of international connections which critics above reinscribe:

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12 The New Victorians was published within a month of Garner’s text, and reviews appeared in the Australian media (see Verlander, ‘Taking the gloves to modern feminism’, The Age, ‘Agenda’, 7/5/95: 8) while TFS debate was becoming evermore heated. Denfeld’s book appeared at number 10 on the ‘bestseller’ list when Garner’s book was number one (see Australian Bookseller and Publisher, June 1995). However, it was also the subject of sharp feminist criticism, including in Verlander’s review.
The controversy surrounding Helen Garner’s *The First Stone* illustrates that the intolerant, repressive brand of feminism which is alienating women in the US is unfortunately alive and well in Australia (Denfeld, *SMH*, 15/4/95: 19). Denfeld here, in an attempt to make her own text relevant to Australian audiences, taps into the event, using it to further substantiate her own claims of a puritanical global feminist sisterhood.

In such accounts, America is constructed as the cultural centre, and the ‘cultural flow’ between Australia and America is unproductively conceived not in terms of process but in terms of influence (Lumby, 1999: 169). As Philip Bell and Roger Bell observe, charges of Americanisation often articulate fear of its effects on national, cultural and political identities. As they argue, the ‘pejorative use of Americanisation sees Australia as adopting social practices and cultural values which putatively originate in the United States’ (Bell and Bell, 1999: 5). P. Jenkins too argues the need to ‘rebut the simple view that problems are a direct imitation of American concerns, disseminated by way of US cultural and political hegemony’ (Jenkins, 1992: 219). That said, this notion of an Australian playing out of international debates is not simply limited to American contexts; some commentators also align *TFS* event with media debates in the UK (Neill, 24-25/6/95, *Weekend Australian*, ‘Review’: 1).

Rather than looking to the American context for the origins of such anti-victim discourses, the deployment of such rhetoric can be found in Australian texts produced in the 1990s. For example, prominent liberal feminist Beatrice Faust mobilised anti-victim rhetoric in her polemical work *Backlash, Balderdash?: Where Feminism is Going Right* (1994); a response to, among other things, Susan Faludi’s 1991 thesis that feminism was under sustained attack in various cultural, economic, and political sites, *Backlash, Balderdash* satirically pathologises the alleged feminist propensity towards victimhood, describing it as ‘wimporrhoea’ (Faust, 1994: 5). Faust criticised the so-called ‘new feminism’ for being predicated upon a view of ‘women as wimps’ (Faust, 1994: 5). In an opinion piece during the event, although surprisingly generally unsupportive of Garner, Faust sees the book as ‘giving its readers permission to express their reservations about the specific dilemma of sexual harassment and general disquiet about wowser feminism’ (Faust, 12-13/8/95, *The Age*: 23).13

One of the most obvious ways in which these global readings can be problematised is through exposing the cultural specificity of the notion of ‘third-wave’ feminism. Internationally, the question of the ‘third-wave’ has been the subject of a number of critical studies and ‘popular’ publications (Heywood and Drake: 1997, 13 Not insignificantly, Faust also penned the foreword to the Australian edition of Rene Denfeld’s *The New Victorians* (1995).
Baumgardner and Richards: 2000). Furthermore, the limitations of the ‘wave’ model (particularly in eliding activists ‘between the waves’) have been the subject of much feminist historiography (Simic: 2001). The term itself has been rarely invoked in Australia, thereby further complicating the importation model which many critics attempt to map onto TFS media event. Although Summers uses the term in ‘Shockwaves’ and other media articles sporadically utilise the term, the generational paradigm rather than the wave model provides the dominant frame for theorising differences between older and younger women in Australia (Maddison, 2002: 10). Moreover, ‘there is little evidence to suggest that we are in another wave of feminist activism that in any way resembles the previous two ways. We cannot simply import a term that may (or may not) accurately describe the situation in the United States’ (Maddison, 2002: 7). During the event itself, Beatrice Faust challenged the notion of a ‘third wave’ due to the implication of a break from the earlier wave: ‘Can you have a third wave when the second is still rolling?’ (Faust, 12-13/8/96, The Australian: 23).

Another crucial disruption to these efforts to read the event through a global framework is that in this instance it is Garner – not the young feminist – who rallies against an alleged victim-centred feminism propagated by young women (Long, 2001: 1). As Helen Verlander remarks in her review of The New Victorians: ‘Read in tandem with Helen Garner’s The First Stone, the feminist “new Victorians” are either the older generation or the younger one, depending on where you are standing’ (Verlander, 27/5/95, The Age, ‘Agenda’: 8). In ‘third-wave’ popular texts produced in the US, the second-wave seeks to impose a puritanical, anti-sex morality on all women (Henry, 2004: 115). In ‘Shockwaves’, Anne Summers herself commented on the central difference between the two contexts: ‘Either we are dealing with a serious time-lag problem, or the US experience – and the books that emanate from it – have little relevance to Australian women (I opt for the latter explanation myself)’ (Summers, Good Weekend, 18-19/3/1995: 28). Looking in the mirror of ‘popular’ feminism, the Australian position is reversed; here it is the figurative feminist mother taking the challenge to her symbolic ‘victim’ centred daughters. Rather than accounting for this difference, it is commonly seen as an unproblematic inversion which is nonetheless deployed to substantiate the universality of anti-victim tracts such as those by young feminists such as Wolf, Roiphe, and Denfeld (Davis: 1997). While generational debates are clearly prevalent in both contexts, I would argue that this crucial difference profoundly destabilises efforts to read Australian and American debates intertextually as indicative of a global dissatisfaction with feminism among young women.

In this study, while acknowledging the narrative and thematic convergences with so-called ‘popular’ feminist texts produced in other countries, I resist the temptation to
read TFS media event as a symbol of a global tendency towards conservative or anti-feminism or as suggestive of an international conflict between ‘second-’ and ‘third-’ wave feminists. Attempts to primarily read TFS media event through the American cultural context in particular work to circumscribe the meanings that can be made of the event, and fail to allow for its culturally specific conditions of possibility. My refusal to read this media event, including texts by Bail and Trioli, primarily through ‘popular’ feminist texts produced off-shore constitutes an important aspect of my project to refigure the event. In the final section of this chapter, I explore how TFS media event opened a commercial space for a series of publications that took Garner (and in some instances, Summers) as their interlocutor.

Publications in Response to the Event
As well as newspaper and academic articles, a number of publications emerged as both contributions, and responses, to TFS media event. These include Kathy Bail’s edited collection, DIY Feminism (1996), Virginia Trioli’s Generation F: Sex, Power and the Young Feminist (1996), Mark Davis’ Gangland: Cultural Elites and the New Generationalism (1997), Jenna Mead’s edited collection, Bodyjamming: Sexual Harassment, Feminism and Public Life (1997), and Rosamund Else-Mitchell and Naomi Flutter’s collection Talking Up: Young Women’s Take on Feminism (1998). As these titles suggest, the trope of generation came to govern much public conversation following TFS. I will not discuss DIY Feminism or Generation F here as both texts are subject to detailed textual analysis in the final chapter. In his review essay of TFS, Generation F, Gangland and Bodyjamming, Ian Duncanson remarked: ‘Narratives of the “Ormond College Affair” have been popular with the Australian reading public’ (Duncanson, 1998: 149). In this section, I consider some of these ‘popular’ narratives.

Throughout this work I both draw upon, and problematise, Mark Davis’ Gangland: The New Generationalism and Cultural Elites. Gangland is, like Catharine Lumby’s Bad Girls (1997), a crossover text that destabilises the increasingly blurred boundaries between the academic and the popular. Davis’ work is polemical, and despite his use of poststructuralist theorists and ideas, the battlelines between the cultural elites and young excluded consumers of culture are firmly and unambiguously drawn. The assumption underpinning the book, that young people are systematically excluded from contributing to contemporary mainstream culture by older cultural gatekeepers, is taken as a given. Having taken such a thesis as read, the book catalogues a number of such exclusions, seeing them as evidence of Australia’s very own ‘culture wars’.

In Gangland, Davis firmly locates TFS debate in this broader cultural preoccupation with generationalism. Gangland, he suggests, is concerned with:
the refusal of a certain cultural establishment to let go. In their determination to hang onto a virtual monopoly (gerry-mander, shutdown, lockout, call it what you will) on the ideas market, its members refuse to acknowledge that paradigms are clashing, changing, in almost every area of life, and they scapegoat a younger generation for these shifts (Davis, 1997: xii).

For Davis, *TFS* debate is just one in a series of dialogues exemplifying a cultural predilection for the exclusion and silencing of young people. Although he does suggest that his book ‘isn’t so much an argument for generationalism, as an argument against it’ (Davis, 1997: 15), he nonetheless attempts to substantiate its existence through a reading of the prevalence of particular hegemonic voices in print media. As a form of polemic, his object of attack is clear. The ‘new generationalism’ of Davis’ title is manifest through a number of complimentary, conservative discourses including a rampant anti-political correctness:

> The battle over ‘political correctness’, and recent controversies in feminism and the arts, have raised issues of generationalism against a background of broad social change where one thing that hasn’t changed has been the cultural incumbency of a range of figures who first gained prominence in the 1960s and 1970s, or who take these as their formative intellectual years (Davis, 1997: 19).

Davis’ analysis appears pessimistic as he assumes a deafening contribution of conservative critics to public discourse, particularly during the print media conversation surrounding Garner’s text. In Davis’ frame, the event is monologic and print media anti-feminist. In constructing an undifferentiated power bloc dominating mid-nineties public discourse, Davis himself reinscribes the homogenisation of generations that his book explicitly aims to critique. Furthermore, Wark underscores the irony that it is ‘precisely the exclusion of younger voices from consideration in the media that created the speaking position from which Davis could appear as the critic of such exclusion’ (Wark, 1999: 228).

Unlike Davis, I do not reduce this debate to a question of the literary establishment defending a ‘canonical author’ (Davis, 1998: 211). In the second edition of *Gangland*, Mark Davis argued that *TFS*’s defenders did so on these grounds: ‘The book had been written by a reputable artist and was therefore art, and possessed the requisite writerly virtues’ (Davis, 1999: 213). Such a crude reading ignores the complexities of public discourse, particularly its own role in such processes of canonisation, and relegates the media event to a literary controversy with little or no relevance to those outside the literary elite. Public discussions on *TFS* undoubtedly mobilised those with large degrees of cultural and educational capital. However, much of the public engagement with the text was not constituted by lengthy critical analysis of its literary virtues, or even to its status as ‘Literature’, but rather attended to the book’s thematic – as opposed to technical or structural – dimensions. For Davis, however, the debate suggested much about the power of Australia’s *literati*, and
accordingly his dismisses TFS media event as the provenance of an elite few. These criticisms notwithstanding, Davis’ critique of TFS and conservative media commentary offers a valuable, if limited, contribution to critical writing on this subject.

Although published during its latter stages, the editors of Talking Up: Young Women’s Take on Feminism (1998) directly position their text within TFS event. The inspiration for the collection, the editors suggest, was to ‘respond publicly, first to Garner, then to Anne Summers’ to demonstrate that ‘feminism was alive and kicking’ (Flutter and Else-Mitchell, 1998: xiii). Talking Up is an analysis of, and a contribution to, popular feminism; it is largely critical of the discursive construction of the ‘young feminist’ that came to circulate during TFS media event. In its introduction, Rosemary Else-Mitchell and Naomi Flutter perceive the book as an opportunity for young feminists to intervene, or ‘to write themselves into’, the popular debate about contemporary Australian feminism. The editors make explicit the role of the TFS event, and of Anne Summers in particular, in the book’s genesis:

This collection answers the challenge issued to young feminists in 1995 by Anne Summers in a now-famous question: ‘Where are the books or articles by young Australian women setting out their thoughts, seizing control of the debate, tweaking the noses of the old guard?’ Anne Summers dared young women to talk back. As one of the gatekeepers of public debate, she tossed us the key and we beckoned (Flutter and Else-Mitchell, 1998: xi).

Flutter and Else-Mitchell also concede that their own contribution was contingent upon Summers’ opening the discursive space in which such a book could emerge and be read as part of a larger cultural conversation. Furthermore, without Summers’ use of her celebrity capital to help to incite generational debate, it would have been difficult to mount a case for the book’s commercial viability. In Summers’ Sydney Morning Herald review of the book, there is a seismic shift in tone from her accusatory, resentful address to young women in ‘Letter to the Next Generation’ (1993) as she suggests:

There is a new generation keeping the fires of feminism alight and with no lack of continuity between them and the second wave. Like their predecessors of 25 years ago, they are fierce and brave and funny, and they willing to fight. We are in good hands (Summers, SMH, ‘Spectrum’, 16/1/99: 8).

Throughout Talking Up, contributors seek to provide a counter-discourse to the individualist feminism that had come to be associated – mostly through Bail’s text – with young women. Most of the articles are presented as autobiographical, with the young writers seizing this space to self-consciously consider the role of feminism in their own lives. Talking Up, as a form of material reader response to the event, is indicative of the cultural reverberation, the ‘countercurrents’ spoken of in my Introduction. Another such material ‘countercurrent’, published two years into the media event was Jenna Mead’s Bodyjamming (1997).
Mead’s edited collection, *Bodyjamming: Sexual Harassment, Feminism and Public Life* (1997), is organised around the three overlapping themes of the sub-title. However, it should be remembered that Mead’s voice was not simply present after the event through *Bodyjamming* and articles in journals such as *Australian Feminist Studies*, but was audible throughout the event in both academic and mainstream publications such as *RePublica, Campus Review, The Sydney Morning Herald, The Age* and *The Australian*. Like the publications discussed above, *Bodyjamming* is a cross-over text which blurs the distinctions between academic and mainstream discourses. As Ian Duncanson suggests, *Bodyjamming* ‘had a large print run and was marketed in shopping centre and airport, as well as academic, bookstores’ (Duncanson, 1997: 150). It comprises articles by academics, journalists, politicians, unionists, satirists, novelists, Mark Davis’ chapter on TFS from *Gangland*, and even includes a personal, affective analysis of the media event from one of the complainants. The collection contains some of the most sustained analysis of the media event to date, particularly in relation to exposing its racial and class dimensions (see Ling Kong: 1997, Curthoys: 1997, Braidotti: 1997).

The publication of *Bodyjamming* in 1997 also facilitated a renewal of the event, again accrediting the event through front-page news coverage. As *The Age* suggested: ‘New book to rekindle college row’ (Trioli, 24/10/1997, *The Age*: 1). The book also resulted in a number of defamation cases, themselves fuelling further news items a few years after its publication (see Gregory, 30/5/00, *The Age*: 4). Reviews appeared both in the literary and mainstream presses, where the book was promoted of ‘the latest contribution to *The First Stone* debate’ (Darcy, 1998: 113). For Kate MacDonnell, Mead’s collection is ‘the long awaited response to the kinds of issues that were both raised in and erased by *The First Stone’* (McDonnell, 1998: 12). In *Australian Literary Studies*, Margaret Henderson commends the book for making the creative and provocative readings of TFS produced in feminist journals and magazines available to a wider, less specialist audience (Henderson, 1998: 324). In terms of mainstream attention, in *The Australian’s Higher Education Supplement* Mackenzie Wark reviews *Bodyjamming*. He argues:

Mead sometimes seems locked into opposing Garner on every point. Hence the book doesn’t quite succeed in escaping the terms of the debate as Garner defined them. Mead seems to take a dim view of the potential for change in the media...


In her *Sydney Morning Herald* review, Catharine Lumby sees *Bodyjamming* as a ‘genuine attempt to make useful meaning out of *The First Stone* debate. To ask, in effect, what public meanings got made of sexual harassment and feminism in that debate’ (Lumby, 8/11/97, *SMH*: 12). Other critics are less positive; for Virginia Trioli, it
is Mead’s lack of attention to ‘what really happened’ in favour of a blanket criticism of the media (Trioli, 24/10/1997, The Age, ‘Saturday Extra’: 8) that proves to be the book’s major flaw.

Mead’s book was seen to represent an outright attack on Garner (see Faust, 10/12/97, The Australian, Manne, 3/11/97, The Australian, Legge, 15/11/97, The Australian). For Manne, the book is animated by a ‘smouldering anti-Garner hostility’ (Legge, 15/11/97, The Australian: 27). In a similar vein, Kate Legge’s by-line reads: ‘Just as the dust seemed to have settled on the Ormond affair, the debate is reignited by a collective assault on Helen Garner’ (Legge, 15/11/97, The Australian: 27). Legge offers the witticism that book should have been called ‘Bodybagging for its efforts to discredit author Helen Garner’ (Legge, 15/11/97, The Australian: 27). In contrast to Wark, Manne and Legge clearly use their reviews to position Garner as a victim of feminism.

Media response to Bodyjamming did, as Sybil Nolan feared, come to centre on whether the book was an ‘effort to “get” Garner’ (Nolan, 7/11/97, The Australian: 17). In this sense, the book’s appearance ‘rekindled previous skirmishes’ of the event (Probyn, 1998a: 131).

Her introductory essay, ‘Telling it like it is’, invokes assumptions about the book’s truth-telling, and provides important critical material upon which I draw in the context of this thesis. While I concur with the majority of its points, a few of its foundational assumptions need to be unpacked if this media event is to be reconceptualised. In her ‘Introduction’, Mead seeks to position her collection as offering the type of ‘public conversation’ that the debate itself is seen as having failed to enact. For Mead, operating within a cultural pessimist paradigm criticised in Chapter One, the debate is variously characterised as a ‘media circus’ (Mead, 1997a: 4) and sensationalist (Mead, 1997a: 12). Mead assumes a monologic quality to the debate, seeing the public conversation on the text as being artfully managed by a powerful network of elite media voices for whom feminists are always ‘ideologues’ (Mead, 1997a: 6). Mead reads the media event in terms of a national and international trend towards neo-conservatism (Darcy, 1998: 113) and anti-feminism.

Mead’s introduction, as a form of feminist media criticism, exhibits many of the characteristics problematised in the previous chapter. After listing a core group of commentators who ‘managed the fate of The First Stone’, she argues:

Following the response to the book and its author in the media you can trace out a map of who’s who in the public domain in Australia. This is called controlling the discourse and it’s an exercise of real power in and by the media (Mead, 1997a: 38).

As Duncan argues, not unlike Garner, Mead ‘tends to fill her world with conspirators (albeit different ones to those preferred by Garner)’ (Duncan, 1998: 55). Mead’s
‘conspirators’ are the representatives of a media culture that is inherently hostile to feminism. In Mead’s analysis of the event, voices criticising Garner within print media (including her own) are rendered invisible.

Mead fails to acknowledge the contradictions and tensions within discourse and between the different discourses circulating within media culture. Other essays, such as Ling Kong’s, Jenny Morgan’s, and XX’s (one of the unidentified Ormond complainants), similarly lament the effects of this supposed monologism. Such a position has been problematised by various critics:

Discussions of the relationship between meaning-making and the media can easily end up sounding like a conspiracy theory in which power elites are seen to be necessarily in a position to manipulate media content to serve their own interests (Louw, 2002: 6).

As Chapter One has indicated, through underscoring the struggles over meaning in which media is always engaged, part of my project here is to move beyond assumptions that media culture inevitably works to support dominant ideologies. In Bodyjamming, Mead reinforces such assumptions and also critiques the text on the grounds of its marketability, a marketability based in the text’s mimicry of media discourses:

One of the reasons The First Stone proved so marketable a product is that it was so media-friendly a product; written in ways that mimicked media discourses. The First Stone was its own media machine trailing the newspaper journalists in its wake (Mead, 1997a: 38).

Here Mead assumes that it was not the media that controlled TFS but TFS that controlled the media. Through such an assumption, the book is granted an enormous (negative) power over its consumers. Here, Mead sees not just passive readers, but passive journalists as having been duped by the book. Further, her criticism that the book discursively resembled media forms implies that it was therefore not so-called high art, or real literature; for Mead, calling the book ‘media-friendly’ is disparaging. However, rather than critiquing such mimicry on the grounds of a high/low binary, Sheridan et al. argue: ‘This style of writing, this skilful mimicry, has been intrinsic to popular feminist texts since the beginning, if The Female Eunuch was anything to go by’ (Sheridan et al., 2000: 341). The backcover synopsis of Bodyjamming illuminates Mead’s perception of the debate: ‘Bodyjamming reflects on the media’s dumbing down of Australian culture in the 1990s’ (Mead: 1997a).

Like the Habermasian supporters cited in Chapter One, Mead posits a culture in decline and reinscribes the demonisation of media thesis, where intelligent dialogue is impossible within media discourse’s restrictive parameters. In particular, Mead criticises the prevalence of ‘celebrity journalism’ (Mead, 1997a: 26) during the event, arguing that it represents one of the event’s greatest limitations. Accordingly, she condemns TFS media event on such grounds. In the following quotation, she assumes
the media possesses an overwhelmingly repressive, negative power that silences non-hegemonic voices: ‘The almost unchallenged chorus of approval that The First Stone called forth had the effect of silencing opposition even to the point of silencing reasonable debate’ (Mead, 1997a: 39). For Mead, the Australian media exhibited ‘slavish devotion to Helen Garner’ (Mead, 1997a: 37). She views Garner’s celebrity, and the support she received in media discourse, to be overwhelming, suggesting that ‘the trappings of icon status that had insulated The First Stone and its author from all but the most carefully worded criticism’ (Mead, 1997a: 37). It is clear here that Mead views the media event as the complete fortification of Garner’s authority; in this thesis, however, I will problematise such a totalising position.

In conclusion, Gangland and Bodyjamming deploy the phrase ‘moral panic’ as the event’s primary descriptor.14 ‘Moral panic’ is a sociological term referring largely to the representation of deviance in mass media. In Folk Devils and Moral Panics, the earliest study on this (primarily mass-mediated) phenomenon, Stanley Cohen argues:

Societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic. A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media … (Cohen, 1973: 9).

For Mead, a ‘moral panic’ is in itself a ‘media event’ (Mead, 1997a: 14), while Davis uses Cohen’s work to suggest that there is long history of ‘demonising’ young people (Davis, 1997: 272). Furthermore, in Mead’s analysis, Garner represents the ‘catalyst for a moral panic about power and relation between the sexes’. This aspect of Mead’s book was emphasised in a newspaper review entitled ‘Author outs moral panic of university sex scandal’ (Lyall, 28/10/97, The Australian: 6). According to Mead, in this context ‘reasonable discussion or debate or analysis are simply not options’ (Mead, 1997a: 14). ‘Moral panic’, however, is a particularly limited way of viewing the feminism/media relationship, unable to accommodate anything other than cultural pessimism. For Robert Manne, ‘moral discourse’ is to the left what ‘political correctness’ is to the right (Manne, 3/11/97, SMH: 19, see also Duncan: 1998). As Manne observes: ‘Mead uses the idea of moral panic in much the same way her opponents on the Right use the idea of political correctness – as a thought-evading mental tic’ (Manne, 3/11/1997, SMH: 19).

Both discourses, though ideologically divergent, try to close down consideration of particular (often anxiety-provoking) issues. Analysis of the event through such a framework is misplaced: it over-estimates the power/capital of conservative commentators and under-estimates the agency of feminists and their (if constrained) capacity to talk back within the avenues of news discourse.

14 While Davis does deploy the phrase ‘moral panic’, he also reworks this idea to speak of ‘victim panic’ in relation to feminism in particular.
Conclusion

This chapter has offered a comprehensive introduction to commentary on the book and TFS media event. In particular, it demonstrated various commonalities in ‘academic’ and ‘mainstream’ discourses, discourses that intersected and overlapped throughout the event. It has also sought to problematise some of the main ways in which the event has been conceptualised in both these contexts. As briefly noted in the Introduction, and, as this chapter substantiates, much commentary on the event has either assumed that it represents a silencing and condemnation of Garner, or that it works only as an homogenous attack on feminism by conservative commentators. Therefore, whether conceptualised as an attack on TFS’s author or on feminism, the outcome remains the same: a dismissal of the media event and its possibilities. In order to re-conceptualise this media event, it is necessary to negotiate a critical path between these two extremes. Prior to staging such a negotiation in Chapters Four to Six, the following chapter focuses on the media event’s catalyst, The First Stone.
Chapter Three

Bestselling Feminism – The Textual Politics of *The First Stone*

The fact is that a certain nexus of forces existed in that place, at that time. The formula was chemical: a precise mix of prissiness, cowardice and brutality. A flick of a fingertip, and up it went. The pieces fell all over the countryside; perhaps they are still falling (Helen Garner, 1995: 222).

Narratives shape and make intelligible social practices. These practices accumulate and form particular social worlds, which makes the stories we tell about them very important. Any subject has available a limited array of pre-existing narratives. Like language games, these narratives precede us. Developing them shapes us as subjects. Rarely do subjects have equal power to determine the dominant stories of their society. The power to narrate is the power to shape it (Jane Flax, 1998: 9).

Introduction

Yaacov Yadgar observes that ‘every media event tells a story’ (Yadgar, 2003: 212). In addition to the narrative processes through which news is always constructed, this media event literally had a particular story at its core. In this chapter, I offer a detailed textual analysis of that story: *The First Stone*. Primarily, I critique the way in which Garner’s text attempts to delimit the meanings of contemporary feminism, not only through a particular representation of feminism itself, but through the reinscription of certain assumptions and mythologies about women and gendered interaction contested by feminism. While critics defending the text sought to emphasise its ‘ambiguities’ and indeterminacy (see Goldsworthy: 1996, Giles: 1995, McDonald: 1995) I conversely argue that, although the narrator appears at times equivocal, a number of ideological certainties structure the narrative. Garner textually seeks to discredit – in a far more subtle fashion than simply contesting its ‘truth’ – the story of the Ormond women, primarily through her construction of a particular narrative about young women, contemporary feminism and the misdirection of them both.

1 I have spoken of my ambivalence towards this media event in the ‘Introduction’; my affective response regarding the book (being disturbed by what I see as its reactionary politics) is conversely much more certain. Such a position – underscoring the book’s ideological and ethical limitations, while seeking out the event’s potentialities – need not be contradictory. My point throughout is that the limitations of book did not result in an inherently limited media event, as is commonly assumed to be the case.
As Anita Harris has recently argued (2004), young women commonly function as the source of grave anxiety in contemporary culture and are central to debates about economic and cultural change (Harris, 2004: 13); this assumption is instantiated by Garner’s portrayal of the Ormond women. Their actions are constituted, not merely a threat to the Master and that for which he stands, but to the entire social order and to an anterior feminism nostalgically invoked throughout. Through her persistent rhetorical efforts to discredit them and trouble their truth-claims, she attempts to diffuse this threat of youth and of the inappropriate feminism it engenders. This chapter will identify and critique the (often contradictory) discourses central to the narrative’s development. This close analysis will be informed throughout by a consideration of TFS’s textual strategies, in particular its use of the first-person pronoun, a common rhetorical strategy of academic and popular feminist writing (see Pearce: 2003). This deployment of the first-person pronoun in a work of ‘non-fiction’ functions to authenticate its truth-claims; therefore, the narrative ‘I’ in TFS deserves further attention. In reading the text in terms its engagement with sexual harassment discourses, I draw throughout upon the work of feminist philosophers Drucilla Cornell (1995) and Jane Flax (1993, 1998).

TFS is a self-reflexive narrative, which throughout engages with the writer’s experience of researching and writing the text. Of the book’s self-consciousness, one of the event’s earliest reviewers Luke Slattery suggests that ‘it wears its homework on its sleeve’ (Slattery, 4-5/3/95, The Australian: 31). Along the same lines, although much less supportive, Cassandra Pybus identified TFS as ‘solipsistic and self-serving metafiction’ (Pybus, 1996: 22). The narrative ‘I’s thorough implication in the telling of this tale has, as Chapter Two suggested, caused much anxiety. Furthermore, it is also seen to be emblematic of broader changes in Australian publishing and readerships towards autobiography and life writing. In particular, the narrative voice expresses Garner’s discontent that she had intended to write a different book but was prevented. As one critic argues, it is a ‘book about a book she had been unable to write’ (Tregear, 2001: 112). In her review, Morag Fraser argues that the text bears the mark of this unfulfilled creative desire: ‘Often the strain shows: it is not what she had wanted to write’ (Fraser, 25/3/95, The Age, ‘Saturday Extra’: 7).

In terms of the textual strategies used to construct her claims to truth, TFS is, as Henderson and Rowlands remark, ‘a pastiche of the authorial self: consciousness-raising, self-exploration, anecdotes, and endless conversations with friends’ (Henderson and Rowlands, 1996: 13). Garner’s narrative also enacts a number of temporal shifts, moving between abstract engagement, personalised reflection, necessarily cloudy memories, and contemporary conversations. She invokes a feminist past in which she played an active
part, and a present and an imagined (feminist) future for which she melodramatically articulates despair. Her narrative is peppered with historical anecdotes through which she attempts to legitimise her ability to speak as a ‘feminist’ or authority on feminism.¹ That said, Garner’s writing – fiction and her more recent non-fiction alike – has a long history of ‘profound disillusionment with feminism’ (Trioli, 1996: 15); TFS is no exception. Her addressees are both men and women existing outside feminism and her libertarian ‘sisters’, for whom she exposes the de-generation of feminism. In TFS, Garner makes particular truth-claims about feminism that were at once reaffirmed and destabilised during the subsequent media event. It is, therefore, necessary to briefly address the question of narrative and ‘truth’.

**Narrative, ‘Truth’ and Feminism**

Prior to commencing this analysis, it is valuable to make explicit some of its guiding assumptions. Firstly, it may appear that the following analysis conflates ‘Garner’ with the narrative voice; this does not stem from a belief in the intentional fallacy and does not seek to defer to the author in order to, in Roland Barthes’ words, ‘impose a limit on the text’ (Barthes, 1977: 147). ‘Garner’ here refers to the narrator-protagonist in the text and the author-effect subsequently produced in the text’s public readings (see Foucault: 1980). In the previous chapter I considered how Garner’s book came to be generically positioned in media and critical discourse. While not wishing to generically fix the text, I preface my own analysis with a few brief comments regarding how I conceptualise the narrative. In order to avoid the common critical gesture of reading all women’s writing as autobiography, Maria Lauret argues that works with the narrator as protagonist (such as TFS) and which ‘rely on the illusion of presence in their mode of signification’ can more productively be defined as ‘fictions of subjectivity’ (Lauret, 1994: 98). Therefore, rather than assume that Garner is the force consciously controlling the narrative, as many critics have done, my analysis is attentive to the rhetorical strategies used to discursively constitute the narrator-protagonist.

While the text was marketed and received as ‘non-fiction’, my analysis, following Derrida’s critique of the metaphysics of presence, takes it as axiomatic that no form of writing can reflect an extra-textual reality or offer unmediated ‘truths’. Throughout I assume that the notion of truth itself is discursively produced and that particular ‘truth-

¹ Garner has been seen as a ‘feminist literary icon’ and Goldsworthy argues that almost all of Garner’s fiction is preoccupied with sexual desire and the ‘relationship between sexual behaviour and social organisation’ (Goldsworthy, 1996: 28). In regard to her non-fiction, Goldsworthy suggests Garner exhibits a long-standing concern with ‘the necessity for men and women to co-exist peacefully in the world’ (Goldsworthy, 1996: 91.) See Garner True Stories: 1996 and The Feel of Steel: 2002; my following analysis certainly identifies such a preoccupation in TFS.
claims’ are produced under specific conditions to serve particular interests (Flax, 1993: 138). As poststructuralism has illustrated, the search for an underlying or foundational meaning relies upon the repression and refusal of other possibilities and thus disavows the constitutive role of power in the production of truth (Beasley, 1999: 93). Throughout this chapter I assume that the question of whether TFS ‘helps to produce or reproduce relations of domination is independent of judgements about its truth or falsity’ (Fairclough, 1995: 15). Like Jane Flax, in her discussion of the Hill-Thomas sexual harassment case, I recognise the impossibility of mimetic accuracy, in any text, and am thus not interested:

in matters of ‘fact’, guilt, or innocence … not about who told the ‘truth’. Far more interesting to me are the processes of representing oneself and others and the politics of constructing and interpreting meaning (Flax, 1998: 4).

Moreover, feminists have long been concerned with the inherent androcentrism in claims to ‘truth’ and ‘objectivity’ in Western epistemology. As Tania Modleski observes, feminism is ‘not about uncovering original truths but about “changing the stories”’ (Modleski, 1997: 226). It will, therefore, be evident that I am not concerned with whether Garner’s account can be classified as an ‘accurate’ or ‘objective’ rendering of the Ormond College case, but with exposing the kinds of discourses upon which the text bases its account and the attendant truth-claims about the Ormond case, gendered interactions and contemporary feminism in Australia. As I have shown in the previous chapter the question of TFS’s ‘truth’ – despite academic emphasis on its relativity – was a central preoccupation during the media event.

The question of whether a text can be thought of as ‘feminist’ depends on the uses to which such a text is put, that is, the context of its interpretation and inscription (Schulze et al., 1993: 31). Though it is impossible to provide a strict definition of a ‘feminist text’, Alison Jaggar positions feminism as ‘all those forms of theory and practice that seek, no matter how and by what means, to end the subordination of women’ (in Felski, 1989: 13). While not invoking an authentic feminist poetics, I argue that Garner’s text appears to reinforce, as opposed to contest, a series of what can be labelled dominant narratives and tropes about gender and sexual relations. The narrative, therefore, offers symbolic sustenance to such relations of domination. That is not to say there are not ‘textual flashes of empathy’ at various points in the narrative (Davis, 1997: 80), or that there are not ideological inconsistencies, gaps which my own analysis seeks to suture – to read as a feminist necessarily involves making interpretive choices for particular ethico-political purposes. Certainly, Garner recounts a number of personal incidents to narrativise such
empathy. As Kate Foord argues, TFS is ‘quite profoundly at odds with itself’ (Foord, 1998: 48) and these contradictions will also be considered here. However, the assumption that the way this harassment was handled by the young women is fundamentally flawed permeates Garner’s entire account.

*The First Stone’s ‘Paratexts’*

Before analysing the narrative itself, I will briefly engage with the book’s ‘paratextual’ elements (Genette: 1997): the title, the cover, the author’s note, the epigraphs and the backcover ‘blurb’. While I will suggest that media texts such as interviews and speeches form an epitextual network around TFS, paratexts are the elements physically immediately surrounding the published book and which materially frame the narrative (see Genette: 1997). The title of Garner’s work became representative of the book’s assumptions and the metaphor of stone-throwing was used throughout to characterise the feminist battle staged within the discursive parameters of the event. The book’s subtitle also works to delimit the text’s meanings, as it refers to ‘some questions about sex and power’, thereby positioning the text as a series of shifting speculations, not definitive answers.

There are two ‘allographic’ epigraphs which likewise attempt such delimitation; the first seeks to circumscribe the meanings of the narrative, while the second works to elucidate the title (Genette, 1997: 156-157). The biblical allusion in the title and in the epigraph – ‘Let the one among you who has done no wrong cast the first stone’ (John, 8:7) – invokes the puritanical, dogmatic feminism simultaneously constructed and criticised during the narrative. This epigraph is also the text’s initial strategy for constructing the empathic relationship with the former Master of Ormond College that it seeks to sustain throughout. Furthermore, the inclusion of the following quotation from Zoe Heller could suggest that Garner anticipates feminist critique due to the narrative’s patent alignment with the Master:

> The struggle for women’s rights is ... not a matter of gender loyalty. It is a matter of ethical principle, and as such, it does not dictate automatic allegiance to the women’s side in any given argument.

As Garner’s here implies, there is no necessary relation between a narrator inscribed as ‘woman’ and a politics of empathy towards other women. As feminist critics have emphasised, ‘women don’t necessarily side with women because they are women’ (Fraser, 1997: 117). While rightly emphasising that essentialist notions of feminist solidarity, of ‘automatic allegiance’, are problematic due particularly to women never being only women (see Butler: 1990), Garner conversely exhibits an allegiance to The Master based on their...

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similar class and racial subject positions. As suggested, this is not to imply that such an
affinity between women should be expected on essentialised grounds. However, the idea
that he did not threaten Garner’s own racial and class location informed the empathy
which the narrative directs towards him. As Anna Cossins speculates: ‘Would Garner’s
concern have been as great if the alleged offender was, say, the gardener of Ormond
College?’ (Cossins, 1995: 532). Here, Cossins neatly encapsulates the way class affiliation
cuts across that of gender.

The author’s note too, as a form of preface, attempts to manage and delimit the
interpretive possibilities of the subsequent narrative. This note, while working as a
’sstatement of intent’ and site of genre definition (Genette, 1997: 221), also specifies what
the text is unable to offer. In this note, Garner pre-empts the blockages upon which she
bases this conspiracy of feminist silence. After suggesting that the book was originally
intended as ‘an extended piece of reportage’, Garner argues: ‘However, I soon encountered
obstacles to my research which forced me, ultimately to write a broader, less “objective”,
more personal story.’ These blockages, where feminists are seen to literally impede her
ability to tell an objective tale, are an important narrative strategy and represent an
implicit critique of feminist reconceptualisations of epistemology in a broader sense. That
is, feminists are criticised not only for impeding Garner’s attempts at objectivity but all
attempts at seeking a transcendental truth. In later media attention, the feminist
politiscation of epistemology, and pedagogy, came under further scrutiny. The author’s
note professes the book’s ‘fictiveness’ (Genette, 1997: 215), as she concludes that she has
‘felt free to invent names for all the characters’. This detail resurfaces later in the media
event and provides the grounds for a disruption of her authority.

It is valuable to turn to the book’s backcover ‘blurb’. In her recent work on this
neglected form of promotional discourse, Kate Douglas argues that ‘blurbs are fast
becoming the new form of book review, the most read and referred to piece of criticism on
a new release’ (Douglas, 2001: 808). On TFS’s earliest edition, there are three quotations
from reviewers, tellingly all mainstream newspapers that featured centrally in the
subsequent event: The Age, Sydney Morning Herald, and their weekend magazine
supplement, Good Weekend. One of the blurbs on TFS, like the later epitexts such as
authorial profiles, works to establish sympathy for its author, who has purportedly
endured much personal suffering to produce the text. While the SMH review extract
focuses on the ‘quality’ of Garner’s writing, the quotation from the Good Weekend
suggests: ‘This was never going to be an easy book to write, its pages are bathed in anguish
and self-doubt, but also suffused with a white-hot anger’. Likewise, The Age review
forecasts the book’s controversy and suggests that ‘the debate about sexual harassment will
now have a very public airing’. Here, TFS is believed to guarantee further public debate; these assumptions about the author’s courage will be further considered in my analysis of Garner’s celebrity.

From early in the text, the narrative voice (referred to from here on as ‘Garner’) seeks to adopt an empathic relation to the Master, governing both his characterisation and her own role in the events which shape the narrative (i.e., the actions she takes, who she speaks to, and how she represents these interviews). After recounting The Master’s initial police interview, Garner foreshadows her own role in the ensuing narrative. The authorial ‘I’ locates itself in relation to questions of power, feminism, sex and history and, as it does so, it also makes implicit the series of relations which come to govern the text: an empathy with the Master, and an antagonism towards the young women, here constructed as the representatives of the kind of modern ‘feminism’ criticised by Garner. From this early stage in the narrative, Garner’s own account is also textually-mediated by the articles relating to sexual harassment and the case published in mainstream news accounts in 1992. Several times in the narrative she either directly quotes from or credits these press accounts with sparking and subsequently fuelling her desire to intervene in the Ormond events (15, see also 23, 17, 47, 67, 68, 84, 162, 167, 198, 220). These newspaper articles also act as primary material in the construction of her own realist narrative. For example:

One morning in August 1992 I opened *The Age* at breakfast time and read that a man I had never heard of, the Master of Ormond College, was up before a magistrate on a charge of indecent assault: a student had accused him of having put his hand on her breast while they were dancing.

I still remember the jolt I got from the desolate item: Has the world come to this? All morning at work I kept thinking about it. I got on the phone to women friends of my age, feminists pushing fifty. They had all noticed the item and been unsettled by it. ‘He touched her breast and she went to the cops? My God – why didn’t she get her mother or her friends to help sort him out later, if she couldn’t deal with it herself at the time?’ And then someone said what we had no doubt all been thinking: ‘Look-if every bastard who’s ever laid a hand on us were dragged into court, the judicial system of the state would be clogged for years’ (15).

Here, she situates herself in a community of feminists of her generational cohort, her own sisterhood who share the same ideals and who are called upon at various points in the narrative to help authorise her own position within the second-wave.

This initial expression of doubt about the efficacy of sexual harassment remedy drives the entire narrative. In fact, the perpetual posing of the question ‘Why did they go to the cops?’ implies the perceived inadequacies of this course of action. However, as I will suggest, it is not the systemic limitations of legal remedies with which Garner takes issue, but the relinquishing of responsibility she associates with the women’s search for redress through legal channels. Garner’s invokes the trope of ‘commonsense’ to discredit not only
the actions of the women directly involved in the Ormond case but what she perceives to be the hegemonic feminism that motivates them and their supporters. Garner’s rhetorical device of rendering it part of the natural order works to ‘un-name’ sexual harassment, which did not exist until named by feminism (see Spender: 1980). The narrative is propelled by a desire to make the women’s actions, language, and ways of being and knowing, incomprehensible, beyond the narrative I’s epistemological and ethical frameworks. The initial textual device employed to achieve this is the text’s inclusion of a letter written by Garner to the man at the centre of the allegations, a letter which makes explicit the narrator’s ideological investments.

**Narrative Sympathies: ‘The Letter to the Master’**

After reading about the allegations of sexual harassment in a Melbourne newspaper in 1993, Helen Garner composed a letter expressing her disgust at the way feminists were positioning Colin Shepherd, ‘The Master’ of Ormond College, University of Melbourne, at the time of the allegations. Garner’s letter to the Master is indicative of the text’s position vis-a-vis the Master throughout. This letter itself has been the source of much debate and authorial comment. For example, Janet Malcolm’s comments on this letter underscore its narrative centrality: ‘the sending of this letter is the act that fuels the book’s plot – it is the mis-step whose consequences we watch the author helplessly struggle to undo for 200 pages’ (Malcolm, 1997: 37). This letter effectively circumscribed the type of book she was able to write, a claim that featured prominently from the media event’s early stages (see Gunn, 27/3/95, *The Australian*: 5). Moreover, in one of the many self-reflexive pieces on her writing process, Garner observes:

> Awareness of that fateful initial letter moves through the text of *The First Stone* like a tidal wave. I’d call some young feminist on the phone to arrange an interview. She’d seem warm and eager to help; but by the time I got there, she would greet me with a frozen expression which I came to recognise, in time, as that of someone who’d been shown a copy of my letter to the Master (Garner, 1997: 11).

In another context, Garner asserts that the writing of this letter was indicative of her ‘often naively spontaneous response to things’ (in Koval, 1995: 10). The letter, incorporated into the text of *TFS*, reads:

> What I want to say is that it is heartbreaking for a feminist of my nearly fifty like me, to see our ideals of so many years distorted into this ghastly punitiveness. I expect I will never know what ‘really happened’, but I certainly know that if there was an incident, as alleged, this has been the most appalling, priggish and pitiless way of dealing with it. I want you to know that there are plenty of women out here who step back in dismay from the kind of treatment you have received, and who still hope that men and women, for all our foolishness and mistakes, can behave towards each other with kindness rather than being engaged in this kind of warfare (Garner, 1995: 16).
Remarkably, given this patent partisanship, she later pens a letter to the women involved, suggesting she aims to ‘write a truthful, calm and balanced account of what happened’ (177). There are several points worthy of consideration in this letter to the Master, particularly as each of these assumptions is sustained and developed throughout the narrative. Firstly, Garner’s self-identification as a feminist. Secondly, her distancing from contemporary feminism, which she sees as responsible for an unjust reconstitution of relations between men and women as ‘warfare’. Thirdly, her challenge to the legitimacy of the charges, both in terms of the ‘truth’ of the allegations and the actions of the victims. Fourthly, her alignment with the Master.

In her self-identification as a feminist, Garner attempts to establish her aura of authority and ability to engage with issues, like sexual harassment, named by feminism. In addition to a number of anecdotes, she proclaims herself ‘a veteran of the feminist social milieux of the seventies’ (117). The text is littered throughout with self-assertions of Garner’s status as feminist. Nonetheless, her self-alignment with feminism does not remain unqualified. While not interested in questions of ‘authentic’ feminism, or the extent to which Garner herself can be considered ‘feminist’, I am interested in the ways that her attempts to take up a feminist speaking position are often undercut by the other discourses (such as liberal humanist, sociobiological, patriarchal) which she mobilises in her telling of the Ormond tale. Moreover, this self-identification was also important in subsequent media responses, in which she was also positioned as a dissenting voice fighting to be heard against the feminist orthodoxy featured throughout the narrative. In addition, through laying claim to the history of feminism through ‘our ideals’, Garner appears proprietorial and also homogenises second-wave feminism (see Ion, 1997: 110).

Garner both adopts this feminist speaking position and disavows it, claiming that ‘it’s heartbreaking for a feminist of nearly fifty like me, to see our ideals of so many years distorted into this ghastly punitiveness’ (Garner, 1995: 16). As a ‘mother’ of feminism, it is clear that Garner’s text will be a chastising of her wayward daughters, those thought to be responsible for distorting an authentic, anterior feminism. While Garner takes up a feminist subject position, this gesture of attempting to undermine claims of sexual harassment through reconstituting it as part of the ahistorical and apolitical ‘dance between the sexes’, represents a challenge to the politicisation of this type of behaviour for which her own generation of feminists – those of the ‘second-wave’ – are responsible. In Garner’s account, feminism impinges upon, or more accurately, punishes men.

As narrator, Garner positions herself and her text as the Master’s champion, challenger to the feminist dogmatism she perceives to have ruined his life; for Garner, men are ‘emasculated by feminism’s stern dictates’ (McCluskey, 1997: 64). In Garner’s battle
metaphor, she presents herself – not only in this letter but throughout the text and into the media event – as an ally to the Master and enemy of a particular form of feminism. Thus feminists, in challenging such a ‘natural’ position, can be constructed as deviant, hysterical and fanatical, and as manipulative of the young women. The text gives much space to analysing the character of the Master, which the women have irrevocably sullied. The Master’s voice is, in addition, given considerable space in the text, and his own disavowal of his (gendered) power over the women (56) is supported by Garner later in the text. Furthermore, other voices of masculine privilege and authority pervade the text, and Garner goes to great pains to establish the Master’s feminist credentials (51) by citing, for example, his establishment of an EEO committee at Ormond. In TFS, men are the bearers of truth (Davis, 1997: 80). While sympathetic to feminism, the Master is represented as a man whose strategies for dealing with (female) sexuality, as it has been reconfigured in light of second-wave feminism, simply prove inadequate. As Robert Manne argued, following Garner’s logic, the Master is ‘caught in the paradoxes between two sexual eras’ (Manne, 1995: 3). The remainder of this chapter will demonstrate that the four key assumptions of this letter structure the entire narrative.

The Narrative’s Central Question: ‘Why did they go to the cops?’

In relation to Garner’s quest for a justification for the young women’s actions, one media commentator observed: ‘The First Stone is not so much a whodunit as a whydun it’ (Jackman, Courier-Mail, 31/3/95: 18). Throughout the narrative, Garner chastises the women for what she posits as their retrospective, inappropriate exercise of agency, what she refers to as ‘going to the cops’. In Garner’s reading, such an exercise of agency should have occurred, and ceased, at the initial point of harassment. In this manner, Garner’s text intersects with conservative, patriarchal discourses that fail to recognise the legitimacy of sexual harassment’s legal remedy. Through this insistent question, she creates what can be described as a ‘politics of overreaction’, as she invokes an opposition between the reaction of feminists and that of ‘normal’ women to sexual harassment (Mahood and Little, 1997: 184). That these women came to represent all feminists suggests the deeply politicised nature of taking such action, implying that it is feminists – not ‘ordinary’ women – who would act in such a fashion. In Chapter Two, I emphasised this strategy of establishing an opposition between feminists and so-called ordinary women, a rhetorical gesture which is evident in TFS.

Garner’s critique of the women’s actions becomes even more disturbing in light of her assertion that ‘it never occurred to any of us that he might be innocent’. She takes the
women and their supporters to task for ‘their scurrying to the law’ (137), thus implying a cowardice and a failure to deal with the matter in an appropriately individualist fashion. While Garner demands that the women should have acted, she deplores the agency they did exercise through ultimately reporting the incident to the police. Garner fails to acknowledge the extreme risk at which the women placed themselves by taking up the subject position offered them in the legal discourse of sexual harassment. In Carol Bacchi’s words, ‘it takes great courage to press a sexual harassment charge, especially in cases where the harasser holds institutional power over the one harassed’ (Bacchi, 1998: 83). All the processes through which the women went, including the grievance procedures of both the College and the University, need to be reconceptualized and ‘seen as acts of resistance or agency’ (Morgan, 1997: 114). Not only does Garner fail to recognise these acts of agency, but she undermines them entirely through constructing the women’s actions as the product of manipulation by feminists. Their actions are seen, not as exercises of agency, but wicked acts of revenge and retribution (see Cossins: 1995, Lake: 1995). In mobilising a discursive framework consistent with patriarchal discourses that attempt to position women as subordinate, the text demonstrates the manner in which women, even those taking up so-called ‘feminist’ speaking positions, can also be complicit with those discourses they seek to contest. Even feminists do not exist outside or above other ideologies, but are subject to multiple interpellations that may contradict our take up of feminist subject positions (see Collins: 1989). In this sense, TFS demonstrates ‘that being a woman is no guarantee that one’s writing will challenge hegemonic norms’ (Weedon, 1987: 165).

In Garner’s narrative, the Ormond women’s search for legal redress comes to exemplify contemporary feminist action. TFS is fundamentally concerned with what is appropriate (for) feminism; ‘going to the cops’ is not appropriate feminist action. Intergenerational conflict has been theorised as a ‘politics of contempt’ (Detloff: 1997), where generations express contempt for each other’s modes of discourse and modes of action; such contempt dominates TFS. In contrast to the lack of a definitive position which Garner suggests marks her text, she characterises the young women and their supporters as ‘intemperate’, as unambiguously dividing the world into ‘harassers and harassed’ (82). The young women are involved in ‘practices of feminisms which she dislikes, [and] homogenises’ (Duncanson, 1997: 160). The inappropriate practising of feminism with

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4 For further interrogation of the law as an inherently masculine framework, see Smart: 1995.
5 For Carol Bacchi, grievance procedures in the anti-woman academic context will inevitably be inadequate (Bacchi, 1998: 86). See also Deizch and Weimer’s The Lecherous Professor (1984).
which she charges the Ormond women features throughout the media event and is further explored in *Chapter Six*.

In continually posing the question ‘Why did they go to the cops?’ (38, 40, 45, 221) – a question Garner poses both rhetorically and to those who she (selectively) interviews – the aberrant act at the centre of the narrative shifts from being the Master’s alleged offence to the women’s search for legal remedy; that is, the ‘crime’ at the narrative’s centre is perpetrated by the students who took action against the Master following the alleged assault not the assault itself (Cossins, 1995: 538-539). Through questioning why the young students took legal action, the narrator explores her own ambivalent relation to the feminism she believes underpins their actions. As a mark of her support for him, Garner even asserts her own desire to erase the Master from the narrative altogether: ‘The innocence or guilt of Colin Shepherd was to me the least interesting aspect of this story. What I really wanted to know was why the girls went to the police’ (40). In Garner’s narrative, the young women’s actions are seen to be much worse than those of the Master (Mead, 1995: 175). Throughout, Garner attempts to justify her initial expression of support for the Master by using the authorising discourse of personal experience. For example, recounting that her ‘boyfriend’ was also her university tutor, she exhibits her fundamental inability to view sexual relations between teachers/students as an imbalance of power: ‘It had never occurred to me to call what happened between me and my tutor “sexual harassment” or an “abuse of power” … I value it as part of what I am and how I have learnt to understand the world’ (166). Garner also fails to distinguish between her consensual relationship and the unwanted sexual attention experienced by the Ormond women. She ponders her own response to the young women’s actions:

> I thought I might be mad at these girls for not having taken it like a woman – for being wimps who ran to the law to whinge about a minor unpleasantness, instead of standing up and fighting back with their own weapons of youth and quick wits (Garner, 1995: 40).

The Ormond women failed to ‘take it like a woman’, in the sense that they failed to take it at all. As Kate Foord argues that:

> ‘taking it’, for women, implies absorbing the shock, it implies lying down, it implies the sexual receiver. These girls, the complainants in the Ormond case, didn’t take it like women, they took it, to extend the analogy we have been offered, like men. … Despite appearances, Garner seems to bemoaning not passivity, but its loss (Foord, 1998: 53).

In this way, these women commit a crime against their gender (Grant, 1993: 164) by making visible a fissure in dominant conceptualisations of ‘Woman’ that Garner, through her reinscription of particular assumptions and tropes relating to women, attempts to suture. Questioning naturalised assumptions such as men’s access to women’s bodies, or
women’s responsibility for men’s sexuality, effectively ‘breaks the rules’ of gender (Grant, 1993: 164, see also Cossins, 1995: 558).

In persistently berating the Ormond women, Garner displaces the failure from the institution to the individual. As previously observed, Garner also refuses to acknowledge that the women went through any conciliation processes prior to filing charges, attempting even to charge those involved in this ‘feminist conspiracy’ with a phallocentric response:

they charged past conciliation into the traditional masculine style of problem-solving: call in the cops, split from the relevant nuances of character and context, and hire a cowboy to slug it out for you in the main street at noon, with the citizenry watching (105).

Here Garner attempts to turn the women’s feminist logic against them. As a later section illustrates, it is this act of making sexual harassment visible in the public sphere (‘with all the citizenry watching’) which Garner problematises throughout the text. Despite her critique of liberal reforms, her condemnation of the women’s recourse to legal remedies is underpinned by a rhetoric of agency and choice which itself is an aspect of liberal discourse. In Garner’s account, it is the failure of these women to exercise such agency, the failure to say ‘piss off’, which is identified as the site of discord, not the Master’s abuse of power. Garner’s text is clearly informed by a liberal humanist concept of subjectivity; in fact, it is only through (re)inscribing the notion of a sovereign, unified (hence non-contradictory) subject that the text’s condemnation of the women’s search for succour through legal channels can be effected. Here, agency is not related to one’s discursive position, but is purely the product of a fully conscious, self-determining individual. Garner’s condemnation of what she construes as the women’s failure to deal adequately with the situation when it occurred, and which relies upon this notion of an autonomous subject, does not take account of women’s contradictory discursive positioning in the ‘social moment of sexual harassment’:

While imbued with agency and the capacity for creative responses, we are also constrained by cultural discourses of gender which frame our desire. Certain gendered discourses – care, sexual liberation, motherhood, liberal feminism, and moral purity, to name a few – impel contradictory responses to sexual harassment, inspiring resistance the one moment, compliance the next (Ring, 1994: 129).

Garner’s failure to acknowledge such constraints effects an elision of the networks of power in which the women were operating. The idea that the women felt they did not have access to a discursive framework to enable them to actively resist the way the Master positioned them in the moment of harassment, or indeed that the conciliation processes available to them prior to reaching the stage of legal remedy did not offer a sufficient acknowledgement of their experience, is discounted by Garner throughout. One of the many male truth-tellers featured in TFS, and whose comments are left to stand without authorial
interpretation, suggests: “Nicky Stewart seemed to me a very sophisticated young lady. Why didn’t she just knee him in the balls?” (201). This question, though not explicitly articulated by the narrator, is implicit throughout the narrative.

Some critics have located the book’s possibilities in its ambiguities and contradictions; others have argued that the book’s purported contradictions are not sustained when the narrative voice is interrogated more closely. For Australian philosopher Genevieve Lloyd, the tenor of the narrator’s voice undermines the possibilities of the text’s uncertainties: ‘the sensitivity that comes through in Garner’s reflections on the ‘unknowability’ of ‘what happened’, co-exist oddly with the narrator’s occupation of the speaking position of the rational, discriminating mind’ (Lloyd, 1997: 13). In Garner’s narrative, ‘radical feminists’ are gripped by emotion and thus are incapable of the detached reasonable voice exercised throughout by the narrator (Lloyd, 1997: 13). Despite her many expressions of empathy, Garner does not appear to take account of the psychic trauma experienced by the women. On the contrary, she effectively ridicules Rosen’s articulation of worthlessness (88). In fact, Garner is contemptuous of the young women: ‘I wanted to find Elizabeth Rosen and Nicole Stewart and shake them till their teeth rattle’ (Garner: 168, author’s emphasis). Here the narrative voice professes a desire to literalise the symbolic violence in which the text throughout engages. As John Docker observes, and as this quotation suggests, Garner becomes more linguistically violent towards the young women as the narrative progresses (Docker, 1995: 15). As one of the earliest reviewers argued, the narrator’s expressions of empathy are ‘not the dominant note of The First Stone, which remains an appalled response to the extremity of the girls’ actions’ (Craven, 25-26/3/95, The Australian: 7). Such extremity is signified through her discursive reconstitution of sexual harassment.

**“Nerdish passes at a party”: ‘Eros’ and the Depoliticisation of (Hetero) Sexuality**

Though the things the students alleged might well have happened (this being an imperfect world), and might have given offence, they were not, ultimately, earth-shattering, that a man might not necessarily feel himself backed into a tight corner by such allegations, since foolish things done at parties are not after all so rare: if they were all to be punished, which of us should ‘scape whipping? (93).

As well as problematising the Ormond women’s legal actions, Garner reconstitutes the Master’s actions to ‘nerdish passes at a party’ (38). She attempts throughout to trivialise and indeed (re)privatise the harassment experienced by women in the Ormond case. In particular, she seeks to impose a framework of intelligibility on their experiences which relies upon a series of (patriarchal) tropes about masculine and feminine sexuality.
While the text constructs feminists as puritanical ideologues, embracing the ‘new ideology that sexual harassment is a crime’ (46), she attempts to position her own account, and indeed relations between women and men, as existing outside of the messy business of ideology. Garner posits that her narrative is not ideological, it is simply about life, and ‘eros’: ‘I have no line to run’ (16). Despite her suggestion to the contrary, Garner’s text is inescapably shaped by ideology and reinscribes the kind of patriarchal logic which the women of whom she writes (i.e., Elizabeth Rosen and Nicole Stewart) sought, through their taking legal action, to contest. In Garner’s vision of eros, all the Master is guilty of is poor communication (see Parker, 1997: 125). Through the Jungian-inspired discourse of ‘eros’, Garner reinforces the heterosexual mythology of romance. The text, therefore, is remarkably heteronormative, particularly in terms of its assertion about the natural ‘dance’ between the sexes.

Throughout Garner’s narrative, feminism impacts negatively upon the transcendental, ahistorical notion of sexual relations invoked by the use of the signifier ‘eros’. Garner implies that attempts to repress it, or to contain it, will always be unsuccessful. She charges feminists with attempting to simplify the complex question of desire. Her own approach, while claiming to acknowledge the role of desire in gendered engagements, fails to account for the way in which desire is imbricated with questions of power and thus, potentially, abuses of power. The assumption that desire is complex is mobilised to suggest that attempts to fix it will necessarily be both inappropriate and unsuccessful. For Garner, the women in the Ormond Case, as representatives of feminism, fail to recognise this. In a reworking of Audre Lorde’s ‘erotics of pedagogy’ (Lorde: 1984), Garner argues:

The erotic will always dance between people who teach and learn, and our attempts to manage its shocking charge are often flat-footed, literal, destructive, rigid with fear and the need to control. For good or ill, Eros is always two steps ahead of us, exploding the constraints of dogma, turning back on us our carefully worked out positions and lines, showing us that the world is richer and scarier and more fluid and many-fold than we dare to think (161, author’s emphasis).

In Garner’s representation of relations between masculine/feminine as a ‘game’, sexual harassment becomes mere ‘play’. The game metaphor, like the ‘war’ one used to refer to the supposed generational divide, persists throughout the narrative (47).

Garner challenges the imposition of a legal framework upon this ‘play’ between the sexes, and therefore sexual harassment discourses are seen as injecting politics into an allegedly apolitical space. As a means to further ‘justify the non-intervention that [she] advocates’, Garner here reinscribes the public/private dichotomy contested by feminists (Cossins, 1995: 544), and her largely humanist discursive framework makes it difficult to conceptually accommodate the notion of sexual harassment. The possibility of Garner
speaking ethically within such confines is significantly limited. She laments the fact that ‘Eros, “the spark that ignites and connects”’, due to such politicisation, may get ‘extinguished in the wreckage’ (113). She continues:

What’s wrong with flirting? Perhaps it made the men ‘feel good for the rest of day’, too. Why be so literal-minded about it? Why does it have to be harmful or wrong? Who says it has to mean something beyond itself? It’s play. It’s the little god Eros, flickering and flashing through the plod of our ordinary working lives. Feminism is meant to free us, not to take the joy out of everything (113, author’s emphasis).

She seeks to detach ‘flirting’ from the discursive frameworks that constrain the way it is made meaning-ful and render oppressive feminism’s opposition to such detachment. In fact, her narrative hinges upon such a representation. In effectively asserting that feminism is no fun, Garner can be seen to rely on a narrative which is common in critiques of feminism’s alleged ‘hyper-alertness’ to sexual victimisation (Modleski, 1997: 219): that support for laws against sexual harassment is synonymous with advocating ‘sexual repression’ (Cornell, 1995: 234). Opponents of sexual harassment laws often assume that its supporters reinscribe the construction of women as ‘fragile, asexual’ beings (Cornell, 1995: 168). She is contemptuous of the ‘mingy, whining, cringeing terror of sex as manifested in the Ormond story’ (193), and feminism’s ‘constant stress on passivity’ (99).

The above quotation too exemplifies another strategy commonly deployed by Garner: the posing of rhetorical questions, apostrophes to the reader that attempt to represent her own position as informed by ‘commonsense’ (as opposed to the hysteria of feminism). For Garner, the ‘reality’ of sexual interaction between men and women pre-exists her interpretation. The notion of ‘common sense’ plays a crucial role in maintaining particular assumptions about gender differences and relations of power contingent upon such assumptions. While Weedon observes that common-sense is not always conservative in its implications (Weedon, 1987: 77), Garner’s representation of this ahistorical, commonsensical ‘dance between the sexes’ exemplifies the way it can be regressively deployed. Through speaking in the language of universalism, she seeks to normalise particular forms of behaviour, such as men’s unquestionable access to women’s bodies. These attempts at ‘normalisation’ are themselves an oppressive strategy: ‘Normalisation is a form of abuse that is predicated on bringing differentially determined subjects into line with an official version of ‘reality’ (Robinson, 1991: 186). In this narrative, it is the young women’s behaviour that is aberrant, not the Master’s ‘natural’ response to their potent sexuality and youthful beauty.

In further efforts to render the women’s actions as immoderate, Garner implies that the feminist rhetoric of sexual harassment wrongly politicises the ‘blunders’ (120) that can spontaneously occur in sexual relations. As she suggests: “yes, violence against women is
terrible – it’s wrong – but I don’t think violence is what we’re talking about, here” (194). In the following quotation an explicit contrast is made between a ‘real’ instance of sexual violence and the Ormond incident:

On April 1993 the papers reported that a fourteen-year old girl on her way to school had been raped in a public toilet by a man armed with a knife. This is the kind of news item that makes women call each other on the phone. I thought, contemplating it, that our helpless rage and grief at this eternally unpreventable violence against women and girls – our inability to protect our children from the sickness of the world – must get bottled up and then let loose on poor blunderers who get drunk at parties and make clumsy passes; who skate blithely into situations that they are too ignorant or preoccupied to recognise as minefields of gender politics. But the ability to discriminate must be maintained. Otherwise all we are doing is increasing the injustice of the world (120, author’s emphasis).

Garner’s assumptions about ‘real’ victims are common in public responses to sexual victimisation. As McCluskey observes, according to such accounts: “‘Real’ victims, whose injuries deserve redress and protection, apparently are those who are unable to effectively assert autonomous agency’ (McCluskey, 1997: 67). The Ormond women, as apparently capable of exercising agency, thus do not deserve such protection. This juxtaposition of ‘real’ violence seeks to further suggest that this feminist use of legal process is excessive (see also 198). Apart from in the instance of rape, Garner does not acknowledge that sexuality can be deployed in public spaces in inappropriate ways (Flax, 1993: 74):

I know that between ‘being made to feel uncomfortable’ and ‘violence against women’ lies a vast range of male and female behaviours. If we deny this, we enfeeble language and drain it of meaning. We insult the suffering of women who have met real violence, and we distort the subtleties of human interaction into caricatures that can only serve as propaganda for war (221).

Again, the trope of the belligerent dogmatic feminist is mobilised. Here, Garner assumes that the Ormond women make no distinction between their experiences and more invidious forms of assault. However, as Virginia Trioli notes, ‘nobody in the Ormond College matter maintained that the allegations were on a level with rape or violent assault’ (Trioli, 1996: 93-94). The claim that the women conflate all forms of sexual violence represents another means via which Garner de-legitimises the women’s response to the incident at the ‘smoko’. She sees sexual harassment, not as a form of abuse, but as ‘a figment of the fevered imagination of puritanical, sexually repressed, elite white feminists’ (Fraser, 1997: 102). In this sense, Garner’s way of seeing appears deeply embedded in a patriarchal framework, and the narrative can be read as a symbolic assault on the women’s ability to name their experiences. It is their act of naming what they experienced as ‘sexual harassment’ that is pathologised. Moreover, Garner’s emphasis on the women’s power represents another significant textual strategy to undermine their claims of victimisation.
'Vagina dentata in full glory': The Over-estimation of Women's Power

Garner’s account is consistent with much legal discourse criticised by feminists, particularly with regard to the popular trope or enduring archetype of Woman as temptress, seductress or ‘bad girl’. Her narrative imbues the women with a degree of power that they could not possess, or exercise, in this scenario (i.e., because he was in control of their bursaries); Goldsworthy refers to this as ‘needing his signature’ (Goldsworthy: 1998). In addition, the attribution of such power, derived from the young women’s physical appearance, represents both a reinscription of women’s association with the body and a privileging of the notion of corporeal capital as women’s primary ‘weapon’ in the challenging of gendered hierarchies. In the following quotation, where Garner seeks to underscore Elizabeth Rosen’s failure to take responsibility, she focuses particularly on the corporeal, locating it as the site from which Rosen’s unacknowledged – or ‘untapped’ (168) – power emanates:

> is worthless sexual object just a rhetorical flourish, a bit of feminist sabre-rattling on behalf of a young woman who has not taken responsibility of learning to handle the effects, on men, of her beauty and her erotic style of self-presentation?

> Can a young woman really expect to go through life without ever having to take this responsibility? Has a girl like Elizabeth Rosen even the faintest idea what a power anima figure she is to the men she encounters in her life? (89, author’s emphasis).

While not suggesting that women do not challenge hegemonic articulations of power at the microlevel (relations of power do indeed shift), it is this emphasis on the corporeal source of women’s power in Garner’s text with which I take issue. Her narrative in a sense can be seen as an attempt to challenge the negativity of power which characterised much earlier feminist work, particularly as she sees the women as capable of exercising a particular form of power. In this sense, her approach seems somewhat Foucauldian. Following such logic, Lumby explicitly sees Garner to be developing a new model of power: ‘One of her key arguments is that power doesn’t always emanate from a repressive, ‘institutionalised force’, its power is more fluid and unpredictable than that’ (Lumby, 1999: 172, Giles, 1995: 385).

However, despite this emphasis on fluidity and shifting boundaries, as Mark Davis observes, ‘Eros’ in Garner’s account ‘doesn’t suggest a Foucault-style matrix where power and desire are multidimensional’ (Davis, 1997: 90). Rather, through positing its existence outside ideology, ‘ultimately “Eros” is just a version of masculine desire’ (Davis, 1997: 90).

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6 This quotation comes from Pybus’ review of the text, which appeared in both Australian Book Review and the Sydney Morning Herald.

7 Women are commonly positioned this way in cases of sexual harassment. See Jane Flax’s reading of the Hill-Thomas sexual harassment trial (Flax, 1998: 69-82).

8 Throughout the text, Garner’s deploys Jungian frameworks; her most obvious indebtedness is her usage of the terms ‘anima’ and ‘eros’. For further details regarding Jungian psychology, particularly in relation to women, see Wehr’s Jung and Feminism (1989). See also Karen Kissane’s article in The Age, 27/12/95, ‘Jung in The First Stone’: 17.
So despite the rhetoric, Garner fails to view power in all its diffuse aspects. In her extreme sexualisation of this alleged feminine power Garner fails to acknowledge that sexual power translates into actual power only if women say ‘yes’ (Laveen, 1996: 628). For Garner, through the regulation of sexuality, feminism is a form of subjection; the expressions of sexuality she defends, however, are those of masculine subjects like the Master.

The narrative’s overestimation of the young women’s power enables her to obscure the Master’s mutually reinforcing gender and institutional power. In contrast to the young women, as the Master’s power was purportedly not written on his body or manifest in his gait, Garner’s argues its non-existence. She attempts to establish the Ormond complainants’ power relationally through establishing the Master’s powerlessness: ‘She told the court that Dr Shepherd had got down on his knees before her. Which of them does the word humiliated apply to, here?’ (89) This account suggests that the women, specifically Elizabeth Rosen, effectively emasculated the Master. Garner works throughout to highlight his subjection in a new gender order. She positions him as marginalised by the powerful young women who remain an absent presence throughout the narrative. Anna Cossins’ reading of this section, and the way it resignifies Rosen’s remarks, is valuable: ‘because of the radiant power of Rosen’s sexuality, her body is no longer a site of a invasion by Gregory but an altar at which he justifiably pays homage’ (Cossins, 1995: 546). Through constructing the women as powerful, as ‘anything but shrinking violets’ (75), Garner again contests their right to utilise sexual harassment legal remedies. For Garner, the women in the text, along with their feminist ‘conspirators’, perform their feminist identities in an inappropriate fashion – a charge also levelled during the event by Anne Summers.

Garner totally absolves the Master from any wrong-doing, even assuming that the women ‘made victims of themselves by not laughing at a clumsy gesture or inappropriate remark’ (Duncanson, 1997: 155). The notion that the type of behaviour of which the Master was accused is ‘harmless fun’, or that the harasser was misunderstood, is common in discourses which conflict with feminism. In her ethnographically based work on what she dubs ‘public harassment’, Carol B. Gardener refers to the way in which harassment can be romanticised and subsequently read as ‘flattering’ (Gardner, 1995: 169). It is a strategy, I argue, in which Garner participates with regard to Rosen and Stewart and which is consistent with the text’s attempts to position the victims as possessors of a power that is immense, yet unrecognised, at the level of the self. Rather than encouraging women to

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9 As Cossins argues, ‘through the construction of Gregory as a victim, Garner is able to ignore these legal and ethical responsibilities and to divert the reader from the real power he exerted over their lives and their economic dependence on him’ (Cossins, 1995: 541).
acknowledge and subsequently express this power, feminism, Garner implies, stifles this source, and thus seeks to disrupt the ‘natural’ gender order which she implies should be reclaimed. In the following quotation, it is implicit that it is feminism that made things ‘go terribly wrong’: ‘Elizabeth Rosen thinks of herself as a “worthless sex object” when her beauty and erotic self-presentation arouse desire in men. Something has gone terribly wrong here’ (194). Garner’s treatment of ‘gropes as flattery’ is an act of ‘dubious sardonic worth’ which is ‘surely lost in a patriarchal culture that is forged on this same representation of women’ (Harris, 1998: 89).

Many public discourses reinforce this narrative – that being the object of masculine desire is a reward for women, that women acquire salvation and rescue through the gaze of the (male) Other (Malson, 1998: 107). Such a suggestion appears, if not antifeminist, profoundly inconsistent with feminism. The suggestion that Elizabeth Rosen should feel validated by her potential to attract this gaze substantiates such a notion. The narrative voice appears baffled at Elizabeth Rosen’s assertion to the EO Commission that she felt like a “worthless sexual object” (88). Garner questions how attracting, not only the Gaze, but the physical attention of the Master, could function to diminish a woman’s sense of self-worth: ‘Why would a young woman feel “worthless” when a man makes an unwelcome sexual approach to her? ... Would she feel less “worthless” if the man were younger, better-looking, more cool?’ (88-89). The by-product of these acts of romanticisation is the effective de-politicisation of the Master’s actions.

While Garner discovers a photo of each of the women, it is her reading of Rosen that has been unsurprisingly subjected to the most critical attention. Garner concedes that she approached these photographs ‘as if they had coded information that I had to decipher’ (58). In the following quotation, Garner reads a photo of Elizabeth Rosen as illustrative of the type of ‘power’ she allegedly holds, and which is seen as responsible for Garner’s incomprehension of the woman’s trauma. This paragraph is remarkable for a number of reasons, not the least of which is a semi-pornographic (see Cossins, 1995: 545) description that reads like a parody of romance novels prior to the heroine’s acquiescence to the conquering male hero:

The gaze, whether one is male or female, drops like a stone from top to bottom of this photo, then travels slowly up. She is wearing a black, strapless evening dress, out of which the double mass of her splendid bosom – the only possible word is bursting. ... Her face is so dazzling that her hair, worn up and back except for one free curl over her right eye, is only a shadow. It is impossible not to be moved by her daring beauty.

Cossins similarly emphasises Garner’s attempts to reclaim this ‘natural’ heterosexual paradigm (Cossins, 1995: 558).

Goldsworthy argues that reading photos in such a manner is ‘one of Garner’s favourite writing strategies’ (Goldsworthy, 1996: 84).
She is a woman in the full glory of her youth, as joyful as a goddess, elated by her own careless authority and power (59).

In short, the Master’s actions amount to a physical expression of the appreciation which Garner herself, as narrator, articulates. In her study on press coverage of sexual assault, Helen Benedict (1992) suggests that a common rhetorical strategy to position victims unsympathetically is to represent them as physically attractive (Benedict, 1992: 152). Garner attempts to construct a particular type of subject and body that could be seen as capable of attracting unsolicited male attention. However, the power conferred by this sexuality is limited as it is conceived in terms of ‘what it invites not what it does’ (Cossins, 1995: 557). At other points in the narrative she remarks on what she perceives to be Rosen’s overwhelming power: ‘I wondered, as I had many times before, whether Elizabeth Rosen had any real awareness of the profound effect she has on men’ (133).

As suggested above, Garner attempts to (re)locate the locus of responsibility onto the corporeal site from which feminism sought to displace it: the female body. It appears that physical attractiveness is synonymous with sexual availability. Moreover, when Garner realises the unavailability of these bodies, their reluctance to willingly insert themselves into her ‘non-fictional’ space, she simply writes them (a gesture of which Trioli and Bail were subsequently guilty in their textual responses to TFS). She suggests that Elizabeth Rosen is a ‘brilliant and wild young creature’ (194). The imagery of the powerful woman, invoked by the signifier ‘Goddess’, functions as a challenge to the Ormond women’s articulations of (sexual) victimisation. For Garner, Elizabeth Rosen is a ‘femme fatale’, a figure of ‘certain discursive unease, a potential epistemological trauma ... she harbours a threat which is not entirely legible, predictable, or manageable (Doane, 1991: 1). Rosen is also seen as a ‘symptom of male fears about feminism’ (Doane, 1991: 3). However, Garner’s narrative suggests that such fears do not necessarily consume only those gendered masculine. Garner stridently argues throughout that young women’s feminism is punitive. She summarises this philosophy: ‘If you get the opportunity to punish someone, you really ought to’ (46). This representation of the vengeful woman needs to be considered in the context of ‘a long-standing tradition of presenting female power as inherently evil, dangerous, and worthy of punishment’ (Felski, 2001: 109, see also Lake, 1995: 26). This

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12 This process, as Jenna Mead suggests, was also to be found in the narrative constructed in media accounts: ‘a narrative in which, whatever happened, it was the fault of the young woman’s body—represented not just as eroticised but available, “Asking for it”’ (Mead, 1997b: 252).
13 Cornell has shown how such a representation has been deployed in various court cases in order to position the plaintiff as, due to her behaviour, unable to legitimately claim that sexual advances were unwelcome (Cornell, 1995: 191).
14 While not invoking the voice of one of the complainants as an alternative, authentic counterweight to Garner, the comments of XX in Mead’s Bodyjamming draw attention to the paradox of their representation – they are seen as exerting an immense power while being criticised for their so-called ‘victimhood’ (XX, 1997: 53).
focus on the story’s ‘archetypal’ aspects, including those relating to masculinity/femininity, obscures the historical specificities of the debate (see Pybus: 1995).

Through her representation of Rosen, the narrative seeks to recast, once again, her use of legal remedies as illegitimate. Drucilla Cornell deploys a Lacanian framework to account for the way in which women’s assertions of unwelcome sexual advances have often not been afforded legitimacy. In such a framework, it is the pervasive psychical fantasy of ‘Woman’ that explains such a failure (Cornell, 1995: 191). According to Lacanian psychoanalysis, the feminine sex must be abjected because of the break from the mother necessary for entrance into the patriarchal symbolic order; the gap that is left by such a break is thought to be subsequently filled with masculine fantasies that simultaneously involve terror and desire for the mother. These fantasies are then projected onto Woman, who is split into ‘bad’ and ‘good’ (Cornell, 1995: 191). In foregrounding the young women’s desirability Garner attempts to establish the complainants, not only as bad (feminist) daughters, in the sense of the overarching generational narrative of the text, but as bad girls generally. Cornell explores the significance of the discursive construction of this ‘bad girl’, particularly in relation to its mobilisation in a legal framework:

The advances made towards a ‘bad girl’ would be seen as implicitly welcomed because the man himself is tempted by her and, therefore, he unconsciously imagines that she must want what he desires to give; indeed it is she who actively produces the desire in him (Cornell, 1995: 192).

Through these assumptions about personal responsibility, Garner relies upon notions of Woman as being-for-the-Other and primarily as an object of the masculine gaze, as a sexual object who must engage in a type of self-surveillance, consistently making herself aware of the ‘power’ of the way her body visually signifies in a dominant phallic economy. Indeed, the internalisation of such a gaze can be seen as a constitutive element of modern subjectivity (Fuery and Mansfield, 1997: 70), but is of particular importance for women due to their perpetual association with body in Western discourse’s governing mind/body dichotomy.

Garner implies that the Ormond women e ffectively fail in this self-surveillance project, theorised by Foucault following Jeremy Bentham (Foucault: 1977). Such self-surveillance is part of a modern disciplinary project that has particular resonances for women, who can be seen as ‘appearing’ to men’s ‘being’ (Radner, 1995: 3). Garner implies, therefore, that women are so completely trapped within a heterosexual imaginary (the

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15 In her most recent work of ‘non-fiction’, Joe Cinque’s Consolation (2004), Garner’s deploys these familiar tropes of men as ‘victims’ and women as ‘vixens’.
16 Drawing on the work of feminist legal theorist, Carol Smart, Cossins also make the point that Garner reads Rosen through the “male gaze” (Cossins, 1995: 556).
17 For an exploration the functioning of the disciplinary gaze in relation specifically to women, see Tseelon, 1995: pp.67-76.
terms of which the narrator does not challenge), that their only way to be read, as other than always-already sexually available to men, is to participate in an act of desexualisation which re-coding the body through non ‘sexy’ dress allegedly represents. As opposed to critiquing the very processes by which women’s bodies come to signify, Garner suggests the only way women can alter or control the way their bodies are ‘read’, is to be prudent in their choice of attire. This, unlike ‘going to the cops’, is seen an appropriate act of women’s agency. However, contradictorily, Garner actually recommends the strategy of harnessing this corporeal power as opposed to relinquishing it. Through such an assumption, Garner shores up the fears of women subject to harassment that in refusing the ‘patriarchal sexual gaze’, they will become invisible (Mann, 1998: 182). In the Foucauldian sense, women’s relatively recent presence in the public sphere sees the female body as a representation of the ‘undisciplined body’, a threat to the public order which must be contained, or disciplined, in various ways (Radner, 1993: 143), including through sexual harassment.

Through seeking legal remedy, it is not only themselves for whom Garner asserts the women fail to be responsible, but for the (albeit unwanted) expressions of masculine sexuality evoked by their physical presence. In one of the narrator’s many conversations with supportive sources, Garner makes this notion of responsibility explicit:

‘There can’t be freedom without responsibility. It is a woman’s responsibility to protect herself against sexual assault. A free woman must accept that in the world there is risk – that risk is part of her freedom’ (163).

The act of ‘taking responsibility’ is here cast as a form of (self)protection. The latter part of this quotation, the deployment of the word ‘freedom’, can be read as implicating feminism in the construction of the new gender order contingent upon responsibility. Women’s increased visibility in the public sphere, Garner implies, comes with a responsibility that feminism fails to recognise. The use of the signifier ‘careless’ in the earlier quotation invokes this lack of responsibility. Instead of destabilising the public/private binary, Garner constructs women’s sexuality as a problem in/to the public sphere; 18 for Garner, women’s entry into the public sphere should be contingent upon their taking responsibility for effects of their sexuality, thus precluding a reading of behaviour such as the Master’s as ‘harassing’. 19

The following comments are applicable to Garner’s assumptions about women’s invocation of (masculine) desire: ‘In this bizarre parody of the Fall, Eve is to blame for having been desired’ (Jacobus, 1986: 103). The transgression of these women is their failure to collude in the maintenance of such a hetero-patriarchal imaginary which

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18 The normative citizen of the liberal state is assumed to be masculine. Much feminist work has critiqued this assumption. See Pateman: 1988, Gatens: 1993.

19 As Cornell emphasises, critics of feminist notions of sexual harassment fail to take account of the way in which women have often been positioned as responsible for men’s sexuality (Cornell, 1995: 170).
Garner comes to reinforce through the trope of ‘eros’ and the narrative’s denial of masculine power and privilege.

“Poor Bastards”: Narrative Denial of Masculine Power

The over-estimation of women’s power interrogated in this previous section is established relationally, that is, through a concomitant under-estimation of the Master’s power. The actions of the young women and their doctrinaire supporters are seen to expose a fundamental failure of feminism, as implied in a later interview: ‘She said that if the women’s movement had been at all successful, the women could have dealt with the matter one-to-one’ (Williams, 5/4/95, *The Advertiser*: 14). As a result of such an ineffectual feminism, *TFS*’s narrator inscribes a ‘crisis of faith’ in (contemporary) feminism, a crisis continually invoked in interviews during the event. The narrator speaks throughout of her existential angst: ‘I was on the verge of finding things out that would cause an upheaval in my whole belief-structure, particularly where men and women were concerned, and the way power shifts between them’ (72). Through her suggestion that her ethics and her feminism clashed dramatically, Garner discounts the possibility of an ethical feminism. It becomes clear that she views these ethics and her feminism to be incommensurate: ‘I had a horrible feeling that my feminism and my ethics were speeding towards a head-on smash’ (39). The Other for whom Garner is concerned is, however, masculine. For example, she persistently attempts to downplay the Master’s power:

‘As you get old’, I said, knowing as the words left my mouth that they were the classic refrain of old to young and so could only produce rebellion, ‘you begin to understand that a lot of men in these situations are weak. You realise that behind what you saw as force, all those years, there’s actually a terrible pathos. Blokes who come onto girls are putting themselves out on a limb – their self is at risk. You start to learn that women have a particular power of their own, if only they knew it’ (99, author’s emphasis).

In the above quotation, Garner addresses one of the text’s many homogenous young feminists, implying that the pedagogical task of feminists is to make young women aware of the inherent power which results in men being positioned not as “scary or powerful” but as “poor bastards” (99). Moreover, this quotation also exemplifies what has been referred to as the ‘uncritical invocation of generational conflict as an explanatory device’ (Long, 2001: 2). Garner draws upon a kind of epistemic privilege accompanying aging, which permits her to comprehend the inherent vulnerability of masculinity in a way the young women cannot (60). She and her fifty-something friends ‘agree that, over the past few years, as we approached fifty, we had ceased to feel “at the mercy of men”’ (170). As one of her sources observed of the Ormond women, “at that age you don’t see greys” (215). Youth, then, becomes a socially dangerous form of myopia that must be rectified. Such
criticism of young feminists are commonly based on their ‘inexperience and arrogance’ (Harris, 2004: 135). These women pose a threat to the Master due predominantly to their youth; the risks projected onto young women in ‘late modernity’ have been the focus of recent work by Harris (2004) and Driscoll (2002). As the embodiment of such fears, the young women at the centre of TFS destroy not only the Master (i.e., the Patriarch) but the feminism with which the narrator had previously identified.

In relation to men in particular, Garner implies that the problem is not women’s ‘othering’ in heteropatriarchal capitalism, but the inability of feminism to provide men with models of masculine subjectivity following its reconfiguration of masculinity/femininity. Garner cites the comments of an Ormond tutor explaining the Master’s supposed unworldliness, particularly in matters of sexual interaction:

‘You or I might talk about something like ‘developments in contemporary feminism’ – neither of them [The Master and his wife] would know what you meant. They’re unworldly. I’d repeat the word innocent. A lack of perception. Something was going to happen’ (123, italics mine).

In this logic, the Master’s naiveté is perceived as at once the basis and product of a (gendered) lack of cultural competency. Throughout the narrative, The Master – as emblematic of men who simply do not have the framework to understand the contemporary sexual-political climate – is constructed as weak (99) and decidedly unthreatening, as Garner’s description of his less than commanding physical presence suggests (50). Garner’s initial description of the Master suggests that he ‘did not impress as powerful; if anything he looked dogged, even meek’ (32). This presumed lack of power is subsequently juxtaposed with the women’s apparent abundance of power. Furthermore, in her interview with the Master, he asserts: “What power did I really have over Elizabeth or Nicole? ... The alleged power I was supposed to have over those people is an illusion” (56). The narrator leaves these comments to stand uncontested or unencumbered by narratorial judgement, demonstrating the privileging of the masculine word that occurs throughout.

The above quotation is indicative of the way the Master is constructed as passive, both literally and linguistically, throughout the narrative: ‘Intransitive verbs are frequently used to describe his actions. Things happen without his doing or knowing: the women went to the cops, filed the complaints, took him to court, conspired against him’ (Ling Kong, 1997: 70). The narrator’s repositioning of the Master as victim is also consistent with broader Australian nationalist mythologies (Lake, 1995: 26): ‘Colin Shepherd (‘dogged’ ‘meek’, ‘vulnerable’) joins the long line of defeated men – Ned Kelly, Henry Lawson, Burke

and Wills, the Gallipoli diggers, the men on the track, the blokes on the susso – who embody our national mythologies’ (Lake, 1995: 26). Garner’s defence of the Master, therefore, also functions as defence of this enduring national fiction. As Garner’s observes: ‘I failed to see in him the marauding beast described in the anonymous leaflet’ (50). This failure to acknowledge his institutional power, let alone the power deployed in the instance of harassment, represents another way in which Garner undermines the young women’s actions and the feminism they are believed to embody.

Garner’s persistent characterisation of men grappling with the uncertainty associated with blurred gender boundaries appears to attempt to position women, as those in whose name such changes were sought, in a familiar space of care-giver (see Ring: 1994). *TFS* could also be read intertextually as part of the contemporary impetus to ‘take care of men’ (MacMahon: 1999), whose contemporary roles and masculine identities have been apparently thrown into ‘crisis’ due to feminism. In his work on subjectivity, Nick Mansfield (2000) suggests that the success of ‘feminist values’ in the public sphere is commonly met with assertions about men’s concomitant demasculinisation (Mansfield, 2000: 104). Furthermore, this trope of the persecuted Master (like that of the author) resurfaces in the media event, particularly in the commentary of conservative media columnists. One critic offensively compares the experiences of the Master with the Nazi expulsion of Jewish lecturers from German universities in the 1930s (McGuinness, 10/8/95, *The Age*: 12), while another deployed the ‘witch-hunt’ as a metaphor for feminist treatment of the Master (Lane, 27/9/95, *The Age*: 19).

As Anthony McMahon highlights, theorists of masculinity seeking to illustrate men’s powerlessness have heavily relied on the object-relations psychoanalysis of Nancy Chodorow (1978). In their expression of desire for women, men like the Master risk destabilising their (unstable) ego-boundaries by implicitly acknowledging, through such expressions, a need for feminine attention and intersubjective relations (Chodorow: 1978). For Garner, men are shamed when their advances are rejected. As she suggests, men like the Master put “themselves out on a limb”’ (99). In Garner’s account, the sexually attractive woman – symbolising the first love object i.e., the Mother (see Chodorow: 1978) – is a powerful woman who should not squander such power (as she suggests the Ormond women do) but learn to ‘master’ it. Thus, women should learn to trade on their physical (and psychic) capital. In refusing this recognition of the risks men face, including those from women themselves, contemporary feminism thus fails to acknowledge men’s

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21 In terms of her assumptions about the ‘demasculinisation’ of men, Garner’s text can be seen in terms of many other contemporary ‘wounded men’ (MacMahon, 1999: 200) intertexts. Such texts establish a culture of male anxiety, where men suffer due to the “‘poisonous orthodoxy’” of feminism (Segal, 1994: 270).
vulnerability. In addition, due to the discourse of sexual harassment, heterosexual desire can further become a source of vulnerability (Flax, 1998: 81). Rather than utilising their ‘careless authority and power’, through ‘going to the cops’ the women (and the feminism they represented) abused another form of power. As Jane Flax puts it: ‘Sexual harassment charges are now available to women and actionable through law, suggesting a renewed opportunity for women to undermine the social order through the misuse of their power’ (Flax, 1998: 81). This is precisely how Garner characterises the women’s actions. Rather than suggest that relations of power shift, she merely reverses the masculine/dominant, feminine/subordinate dichotomy, positioning men as vulnerable to the effects of women’s sexuality.

In Garner’s narrative, feminism is seen to be responsible for this failure to recognise men’s inherent weaknesses. In recounting one of the many conversations with friends who support her position that harassment can be dealt with outside legal frameworks she continues to undermine the women’s actions by linking them to a particular discursive construction of feminism. In this quotation the law is personified as masculine – an astute observation – but it is not its effects upon women that concern her:

Whose is the power, in situations like these? There is a path here that might be followed, a line of fruitful questioning: but puritan feminists prefer to ignore it. They are offended by the suggestion that a woman might learn to handle a trivial sexual approach by herself, without needing to run to Big Daddy and even wreck a man’s life, because it unsettles their crucial belief: that men’s sexuality is a monstrous, uncontrollable force, while women are trembling creatures innocent of desire, under siege even in a room full of companions, forever to made to feel uncomfortable. I don’t understand my own sporadic collapses into passivity. But this analysis of power is of no use to me at all. In fact, in its disingenuousness it weakens me, and makes me ashamed to call myself a feminist (209-210).

She suggests that encoding particular behaviours in legislation will always be unsuccessful due to the unpredictability and irrepressibility of (hetero)sexual desire. As Bronwen Levy argues, such a distrust of the legal system, as an acknowledgment that ‘legal reforms will not solve all aspects of oppression’, places Garner’s account with the broad realm of feminist discourse (Levy, 1995: 2). While taking Levy’s point, Garner’s critique of the women’s actions does not appear based in concern for the way women are produced in legal discourse. In contrast, the victim for whom she seeks answers is the Master.

As I have suggested, the Master, and implicitly all men, become constituted as victims of an irrational femininity (Flax, 1998: 81) which has the potential to ruin them, their careers and their families. The ultimate personification of such irrationality is, of course, the feminist. In Garner’s narrative, what happens to the Master is emblematic of the assault by feminism on patriarchal authority and notions of human nature. Garner constructs the women, and their feminist ‘manipulators’, as irrational, operating beyond
the realm of (masculine) reason and logic. As Flax has observed, representing women — and in this case, feminists in particular — as irrational or hysterical can serve as a potent form of erasure in the public domain (Flax, 1998: 66). This is a familiar trope, often mobilised to contest the legitimacy of women’s entrance into patriarchal spaces of privilege, and resurfaces during the media event. Sexual harassment laws too, along with the women who access them, can be seen as particularly threatening due to the way in which they call into question the supposedly rational, reasonable dealings of the public sphere. These laws suggest the untenability of the notion of a separate sphere of affect, emotion, family, sexuality etc., and one wherein the exercise of ‘reason’ and ‘logic’ take precedence. For Garner, feminism becomes a signifier for the phallic woman en masse, castrating not only the Master but the entire homosocial economy which Garner naturalises/endorses, particularly as she fails to question men’s access to women’s bodies in the public sphere. In this sense, Garner’s account is deeply nostalgic.

**Feminism’s Alleged Authority and the Distortion of ‘Truth’**

In her narrative Garner seeks to buttress, rather than challenge the heterosexual imaginary which the young women contest. This strategy persists in her insertion into public discourse through interviews and the publication of her speech, ‘The Fate of The First Stone’ (Garner, 9/8/95, SMH: 11). It is thus valuable to place Garner’s text in a broader nostalgic longing which, as Hodges and Doane note, seeks to condemn feminism — amongst other bodies of thought and activism — for its role in challenging hegemonic notions of truth and reality (Doane and Hodges, 1987: 7). Garner’s is a narrative of ‘political decline’, which is underpinned by an attachment to a particular type of social formation (Adkins, 2004: 435). Her nostalgia is for a time before behaviours such as The Master’s had been politicised, a time before second-wave feminism. However, nostalgia in TFS operates on two very distinct levels — firstly, Garner nostalgically invokes a pre-feminist temporality, where gender boundaries were clearly delineated and the private sphere was not politicised, and secondly, her narrative is steeped in nostalgia for a particular type of feminism, wherein the feminist is only ever an agent and never a ‘victim’. These “‘puritan feminists’”, as one of her sources remarks with no authorial comment, took “an idea whose purpose was to free people, and turn it into something that strangles truth” (102). Her generation, Garner implies, would never utilise the judicial remedies for which they fought and would thereby never be reliant on the masculine space of the Law.

As my later analysis of Anne Summers in particular will demonstrate, nostalgic longing pervades TFS event; this nostalgia can be seen in terms of the Nietzschean informed idea of ‘ressentiment’. In TFS event, including in the book itself, the point at
which these two generations come to be differentiated is their attitude to matters sexual, including sexual harassment. Cassandra Pybus sums up the positions of Garner and Summers in the following question: ‘Since they didn’t need sexual harassment laws to manage their relationships with men, why should this generation?’ (Pybus, 1996: 21). In her application of Nietzsche’s notion of ressentiment – a deeply affective phenomenon which pits one generation against another – to prominent generational debates in Australia, Elspeth Probyn examines the inadequacies of the scapegoating manoeuvre upon which it relies (Probyn, 1998a: 131). As Probyn suggests, ressentiment entails an unproductive use of nostalgia. Specifically in relation to the generational motif mobilised by Garner and Summers, Probyn suggests that their question “What’s wrong with young feminists”, emerges and masks a ‘resentful “I want their youth, the privileges that they have because of me/my generation”’ (Probyn, 1998a: 134). Having fought for certain privileges, the figurative feminist mother becomes disillusioned when her daughter puts them into practice, and she subsequently convinces herself of their lack of value (see Morelli, 1998:5). The most obvious example of this in TFS appears early in the narrative, as Garner and her second-wave peers condemn the young women for taking an action unavailable to them: “Look – if every bastard who’s ever laid a hand on us were dragged into court, the judicial system of the state would be clogged for years” (Garner, 1995: 15). Here, Garner’s envy is expressed through a devaluation of the legal processes open to young women who have been sexually harassed. Through such a gesture, her rage and desire for their ‘privileges’ is repressed but not eliminated (Morelli, 1998: 5). Garner exhibits what Elizabeth Morelli argues to be central to the structure of ressentiment, ‘a feeling of superiority over those who seek and possess the now devalued values’ (Morelli, 1998: 5). In TFS, she suggests:

My friends and sisters and I ... got ourselves through decades of being wolf-whistled, propositioned, pestered, insulted, attacked and worse without the big guns of sexual harassment legislation to back us up. We took it ... like women – not wimps who ran to the law to whinge about some minor unpleasantness instead of standing up and fighting back (Garner, 1995: 40).

For Garner, young feminists perform their feminism in unsatisfactory ways; such inadequacies are linked to their generational positioning and lack of experience. In this sense, Garner’s narrative is one of feminism’s decline.

TFS could be constituted, following Margaret Henderson, as a ‘feminist version of the legend of the fall’, largely a tale of the corruption of feminism (Henderson, 2000:}
The feminism critiqued by Garner in the present is contingent upon the romanticisation of a homogenous second-wave. Here, feminism’s ‘fall’ is symbolised by the succession of libertarianism with feminist puritanism, which she views as ‘the perversion of feminist principles’ (Trioli, 1996: 15). For Garner, the Ormond women are seen to exemplify a form of feminism that denudes women of power, a power for which she assumes her generation has fought. This reveals a deeper disturbance for the narrator – has she, self-proclaimed feminist ‘mother’, failed in her maternal duty to imbue her daughter with strength and courage? She fears that her generation has produced the wrong type of feminist subject, who accordingly has taken up the wrong object (i.e., masculine power). In later chapters, I explore the playing out of such affective nostalgia during the event.

In the topology offered by Doane and Hodges, nostalgic discourse is predicated upon assumptions about the rise of feminist authority, with a perceived cultural ‘degeneracy’ deriving from such authority (Doane and Hodges, 1987: xiii). For Garner, the violence engendered by the feminist is manifest in feminist destruction not only of the Master, but of a particular way of being in the world to which she nostalgically seeks to return. The following quotation is applicable to Garner's text, particularly as it appears to reintroduce some fixity to masculine/feminine which it has been feminism’s project to destabilise:

The many feminisms, the endlessly varying incarnations of the movement itself, make the concepts of male and female seem provisional cultural products, constantly subject to redefinition. The nostalgic writer wants natural, fixed sexual difference (Doane and Hodges, 1987: 7).

Frederic Jameson too has suggested that nostalgia represents the desire, along with narrative certainties, for the unified, stable gender identities which are seen as characterising the past (in Read, 2000: 192). As my analysis has suggested, like most nostalgic texts, TFS attempts to vigorously fix a series of binary oppositions (Doane and Hodges, 1987: 12): past/present, male/female, second-wave feminism/contemporary feminism, nature/culture-ideology. In this sense, fixing sexual difference is seen as a means by which nostalgic writers resist feminism (Doane and Hodges, 1987: 142).

In the nostalgic mode of articulation, the degenerate present is contrasted with the past wherein ‘truth’, in this instance prior to its complication by feminism, is locatable (Doane and Hodges, 1987: 8). Throughout, Garner exhibits a sense of unease about the way in which feminism has called into questions the formerly stable referents of

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22 This discursive construction of a feminist orthodoxy responsible for distorting – or ‘corrupting’ (Curthoys, 1997: x-xi) – feminism has also been taken up in academic texts, such as Jean Curthoys’ Feminist Amnesia (1997).
masculine/feminine. As Doane and Hodges note, it is not an uncommon strategy to blame feminism for the loss of paternal authority and even the referent itself (Doane and Hodges, 1987: 141). Garner positions her narrative as the search for a truth which feminism has distorted, both in the instance of the Ormond case and more broadly. For example, she reads the young women’s refusal to speak to her as part of an orchestrated feminist campaign to silence her:

This path to Elizabeth Rosen and Nicole Stewart was plainly not only blocked but mined and ambushed. ... How could I write about these people if they wouldn’t speak to me? The ruder and more secretive these women got, the more determined to retreat into their faceless group, the more curious I became. What sort of feminists were these, what sort of intellectuals, who expected automatic allegiance from women to a cause they are not prepared to argue (71).

Throughout Garner refers to the recalcitrance of the ‘feminist group in Ormond which organised against Colin Shepherd’ (218). In particular, collectivism is ridiculed and the trope of conspiracy invokes assumptions about feminism’s role in actively distorting ‘truth’, whether it be through hindering Garner’s access to sources for her narrative, or through its problematisation of the ‘natural’ flow of eros central to male/female engagement. In one of the event’s earliest texts, Garner makes explicit her concern for truth: ‘it seems important to me that this story has taken place in a university – where the attempt to discover the truth should be held in high esteem’ (in Gunn, 27/3/95, The Australian: 5).

In the rhetoric of the ‘culture wars’, the academy is the central location of this distortion of truth. Most literally, the scene of TFS is predominantly the University of Melbourne and the grounds of its prestigious Ormond College, a place that ‘radiates power’ (20). This narrative setting is significant as the university campus is commonly seen as the breeding ground for a victim-centred feminism (McCluskey, 1997: 58) and an unnecessarily politicised curriculum. Garner speaks of ‘the new feminists’ push on campus to sidestep conciliation and go “straight to retribution”’ (104). TFS implies that the nuances of cultural politics foster a level of hypersensitivity for which the ‘real world’ has neither time nor tolerance. This juxtaposition of reality with the academy thus suggests (academic) feminism’s role as a distorer of truth; in the academy, feminism interferes with notions of universalistic and impartial scholarship propagated by conservatives (Giroux, 1999: 18). Feminist academics, in their politicisation of pedagogy and the curriculum, are criticised for contesting positivist epistemologies thought to be universal and apolitical. As Moira Ferguson et al. observe in Antifeminism in the Academy, ‘the neoconservatives claim fallaciously that their educational goals of objectivity and truth as embodied in traditional humanistic teaching are devoid of political intent’ (Ferguson et al., 1995: 54, see
also Jay, 1997: 66). Likewise, Garner suggests that the academy facilitates the kind of feminism her narrative seeks to discredit as she notes disparagingly that the Ormond women speak of their experiences ‘in the discourse of power, and the abuse of power’ (46).

The narrative is marked by an intense frustration at the refusal of the women directly involved and their ‘feminist’ advisers to co-operate with her gathering of story, a process tracked throughout the narrative. Garner throughout criticises the young women and their decision not to speak to her, seeing this as part of a broader feminist conspiracy and obstructionism. For example: ‘Blocked again. Oh why were they so wretched?’ (153). The narrator-protagonist persistently comments on the invisibility of the women and their supporters. Her narrative is preoccupied with the literal blockages plaguing the narrator-protagonist during this writing process. Such blockages are crucial to Garner’s representation of feminism, and are personified through a number of representative feminist characters. Of one of these feminist obstructors, Garner observes: ‘she and her gang owned the story. Who would tell it? Certainly not me – or not if they could help it’ (82).

As Mark Davis notes, the refusal of the complainants to speak to Garner ‘becomes evidence of a failure among some feminists to want to engage in debate generally, as if Garner might be the only available interlocutor’ (Davis, 1997: 79-80). She observes: ‘As a group they maintained facelessness and voicelessness’ (177; see also 75, 144, 171, 211). However, in terms of the complainants, this choice to not speak can be seen as a significant exercise of agency; for as Plummer observes, ‘the power to tell a story, or indeed to not tell a story, under the conditions of one’s own choosing, is part of the political process’ (Plummer, 1995: 26; see also McCluskey, 1997: 70). While Garner emphasises the women’s victimhood and criticises them both for mis-using their power as Woman, their silence itself – along with their deployment of the law – affords them a form of power which infuriates Garner (Lake, 1995: 27). The unavailability of the Ormond complainants opened a space where other feminists – namely Anne Summers – could argue about the invisibility of young feminists generally. The young women’s refusal to speak to Garner symbolises the rejection of their ‘feminist mother’, an assumption further examined in Chapter Six.

Popular critics of feminism often assume that women’s studies have secured a position of dominance within the academy. In such narratives, feminism ‘controls dissent’ and ‘wields unprecedented power’ (Sorisio, 1997: 135). It is the politics of interpretation, of cultural politics, ‘fed’ to the young women at university by this amorphous feminist orthodoxy which is believed to be responsible for their deployment of sexual harassment legal remedies. Such a strategy, in depriving the young women of agency through the suggestion that they are being manipulated by this dogmatic sisterhood, implies that the
young feminist’s mind is contaminated in/by the academy. After recounting an interview which ‘winded’ her, she asks: ‘The ruder and more secretive these women got, the more determined to retreat into their faceless group, the more curious I became. What sort of feminists were these, what sort of intellectuals, who expected automatic allegiance from women to a cause they were not even prepared to argue?’ (71). Their literal refusal to speak to her is symptomatic of a broader ‘obscurantism’ with which feminist academics are commonly charged (Stringer, 1998: 253). Moreover, in profiles of the author, her feminism is defined in opposition to the theory-based feminism of academics. Garner’s disdain for academic feminists manifests subsequently in her speech to the Sydney Institute, as Chapter Four will demonstrate. TFS attempts to track feminism’s degeneracy, specifically through an invocation of its wrong-headed focus on powerless ‘victims’.

**Power and Victims – The ‘Fall’ of Feminism**

This constant stress on passivity and weakness – this creation of a political position based on the virtue of helplessness – I hate it (Garner, 1995: 99).

Garner’s narrative relies upon a series of well-rehearsed assumptions about feminism. Feminism, in its current guises, is allegedly dogmatic, punitive and monolithic; its positioning of women as ‘victims’ is thought to represent the ultimate deprivation of agency. Modern feminism is ‘priggish, disingenuous, unforgiving’ (93). To buttress such a tale, Garner romanticises and homogenises a second-wave feminism that 1990s feminists have distorted. For Garner, the Ormond women’s actions suggest that feminism is now construed primarily in juridical terms; as a libertarian, Garner appears to see this shift as a ‘betrayal of the profound utopianism of modern Australian feminism’ (Johnson, 1998: 207). Here, she substitutes one mode of conceptualising sexuality – libertarianism – for the whole of second-wave thought in this area.\(^{23}\) She does not allow the possibility that her own text has been central in discursively constructing such a romanticised libertarian second-wave. In contrast to her nostalgic invocation of the type of feminism to which she subscribed, contemporary feminism seeks to rearticulate, as opposed to contest, the association of the feminine with victimisation. This trope of the young feminist as victim is both reinscribed and contested in subsequent media engagement with the text, while the idea of an academy in the grip of ‘rape crisis feminism’ is mobilised at various points in the subsequent debate (Guillat, 9/8/95, SMH: 1). Garner’s critique of discourses of victimhood is even more problematic given the way her narratorial authority relies upon her own

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\(^{23}\) For an analysis of the limitations of libertarianism, see Jeffreys: 1990.
position i.e., as victim of a feminist orthodoxy who refused to help her construct her narrative.\(^\text{24}\)

Rather than being viewed automatically as anti-feminist, Garner’s critique of the allegedly ‘victim’-centred nature of contemporary feminism can be aligned with broader re-theorisations of power and agency. Some critics fear that the codification of ‘male sexual rapaciousness and female powerlessness’ in law works to ‘deselectrize and subordinate women in assigning responsibility to the state for women’s fate as objects of sexist sexual construction’ (Brown, 1995: 170). In this sense, there is a clear point of overlap between popular varieties of ‘power feminism’ and what Susan Bordo describes as the current academic ‘obsession with “agency”’ (Bordo, 1997: 37). In reconceptualisations of power informed by Foucault, and postcolonial challenges to the exercise of power from within feminism, the views held by feminist theorists are much more nuanced than Garner’s caricature of the feminist identified victim allows. The oppressor/oppressed paradigm, with men ‘possessing and wielding power over women’, is unable to account for the contemporary complexities of social interaction, particularly in relation to the manner in which power operates between women (Bordo, 1993: 23): ‘To the extent that feminist discourse has employed a framework of oppressors and oppressed, villains and victims, it requires reconstruction if it is to be able to adequately theorize the pathway of modern power’ (Bordo, 1993: 26). In Garner’s text, the notion of woman as always-already victim, like in these theoretical sites, is questioned.

Feminist theorists have come to see power as a ‘mode of negotiation, implication and complicity’ (Grosz, 2000: 1017). As Grosz emphasises, power should be seen as feminism’s ally, in terms of what it produces and enables as well as disqualifies and constrains (Grosz, 2000: 1017). In this way of thinking about power, issues of concern to feminism such as oppression, subordination and control, ‘must be reconceived beyond the model of woman as passive victim of male power who is robbed of agency and efficacy’ (Grosz, 2000: 1018). However, in TFS it is not that the Ormond women did not exercise agency, but that the type of actions they took were not sanctioned by Garner. In assuming that feminists focus only on its repressive aspects, Garner implies that feminists do not recognise the shifting nature of power; she observes that ‘to suggest that women were in possession of untapped power, was now an act of treachery’ (168-169). Here she fails to acknowledge the theorising discussed above, a strategy in which she must engage in order to sustain her representation of a victim focused, belligerent feminism. Contra Garner’s assertions of a cruel and unforgiving feminism, feminists have been ‘rather more

\(^{24}\) Lois Leveen (1996) argues that this is a rhetorical strategy favoured by Katie Roiphe (Leveen, 1996: 627).
thoughtful in their handling of victimhood, blame, responsibility and the relational complexities attendant upon these terms than they are given credit for in critiques of “victim feminism” (Stringer, 2001: 8). Furthermore, in refusing to acknowledge the many feminist theorists who have posited the complexities of agency and power, Garner creates the sense that ‘she stands alone in her will to name and critique aspects of feminism’ (hooks, 1994: 105) – something for which, as feminist ‘Mother’, she assumes she is eminently qualified.

**Mothers and Daughters: Feminism and Family**

As later chapters comprehensively address generationalism and the politics of its deployment, I will only briefly consider here the narrative's excessive reliance on generational tropes and maternal metaphors. Garner’s representation of the young women in the grip of a distorted feminism invokes an authentic feminism abused by this new generation of ‘feminist daughters’. As Jenna Mead suggested during the media event: ‘The young women are portrayed as daughters in need of a mother’s advice’ (Mead, 21/9/95, *SMH*). These bad feminist daughters are contrasted with Garner’s own biological daughter who represents an alternative to the punitiveness of the Ormond women. In relating her own daughter’s reaction to the case, Garner seeks to position herself as the exemplary ‘feminist mother’. Her daughter tells her: “I can tell you though, I might have reported it to someone – but I would never have gone to the cops” (212-213), thus reassuring the narrator that has not failed in her maternal duties (an anxiety which haunts her throughout). Her own daughter suggests she would, like the autonomous liberal individual subject endorsed by her mother, have dealt with the situation at an individual, as opposed to a structural, level. For Garner, this reliance on the latter is where feminism can be seen to have ‘failed’ women, and indeed men. This comment from her daughter also supports Garner’s notion that, on the hierarchy of pain and trauma established in the narrative, utilising legal remedies in this apparently minor case was excessive. These women are guilty of an improper use of their feminist legacy, an assumption that would come to circulate prominently throughout the media event.

In an effort to position herself as mother, Garner recounts the content of her letters to the complainants: ‘I added that I had a daughter of their age, and that it was as much for my peace of mind as anything else that I wanted to speak to them’ (59). In addition to her characterisation of the Ormond women, Garner narrates her encounters with young feminists who throughout function synecdochally for them. She ponders the ‘un-natural’ behaviour of these feminists:
As I walked down the stairs of the Union building I thought in dismay, is this what feminism has mutated into – these cold-faced, punitive girls? Or – Is there any cause in nature that makes these hard hearts? (100, author’s emphasis).

As Davis emphasises, Garner also suggests that Nicki Stewart “‘never fitted in’” and Elizabeth Rosen “‘didn’t perform any of the functions expected’” (Davis, 1997: 93). She seeks to morally discredit the young women, through characterising one of their bedrooms as slovenly and remarking upon a drink driving offence (67). These women were not, therefore, worthy of the protection they sought. Occupying a space on the periphery, they are aberrations. They are not, her narrative implies, ‘normal girls’. However, while they may not exemplify young women, they are seen to represent young feminists who perform their feminism in inappropriate ways. In Bodyjamming, Foong Ling Kong remarks upon this ‘Othering’ of young feminists:

In her narrative, contemporary feminism as practised by ‘young women’ is the ultimate Other: it slices into myths of Australian unity and Australianness, and is ideologically in direct conflict with the feminism with which she is familiar – and presumably does not want questioned and destabilised (Ling Kong, 1997: 73).

This generational motif structured the public dialogue on feminism for at least the next few years. The following quotation, which appears after her interview with the campus women’s officer, is indicative of the patronising tone she adopts towards young feminists throughout the narrative:

Unjust does not apply to a clumsy pass at a party by a man who’s had too much to drink. The two things belong in different moral realms. But my young activist would not agree. She had a grid labelled criminal, and she was determined to lay it down on the broadest field of male behaviour she could get it to encompass. ‘As you can see,’ she said, ‘I’m passionate about this’. Craziest of all, by criminalising hapless social blunders she actually believed she was ‘empowering’ women (101, author’s emphasis).

This trope of the hysterical, delusional feminist resurfaces in Garner’s speech to the Sydney Institute.

In seeing the women as manipulated by this group of feminists, Garner once again denies the women’s agency. Goldsworthy implies that, through the inclusion of a number of interactions with those who counteract the narrator’s own position, the text is heteroglossic: ‘If Garner had wanted to write propaganda or push barrows she would hardly have devoted so much space to meticulous transcription of arguments with which she disagrees’ (Goldsworthy, 1996: 85-86). Goldsworthy’s deployment of the term ‘transcription’ here is telling, invoking the ‘reality’ underpinning Garner’s representation. Nonetheless, as this example illustrates, in contrast to those speakers who support her, Garner rarely leaves such conflicting arguments to stand without authorial comment and thus such defensive claims about the narrative’s multi-vocality are compromised.
In a conversation with one of these young feminists, Garner explicitly conceptualises the generational relation in terms of an Oedipal model:

Christine G— was losing patience with me. Her seat was slightly higher than mine; she was looking down at me, and the light from a high north-facing window behind her was so strong that I had to keep blinking and turning away to rest my eyes. I felt terrifically at a disadvantage, as if I were importuning her. In fact, this sense of being out of date, irrelevant, reminded me painfully of certain days when I have visited my daughter and she has gone about her business in the house as if I weren’t there. So this is just about middle-aged mothers and daughters, then, just as the old council members and I (with my sudden pity, my reluctance to condemn) are about fathers and middle-aged daughters. I realised that I was afraid of this young woman. I was her political mother, and was busily, calmly, coldly demolishing me and my wimpy scruples, my desire to have mercy (emphasis mine, 97-98).

Throughout the narrative, Garner sets up an antipathy between younger feminists and her ‘generation’. As Curthoys suggests: ‘A major sin of the two young women in The First Stone was that they, as apostate daughters, had rejected Garner herself, feminist Mother-Author’ (Curthoys, 1997: 196), a point made explicit by Garner above. When describing her encounter with the university’s student women’s officer (the elected embodiment of a ‘campus’ feminist), following a description of her physical appearance, Garner suggests: ‘I took a breath to remark in a friendly tone that in my young days as a feminist we would have died rather than wear lipstick; but I held my tongue’ (96). While this may seem inconsequential, in later chapters I demonstrate how such a point – women’s relationship to dress and adornment – is constituted as one of the primary points of difference between generations. Later in the text, Garner recounts this episode to one of her peers:

I related to my friend my pathetic bravado in the presence of the fierce young Women’s Officer from the Student Union. ‘I practically pleaded for her respect’, I said. ‘I talked about abortion law reform, demos and police and so on – I said, ‘We put our bodies on the line’ – but she just looked at me coldly – she didn’t give a shit about our magnificent heroism’.

We sat at the table howling with laughter. ‘It’s a dialogue between generations’, said Angela Z —, wiping away the tears.

‘It’s not a dialogue,’ I said, blowing my nose. ‘It’s a fucking war.’ (106).

Garner believes her second-wave activism fails to generate the respect she deserves. She is enraged at the young feminist’s failure to express any sense of indebtedness or gratitude to her feminist foremothers.

This young feminist is contrasted with an alternative kind of feminist voice that appears throughout in conversations with Garner. These two groups – Garner’s cohort and those involved in the Ormond ‘conspiracy’ – are divided along Manichean lines, and the narrative focuses on the struggle between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ forms of feminism which it
actively constructs. While Garner is shown to both directly and indirectly argue with the young feminists whom she interviews, her engagements with the older women – second-wave feminists – remain free from authorial comment. Garner enlists the voices of a number of nameless women of her generation to suggest that her own critique is symptomatic of a larger discontent with what feminism has become. These women share Garner’s interpretation of the events as shedding some light on the inadequacies of contemporary feminism. Ann Curthoys suggests that recalling these conversations serves a particular rhetorical purpose: ‘Sometimes she delivers her most dismissive judgements through the mouths of her own friends, rather than directly’ (Curthoys, 1995: 207). Garner recounts a conversation with a ‘prominent feminist writer’, without any effort to unpack or provide commentary on what the woman has said. This is a significant, commonly utilised textual strategy in TFS, and is obviously part of Garner’s attempt to position the text as reportage. This character substantiates the narrator’s position that sexual harassment has complicated relations between men and women in the workplace and, more specifically, in the academy:

‘Sexual harassment has gone off the rails,’ she said. ‘Not because the charges are trumped up, but because its damaging people. ... We wanted flexibility – but all the energy that might have led to changes in this area has turned around and focused on this narrow, punitive business of sexual harassment’ (196, author’s emphasis).

Here, as throughout, feminism is thought to have been distorted. These accounts of conversations with women who concur with her perspective throughout appear to construct a consensus that attempts to reconstitute her ideological presuppositions as manifestations of ‘commonsense’. As I have shown, a similar strategy is deployed in relation to the women’s supporters, whose voices in their homogeneity blend to construct the monologism which she claims plagues contemporary feminism.

**Conclusion**

*The First Stone* is structurally characterised by circularity, particularly as the narrator reiterates its guiding melodramatic question on the penultimate page: ‘Why did Elizabeth Rosen and Nicole Stewart report Colin Shepherd to the police?’ (221). Despite appearances, this question is not rhetorical; on the contrary, its answer pervades the text: they went because of a misguided feminism. In this sense, two martyrs are offered up at the conclusion of the book: The Master and Garner herself (Docker, 1995: 16), both of whom bore the effects of a pernicious, powerful campus-based feminism. However, there

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25 Margaret Henderson uses the term ‘Manichean’ in her reading of Kaplan’s *The Meagre Harvest*, a critical narrative also structured in terms of ‘heroines and villains’ (Henderson, 2002c: 311). See also Levy: 1995.
are also two other figurative victims – feminism, and the university it has politicised. Through her identification of these other literal and symbolic victims, Garner works throughout to contest the Ormond women’s status as victims who require (or deserve) acknowledgement of their trauma. She simultaneously critiques the young women’s inactivity, while paradoxically arguing that they – in the grip of a warped feminist logic – were not passive enough (see Foord, 1998: 53). These young women, as potent symbols of risk, threaten the Master and his way of life and embody the victim feminism attacked throughout.

In this chapter, I have offered a necessarily subjective textual analysis of TFS. While this reading has identified problematic aspects of the text, this does not provide grounds for an outright condemnation of the subsequent media event. It is not my intention to position Garner’s text as one whose meanings exist independent of the context of reading. As Terry Threadgold remarks, although the text can offer resistances to the meaning readers may wish to make, ‘the signature of the author is no guarantee of anything, because it always require a counter-signature, someone to sign for it’ (Threadgold, 1997: 88). Likewise, studies of the function of media culture in the quotidian emphasise that ‘texts do not define ahead of time how they can be used or what functions they serve’ (Grossberg, 1992: 53). Neither the text, nor Garner herself (despite her frustrated attempts), can circumscribe the way TFS is taken up in media discourse. The remainder of this thesis will be preoccupied with how the truth-claims articulated in the book, mainly in relation to feminism itself, came to circulate, and were rewritten and reconfigured, in media discourse. In the next chapter, I read a series of culturally legitimated women commentators as ‘celebrity feminists’ who attempt (not always successfully) to manage the media event and the types of stories about feminism available through Australian news discourse in the mid-1990s.
Chapter Four
Voices Above Others: Celebrity Feminism in mid-1990s Australia

Celebrity permits a public voice; it shifts opinions, acts, decisions, feelings from the private stage to the public (James Monaco, 1977: 14).

Celebrity status confers on the person a certain discursive power: within society, the celebrity is a voice above others, a voice that is channelled into the media systems as being legitimately significant (P.D. Marshall, 1997: x).

The explanation of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of the single person, the author ‘confiding’ in us (Roland Barthes, 1977: 143).

Introduction
The second constitutive element through which I refigure The First Stone (TFS) media event is ‘celebrity’. In the previous chapter I offered a detailed textual analysis of the book at the centre of this media event. However, in recognition that the ‘political meanings of stories are contingent, not absolute’ (Felski, 2000: 146), this chapter considers the role of a number of high profile individuals in the formulation of the specific contexts in which TFS came to circulate and be consumed. Despite celebrations of the ‘postmodern public sphere’, the phenomenon of celebrity underscores that not all speakers are granted equivalent cultural currency in news media. As the highly marketable and newsworthy sources and actors with a particular resonance in the cultural unconscious (Raymond, 1995: 124), the media event’s key celebrities help to define its discursive parameters, ensure its newsworthiness and, consequently, its longevity. In this chapter, I focus on Helen Garner, Anne Summers, and Jenna Mead as the event’s central ‘celebrity feminists’. As such authorised commentators, these three women are granted the space in which ‘to tell feminism’s public story and history’ (Deem, 1999: 91). There are two central ways through which this chapter works to refigure previous ways of knowing the event: through exposing how Garner was granted cultural legitimacy via certain processes of celebrity and through analysing two other prominent women who were also authorised, through discursive and rhetorical
practices that have not been significantly unpacked, to speak on, by, or about feminism during TFS media event.

**Authorised Feminists: Helen Garners, Anne Summers, Jenna Mead**

Public space is often seen as gendered masculine, populated predominately by male voices (Keane, 1997: 17); TFS media event, in many ways, undermines such an assumption. However, the voices of women such as Summers and Mead receive comparatively little attention in previous critical narratives wherein Garner’s authority is seen to eclipse all others. ¹ To rectify this oversight, this chapter is organised according to a loose, overlapping taxonomy for these three high profile figures: author (Garner), journalist (Summers), and ‘eye-witness’ (Mead). These three forms demonstrate that celebrity is an internally variegated cultural phenomenon. As Ruth Barcan observes, the celebrity system fosters ‘a number of modalities of public personhood’ (Barcan, 2000: 145). TFS media event helps to produce and maintain the ‘author’, ‘journalist’, and ‘eye-witness’ as specific modes of cultural authority, which in part become meaningful through their variations from one another. As Marshall notes: ‘Oppositions, distinctions, and differentiations among various celebrities reveal their functions within the culture’ (Marshall, 1997: 59). These different modes of authority possess their own ‘logics and requirements’ (Gelder, 2000: 33), and are, like all ‘star systems’, hierarchically organised (Rein et al., 1997: 92).

These three asymmetrical forms of celebrity suggest much about the feminism-media nexus in Australia. Through this media event, though with varying degrees of intensity and success, these women attempt to delimit not only the meanings of the book, but of feminism more generally. However, the processes of ‘celebrification’ (Rojek: 2001) through which they were afforded such authority and what such (at times precarious and fleeting) authority enabled them to achieve, differ considerably. Here, I will show that these multiple forms of ‘celebrity feminism’ can co-exist and serve different (sometimes conflicting) purposes. These different forms can work either to reinforce, undermine or help to produce others operating concurrently in the mediasphere. As mediators, in addition to their own stories of feminism, they also permit others to enter into public dialogue over the meanings of feminism; these other contributors will be the subject of subsequent chapters.

Helen Garner, Anne Summers and Jenna Mead help to define the feminism against which young feminists (and other speakers) position themselves within the event, as both Chapters Five and Six suggest. With varying degrees of qualification,

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¹ It is important to here remember the absent celebrities, the Ormond women, into whose lives Garner and the media peered, and whose agency was expressed in the act of not speaking or being visible, of strategic withdrawal. See XX: 1997.
these three women explicitly position themselves, and are positioned, as feminists within the terms of this media event. However, as Christine Delphy remarks, such self-identification is not a pre-requisite ‘to speak in or of feminism’ (Delphy, 1993: 385). Rather than invoking the (in)authenticity of these women’s feminist identities or an idealised feminist speaker against whom they can be judged, this analysis ‘investigate[s] and question[s] how and why validation and authority come about, and how differing processes of validation become authoritative or not’ (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2000: 215). The question though is not simply the authorisation of women, but what such women (are able to) say and the contribution they make to publicly circulating stories of feminism within news media. This chapter, therefore, looks not only at how their celebrity enables and determines what these women say, but also how such celebrity works to circumscribe how it is said. In relation to the where of celebrity, women’s magazines in particular are often touted as fundamental to the production and circulation of celebrity in Australia (Turner et al., 2000: 153). In contrast, this chapter will focus on the little acknowledged role of broadsheets and their supplements in the constitution of ‘celebrity feminists’. The three case studies into which this chapter is divided will simultaneously engage with the way media representations and their own self-representations as interviewees, speakers, and feature and opinion-piece writers worked to discursively constitute their (celebrity) feminism within the media event frame. Before moving onto the analysis of Garner, Summers and Mead, it is necessary to make a brief incursion into the rapidly expanding field of celebrity studies.

The Cult(ure) of Celebrity: Discourse and Power

Celebrity is fundamental to the ‘maximum visibility’ constitutive of media events, as John Fiske argues: ‘The figures who play the key roles in these events literally embody the politico-cultural meanings and struggles over them about which [Australia] is most uncertain, most anxious, and therefore most divided’ (Fiske, 1996: xv). The role of the celebrity, therefore, is more complex and multilayered than some of its critics assume. The type of feminism circulating in the mediatised public sphere is imbricated in questions of power, a power evidenced during the event by the cultural legitimation of particular speakers. The poststructuralist rejection of foundationalism in favour of a focus on the politics of knowledge-production and truth-claims is important here. In this post-positivist climate, truth is not transcendental or universal: it is a product of particular discursive formations (Foucault: 1972). In recognition of the contingency of

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2 The type of celebrity they come to embody circumscribes their textual presence in the event; that is, different forms of authority result in different types of texts (for example, Garner features most prominently through authorial profiles, Summers through her own journalism, and Mead through a mixture of both).
epistemological authority and power/knowledge complexes, it is axiomatic that there are no true discourses, only more or less powerful ones. In the wake of such challenges to the singularity and absoluteness of ‘truth’, Tania Modleski emphasises that feminists’ critical focus should not necessarily be on who is telling the truth, but simply: ‘Whose story gets culturally legitimated and how?’ (Modleski, 1997: 220). In the contemporary context, the answer to such a question is often the celebrity.

Celebrity is a mechanism of power, a means by which certain speakers are granted, not only the ability to speak, but to have such speech legitimated (Marshall, 1997: x). Newspaper discourses circulate and authenticate truth-claims by a select number of ‘authorized knowers’ (Ericson et al., 1989: 3): ‘In the contemporary knowledge society news represents who are the authorized knowers and what are their authoritative versions of reality’ (Ericson et al., 1989: 3). The celebrity, including its feminist varieties, is one of the contemporary manifestations of such privileged epistemological authority.

The celebrity – perhaps in a way that replaces or reconfigures the ‘public intellectual’ (see Lewis: 2001) – is, as this event attests, an important ideological and epistemological ‘player’ in public discourse (Marshall, 1998: 19). Though critics argue that Garner is a ‘public intellectual’ (Dessaix: 1998), I contend that this framework does not offer the most productive way to theorise her presence (or that of Summers and Mead) in this media event. As Tania Lewis remarks, it is important to recognise the shifting contexts in which the ‘public intellectual’ contemporaneously operates, and reconfigure our conception accordingly (Lewis, 2001: 234). Likewise, it is necessary refigure the way feminists are given voice in public discourse in a media context desirous of more and more celebrity.

In theoretical terms, celebrity is now the main model through which the public figure is conceptualised (Craig, 2003: 57); it is not simply reserved for those involved in ‘entertainment’, but increasingly encompasses political leaders and those traditionally seen as detached from the ‘exigencies of everyday life’ (Craig, 2003: 58). In Australia, as in other cultural contexts, attention to celebrities now appears to dominate much contemporary media coverage (see Turner: 1996, Marshall: 1999, Wark: 1999. Turner et al.: 2000, Turner: 2004). The 1990s in particular – the period with which I am preoccupied – is characterised by an ‘obsession’ with ‘fame, celebrity, public confession and scandal’ including in so-called ‘quality newspapers’ (Lumby, 1999: xi). As I have observed in Chapter One, this ‘drift towards celebrity and lifestyle journalism’ (Turner

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3 In a broader sense, Henry Giroux argues that media culture, in its production and dissemination of particular ways of knowing, functions as the ‘pedagogical force par excellence’ (Giroux, 2000: 10), a role that often goes unacknowledged (Giroux, 2000: 32).

4 I have chosen not to deploy this problematic term, and instead concur with Lewis that distinctions between intellectuals and celebrities are becoming tenuous (see Lewis: 2001).
et al., 2000: 46) is symptomatic of the changing role of journalism in contemporary western media, of the dissolution of division between “hard” (“serious”, “fact-based”) news and “soft” (“light”, “human interest” or “interpretation based”), a shift which itself is gendered feminine (Carter et al., 1998: 7). Nonetheless, ambivalence about the pervasiveness of celebrity and its highly visible destabilisation of public/private boundaries remains common. Celebrity is often represented as the ‘epitome of the trivialisation of the media’ (Turner et al., 2000: 5). In such ‘narratives of decline’ (McNair, 2000: 10), the expanded discursive space in and through which celebrity circulates is symbolic of the decay or ‘dumbing down’ of media culture that I have previously mentioned. The celebrity, as a ‘human pseudo-event’ (Boorstin, 1971: 57), is decried as further evidence of the mediasphere’s pernicious inauthenticity (see Gitlin: 1980) and depthlessness: ‘The quality press, glitzy magazines, current affairs television and major publishers have all been sucked into the celebrity vortex and its profitable promise’ (Schultz, 2004: 9). In these accounts, media celebrities are ‘intrinsically inappropriate as cultural representatives of any sort’ (Turner et al., 2000: 171). For other critics, however, the situation is not so bleak.

**Publicising the Private: The Possibilities of Celebrity**

In contrast to the pessimism highlighted above, this ‘tabloidisation’ and increase attention to celebrity is seen as a form of ‘democratisation’, symbolising the dramatic recasting of news values (Allen, 1999: 190). As Turner et al.’s use of a metaphor of pathology indicates, celebrity:

> is not merely an ugly growth on a media system, the removal of which will return us to a prior and better state of being, but part of a much deeper transformation of the process by which information and entertainment are produced, distributed and consumed (Turner et al., 2000: 173).

Therefore, although romanticisation of celebrities should be avoided, this transformation need not be conceptualised as entirely negative. In particular, the destabilisation of the public/private dichotomy, which is central to this transformation of media, is something for which feminists have long advocated. The Ormond affair centres on questions of privacy, publicity and their delineation. It is unsurprising that, as the embodiment of such tensions, the celebrity became such an integral part of the event’s realisation. Further, as bridges ‘between the private world and public debate’ (Turner et al., 2000: 14), celebrities often work as mediators during times of political and social upheaval. Celebrities are, therefore, ‘significant nodal points of articulation between the social and the personal’ (Rojek, 2001: 16). Moreover, celebrities function to make the distinction between public and private, or rather its collapse, meaningful to contemporary audiences. As the site for the production of ‘an elaborate discourse on
the public individual’ (Marshall, 1998: 4), celebrity provides the theoretical and practical means for negotiating the tensions of modern subjectivity.

For my purposes, the most notable by-product of this increased investment in celebrity and the ‘elevation of the personal’ (Turner et al., 2000: 14) is a shift in the way media engages with feminism, a shift palpable in TFS event and about which many feminists are unsurprisingly ambivalent. Here, the feminisation of celebrity and the celebritisation of feminism are intertwined. Rather than news attention to feminism focusing on particular feminist events or issues commonly identified as ‘feminist’, contemporary engagements rely more heavily upon individual celebrity feminists: now, more than ever, feminist issues are associated with celebrity figures known to be feminist (Germaine Greer being the most well-known British case in point), and life-style type interviews with such figures (and/or reviews of their latest book) have tended to replace the reporting of issues and events of feminist interest (Pearce, 2003: 23).

Along these lines, TFS event is seen to prove ‘the marketability of personality-driven feminism’ (Bail, 1996: 8). While now more pronounced, such a strategy of individualisation is by no means an innovative journalistic device. On the contrary, news discourse commonly ‘individuates its subjects’, using high degrees of personalisation to produce the drama upon which it thrives (Turner et al., 2000: 9); TFS media event is no exception. Such individualisation also works as a marker of a celebrity culture, consumer capitalism and the previously mentioned trend toward lifestyle journalism.

The shifts in the mediascape identified above have had a profound effect on how feminism comes to mean, and indeed on how feminism should approach the media both in a theoretical and practical sense. The celebrity feminist, however, is qualitatively different from other entertainment-based manifestations. In Daniel Boorstin’s terms, the celebrity is ‘known for his [sic] well known-ness’ (Boorstin, 1971: 57). Conversely, the celebrity feminist is important not simply for who she is (‘known for her well known-ness’), but for what she says. That is, her celebrity is based on, and sustained by, her enunciative practices, a significant factor that distinguishes her from other less politically charged forms and which therefore requires an alternative framework; such a framework is provided by Jennifer Wicke (1998).

‘Superstars’ and the Politics of Celebrity Feminism

Celebrity feminism, as a phenomenon distinct from other forms of celebrity, requires further examination; such examination will help to more deeply understand the relationship between the TFS event’s most prominent feminist speakers and the

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5 Lewis makes this argument in terms of the need for attention to the ‘celebrity intellectual’ (Lewis: 2001).
mediatised public sphere. While Graeme Turner suggests that celebrity is the mechanism ‘that brings literature and journalism in their closest relation for most Australians’ (Turner, 1996: 2), the same can be said of celebrity in relation to feminism and journalism, an argument readily substantiated by TFS media event. Given that many women’s access to feminism is textually mediated through representations of celebrity feminists such as Germaine Greer and Camille Paglia (Skeggs, 1997: 140), the cultural, and even pedagogical, significance of the celebrity feminist should not be under-estimated.

As part of a wider feminist concern with who is authorised to speak (see Alcoff: 1991, Ang: 1995), concerns about the politics of celebrity are neither surprising nor new. ‘Transformation’ of active feminists into celebrities by the media has been viewed largely in terms of the inevitable dilution of feminism’s ‘radical messages’ (Gever, 2003: 87) and, in terms of second-wave engagement with media, a ‘compulsive focus on individual personalities’ was believed to contradict the stated egalitarian, anti-hierarchical principles of the women’s movement (Gever, 2003: 88, see also Gitlin: 1980). As Shelagh Young argues:

The ‘personal’ may well be ‘political’, yet as feminists begin to contemplate their relationship to the mainstream and the place of feminism within popular culture, we find ourselves wondering whether the popular ‘personality’ can really be ‘political’ (Young, 1988: 174).

Feminist critics have also argued that the media simply promotes those least likely to threaten the dominant order, ‘flamboyant’ movement leaders who do not ‘represent the movement as a whole’ (Huddy, 1998: 185) or ‘stars’ who are not ‘representative of anything but themselves’ (Faust, 1994: 12). The all-powerful media is consequently charged with the appointment of inappropriate (often conservative) feminist speakers, thereby minimising the movement’s diversity (Bradley, 1998: 171). However, the case of Australia’s own ‘pioneer celebrity feminist’, Germaine Greer, complicates such analysis; Greer is anything but an innocuous liberal feminist, although her perceived heterosexual desirability is seen to facilitate her feminist visibility and celebrity (Sheridan et al.: 2000, see also Spongberg: 1993).

For these critics, the figure of the celebrity works as a strategic containment device, proffering a non-representative feminism that can only ever be negative; like other forms of celebrity, the celebrity feminist subject remains inevitably marred by her

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6 It appears that authors of works marketed as ‘feminist’ have historically been the most highly visible variety of feminist in the mediatised public sphere (see Tuchman, 1978: 175); TFS media event substantiates this point, as Garner, Summers and Mead each published books about feminism in Australia which were afforded a high degree of media visibility.

7 Apart from Sheridan et al. (2000), much recent critical work on such feminist ‘superstars’ has focused on conservative American writers such as Camille Paglia, Kate Roiphe and Naomi Wolf (Whelehan: 1995, Siegel: 1997a and 1997b, Sorisio: 1997), with little attention to Australian feminist celebrity.
supposed inauthenticity. This pessimism is unsurprising, given that the women who are invoked in critical discussions of celebrity feminism are often feminism’s most stringent critics or those who ‘blow the whistle’ on its limitations (Davis, 1997: 83): American authors such as Camille Paglia, Rene Denfeld, and Naomi Wolf. In these accounts, the celebrity feminist epitomises all that is wrong with contemporary media culture, underlining the ‘dangers’ of feminist involvement therein. Such criticism demonstrates that the authority afforded ‘celebrity feminists’ sits uncomfortably with many feminists. Nonetheless, not all critics of the celebrity feminist phenomenon work from within this cultural pessimist paradigm.

The term ‘celebrity feminism’ as theorised by Jennifer Wicke moves substantially beyond metaphors of celebrity as a force ‘contaminating’ or harming a homogenous unmediated feminism. First published in 1994, Wicke’s ‘Celebrity Material: Materialist Feminism and the Culture of Celebrity’ is the key feminist text on celebrity, media and feminism. In this article, Wicke attempts to recuperate the feminist celebrity from the sorts of criticisms outlined above. She argues that the absence of a visible women’s movement has created a void which popular feminism – and specifically celebrity feminism – can (albeit partially) fill. Wicke suggests that feminist engagement with this ‘celebrity zone’, as the public space where feminism is ‘in most active cultural play’ (Wicke, 1998: 390), should be seen as a crucial site of interrogation for feminist critics: ‘The celebrity zone is there, and we all pay heed to it, intersecting as it does with academic-feminist quarrels and controversies, with public debates, politics, and representations’ (Wicke, 1998: 407).

The celebrity feminist is a crossover subject position, one which regularly troubles distinctions between academic and popular epistemes. Wicke cautions feminists against dismissing such a realm on the grounds that it offers ‘corrupt’, ‘inauthentic’ images of feminism: ‘celebrity visibility per se should not be automatically associated with corruption or selling out – our mass-cultural tag sale took place long ago (Wicke, 1998: 390). The celebrity field, rather than being a ‘realm of ideological ruin’ (Wicke, 1998: 391), is much more complex than previous criticisms would allow. The academic tendency to ‘vilify’ (Wicke, 1998: 391) the celebrity sphere simply results in a crude reinscription of the high/low binary opposition, designating the ‘popular’ as the site

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A number of other critics argue similarly that media culture’s promotion of feminist ‘superstars’ offers little cause for celebration. Like the above criticisms, it is posited that celebrity feminists are ‘false-feminist opportunists’ (Hogeland, 1995: 95) or ‘faux feminists’ (Faludi, 1992: 32), who are ‘hyped by corporate media’ (Pozner, 2003: 33). Others suggest that their elevation facilitates a denial of difference (Huddy, 1997: 186); homogenises women (Vavrus, 2002: 184); fails to challenge the existing social order while appealing to market forces, (Young, 1997: 7); and strips feminism of its ‘depth’, promoting women who are ‘quietly misogynistic’ (Davis, 1999: 92).
less worthy of critical engagement (Hollows, 2000: 203), a position I have problematised in Chapter One.

Wicke’s model contrasts with other forms of celebrity, where public attention to the private life seeks to uncover the ‘real’ person behind the inauthentic image projected within the discourses of celebrity (Marshall, 1997: 4). Here, the focus is on the celebrity as a legitimate speaker, not as a self whose interiority exists to be discovered. Moreover, the celebrity feminist need not explicitly identify as ‘feminist’ to be active, or activated, in this zone. ‘Celebrity feminism’, for Wicke, ‘is an ineluctable media category today, and a woman with a profile in the public sphere will be assimilated to it’ (Wicke, 1998: 389). Questions of an authentic feminist identity in media culture therefore become irrelevant. This should not imply, however, an uncritical populism on Wicke’s part. On the contrary, Wicke also acknowledges the tensions in celebrity feminism, viewing this zone as at once productive and unproductive: ‘Good things happen in the celebrity zone and bad things happen in that zone’ (Wicke, 1998: 391, see also Lilburn, 1999: 6). In this sense, celebrity is indicative of the ambivalence marking the interaction of feminism and media more broadly.

There is, however, one important limit to the contributions of celebrity feminists to public discourse: their whiteness and class privilege. Celebrity feminism also comes to mean through its exclusions, a point not thoroughly considered by Wicke. As John Hartley argues, ‘meaning in news-discourse is not only determined by what is there, but also by what is absent, not selected, discursively repressed’ (Hartley, 1982: 117). Celebrity is fundamentally a question of privilege and thus, while at times it facilitates feminist entrance into the mediasphere, is often contingent on the omission of other, non-hegemonic voices. All the women in this chapter are highly educated, white, middle-class, heterosexual, successful women. In this sense, there is a danger that one set of privileged cultural actors (i.e., white conservative men) will be replaced by another set, possessing its own unique exclusions. As an inherently hierarchal system, celebrity is ‘determined along lines of race, class, and gender difference’ (Newbury, 2000: 283). Perhaps it is through the event’s processes of celebrification that this elision becomes most visible, that is, through both the literal invisibility of bodies racially constituted other than white and through the symbolic invisibility of its participants’ whiteness (see Gabriel: 1998). In the specifically Australian context, any theory or form of feminism that ‘reinstates the white feminist subject as the main actor’ (Ang, 1995: 71) must be critiqued for its exclusions. In this event, celebrity feminism is a form of racialised authority.

bell hooks has explicitly addressed the limitations posed by a celebrity feminism which at its core remains white, middle-class, and heterosexual (hooks: 1994). For
hooks, celebrity feminism – its limitations not withstanding – does offer opportunities that feminists cannot afford to sacrifice (hooks, 1994: 90). Wicke’s framework negotiates this tension by refusing to view criticism of celebrity and recognition of its potential as mutually exclusive. Rather than seeing these limitations as a condition of the media, as many critics do, she assumes that it is more productive to view not the politics of celebrity but rather the politics of individual speakers as the main source of such limitations. Wicke offers feminist critics an ability to discriminate between different representations without condemning the systems of celebification which foreground them in the first instance. While I have criticised Garner’s book in the previous chapter, and will further criticise her discursive construction of contemporary feminism, I ultimately concur with Wicke’s comments regarding US celebrity feminist Naomi Wolf. She suggests that, although ‘some form of feminist discourse’ is occurring within this ‘celebrity space’, her ‘tart criticisms are meant for the insufficiencies of her book and her politics, not for celebrityhood itself’ (Wicke, 1998: 397).

Building upon Wicke’s comments, I would extrapolate here and suggest that it is not merely Garner’s own enunciative practices that are important in this discursive realm, but the gap her book’s publication consequently opened for others – including Summers and Mead. Sheridan et al. likewise suggest that ‘we would argue that all these books [‘blockbuster’ texts] have in common is an author who functions as a public persona, a celebrity – who has the capacity to create a space for public debate on feminism’ (Sheridan et al., 2000: 343). Here, this delineation of public space makes the celebrity an indispensable part of the way feminism comes to signify, and be performed, in contemporary media discourse. In this sense, ‘the representation of certain highly privileged news celebrities allows a range of feminist debates to be articulated’ (Carter et al., 1998: 8). TFS media event functioned as a discursive site within which a broader dialogue over/with/between feminists could occur, and the ‘feminist celebrity’ was an integral part of the realisation of such a conversation.

As TFS media event reaffirms, celebrity is central to feminist visibility in the late twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries. In the following sections, building upon my preliminary analysis of celebrity, I consider these three modes of celebrity as part of a specific cultural moment (Newbury, 2000: 273). This analysis asks: How is feminism spoken through these figures? What do these performances tell us about feminist subjectivities in a media-saturated environment? While unified under the broader rubric of ‘celebrity feminist’, the spaces in which these three women spoke, what they could say, the legitimacy afforded their articulations, and the consequences of such speech (in terms of the event’s direction) differ markedly. My addition of the three qualifiers to the term ‘celebrity feminist’ – author, journalist, eye-witness – works to
simultaneously mark their commonalities and deviations, both from each other and from Wicke’s model. The first of the media event’s celebrity feminists analysed here is its most prominent: Helen Garner.

**Helen Garner as Hybrid Celebrity**

Helen Garner functioned as the event’s most highly visible ‘celebrity feminist’; she even appeared on *Who Weekly*’s “The 25 most intriguing people of 1995” list (see Bulbeck, 1999: 3). The fact that Garner was afforded a high degree of authority during the event signals that, despite proclamations of expiration, authorship maintains its currency. Having been constructed by various media commentators as responsible for a broader cultural conversation over feminism, it is not surprising that Garner was called upon throughout the event to participate in its dramatic articulation. Her celebrity provides her with the space to re-articulate, and in many cases extend, the book’s key tenets. In this sense, much media commentary comes to view *TFS* not as a textual construct but as the unmediated expression of its author’s opinion, a move assuring her news value.

The hybridity to which I refer in the title of this section relates to the way Garner’s literary capital was successfully ‘converted’ into a form of celebrity feminism (see Carter, 1997: xii). As Henderson and Rowlands suggest, the media event represents Garner’s ‘debut as feminist spokeswoman’ (Henderson and Rowlands, 1996: 12). She is not only a celebrity author but an ‘expert’ on contemporary feminism, which makes her eminently more marketable (Turner et al., 2000: 57) and newsworthy. In media attention to Garner’s most recent work, *Joe Cinque’s Consolation*, the role of *TFS* in reconstituting her reputation ‘from author of intimate fiction’ to ‘public, political figure’ is also emphasised (Wyndham, 17/7/04, *Good Weekend*: 24).

The consistent positioning of the text as ‘non-fiction’ ensured that Garner could be called upon when her text came to be publicly interpreted in ways she, or supportive commentators, failed to sanction. As Kate Foord argues, Garner’s power is based on her status as ‘the only “real” character among fictionalised *dramatis personae*’ (Foord, 1998: 44). This collapse of author and narrator serves to ‘doubly amplify’ Garner’s voice and imbues the narrative with extra-literary authority, thereby stretching:

the narrator’s reach both within the text – where her status as ‘real’ is amplified by the extra-textual hyperreality of the celebrity – and outside the text – where the truth-status of Garner’s version of the Ormond case is boosted by the ascription to her of an elevated place in cultural discourse (Foord, 1998: 44).

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9 As a so-called ‘tabloid’ magazine, *Who Weekly* is central in the constitution and circulation of celebrities.
Garner’s celebrity was buttressed by the narrative and rhetorical strategies of her book. That is, the book’s first person enunciation facilitated these public authorial performances and impassioned acts of self-defence.

Garner’s celebrity sign is produced by, and produces, intense public interest in her text and its representations of feminism. This circular logic is central to celebrity culture (Turner et al.: 2000, Boorstin: 1971). The ‘celebrity feminist’ status afforded Garner was used – by herself and commentators – to (re)assert the authority she had textually claimed within the initial narrative. However, as a result, many critics take Garner’s authority for granted (Cossins: 1995, Henderson and Rowlands: 1996, Bird: 1996, Davis: 1997, Ricketson: 1997), and thereby fail to consider the complex signifying processes through which such authority is (re)produced.

For critics who take her authority to be self-evident, her privileged position within media discourse during this event is guaranteed, and is further buttressed by celebrity: ‘Celebrity journalism saw to it that the Ormond affair became the Garner affair’ (Mead, 1997a: 26). Anne Cossins argues that Garner’s truth-claims are validated because she is a ‘published author of recognised standing’ and ‘a self-described feminist author appearing to “abandon” her “feminist sisters” (Garner versus feminism’s “grimmer tribes”’) (Cossins, 1995: 536). Cossins continues to overstate Garner’s power to silence conflicting interpretations of feminism, arguing that ‘in the absence of any other material with the same wide dissemination’ Garner’s statements ‘became the truth’ (Cossins, 1995: 537, emphasis original, see also Henderson and Rowlands, 1996, Darcy, 1998a: 49). Similarly, Mead argues that Garner’s ‘icon status … insulated The First Stone and its author from all but the most carefully worded criticism’ (Mead, 1997a: 37). Furthermore, for these critics, Garner’s authorisation as a speaker on feminism is the source of grave anxiety; Mead argues that Garner is a ‘fake’ feminist, unrepresentative due to this inauthenticity (Mead, 16/8/95, The Age: 17). Both Garner and the culture industries responsible for her celebrification are seen as a limit to the productivity of public discourse about feminism and sexual harassment (for example, see Ricketson, 1997: 97). In addition to the assumption that Garner’s existing literary capital secured journalistic support, others assumed that the book’s conservative gender politics (politics the author was thought to share) automatically resulted in sympathetic media portrayals (see Gelber, Green Left Weekly, 26/4/95: 32, Meade, 30/9/95, The Australian: 6, Davis, 1997: 82).

For these critics, Garner’s authority during this media event remained largely uncontested, an authority sustained by the endless stream of prominent conservative supporter-commentators (see Mead: 1997a). However, the assumption that the news media merely reflect and reinforce a pre-established, unquestioned authority elides the
The Undead Author: Literary Celebrity and Promotional Discourse

Despite anti-authorial criticism (Barthes: 1977, Foucault: 1980), the ways in which Garner was produced as ‘Author’ in many of the media responses illustrates that, in public discourse at least, the author is far from dead. In their desire to avoid ‘committing intentional, affective, and other fallacies’, literary critics have excluded a vital part of the reception process: public attention to the author (Rodden, 1989: 91). This chasm between academic and non-academic conceptualisations of the author, where the author is respectively ‘eliminated’ or ‘hyped’, has been the subject of much critical attention (Bradbury in Moran, 2000: 59). As a theoretical framework, celebrity helps to navigate these two inadequate extremes of the author’s complete absence or complete presence (O’Connell, 1996: 43). Although literary celebrity itself is not simply a modern phenomenon (Cawelti, 1977: 164), the public performance of authors – a central marketing device – is experiencing increases in demand and popularity as new spaces open up to literally host such performances (O’Connell, 1996: 43, see also Roland Barthes’ ‘Death of the Author’ and Michel Foucault’s ‘What is an author?’ represented a reconceptualisation of romantic notions of the author as the self-present producer in works of literary genius. Instead, they viewed the author not as the source and controller of the text meanings, but a discursive construct mobilised to delimit texts’ interpretive possibilities. In this vein, Foucault coined the term ‘author-function’ to signal the author is produced outside the text.

10 Roland Barthes’ ‘Death of the Author’ and Michel Foucault’s ‘What is an author?’ represented a reconceptualisation of romantic notions of the author as the self-present producer in works of literary genius. Instead, they viewed the author not as the source and controller of the text meanings, but a discursive construct mobilised to delimit texts’ interpretive possibilities. In this vein, Foucault coined the term ‘author-function’ to signal the author is produced outside the text.

11 Feminist critics have been profoundly ambivalent about these proclamations of the author’s death, with such pronouncement being seen as a premature foreclosure of agency for women. See Rita Felski: 2003.
The literary reputation is now primarily established not in the academy, but in the mediasphere, through lifestyle interviews, glossy magazines and ‘photoshoots in the weekend magazines’, a move that causes great anxiety among a number of academics (Turner, 1999: 18-19). As Kate Douglas argues, ‘if the “personal” continues to be profitable, biography will continue to permeate through cultural production, influencing reception in ways not anticipated by those who pronounced “the death of the author”’ (Douglas, 2001: 821). Through its construction of Garner’s literary celebrity, *TFS* media event is further testament to the commercial viability of the ‘personal’ and this immense cultural investment in biographical reading.

As part of this ‘authorial resurrection’ (Douglas, 2001: 813), many of the event’s prominent commentators, journalistic and academic, make the assumption that ‘Garner’ the celebrity overshadowed the book (Manne, 6/4/96, *The Australian*: 9, Bird, 1996: 48, Henderson and Rowland: 1996, Goldsworthy: 1996). For Mathew Ricketson, it is Garner’s ‘fame’ rather than her storytelling ability that most engages readers (Ricketson, 1997: 97). In this formulation, ‘the book comes to matter less than the authorial persona’ (Sheridan et al., 2001: 339). *TFS* certainly reached ‘media saturation’, a feat in no small part due to the marketing of its author (see Poland, 2003: 132), an enormity signified semiotically by the size of ‘Helen Garner’ on the book’s cover (Bird, 1996: 48). This re-focusing to the personality at the cost of their work is thought to be an unfortunate by-product of the celebrity machine (Boorstin, 1971: 162, Cawelti, 1977: 163). Graeme Turner’s comments, erring on the side of ‘cultural pessimism’, are indicative here: ‘Within the world of the feature article, authors are increasingly represented in ways that disconnect them from their work. Successful writers are offered to us as celebrities or personalities, interesting because they are famous’ (Turner, 1996: 9). Granted form may not be at the top of the agenda (Turner, 1996: 9) during the media conversation over *TFS*, but to assume that the book is obscured by the mechanics of celebrity, as does Turner, is to miss the way the construction of Garner’s privileged relation to her text became central to this celebrity (and to the event itself).

This media event demonstrates that *TFS* is not necessarily lost in media attention to its signatory. Rather, in media discourse, the text and the authorial ‘text’ feed back into the interpretation of each other. The persistent rhetorical slippage that sees Garner (subject of utterance) and the narrator of *TFS* (subject of enunciation)12 unproblematically conflated (a conflation that underwrites the entire event) means that most media commentators viewed Garner’s life narrative as the key to unlocking the text and its author’s supposedly unbiased insights into feminism, itself not in the least a

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new form of literary critical practice. Such auto/biography has been controversial, particularly when authors represent ‘themselves not only in the narrative proper, but also in interviews and other public discourse as literally identical to the “I” of the narratives’ (Lakoff, 2000: 35). There are a number of representational strategies used in newspaper discourse to authenticate Garner as a feminist speaker. Although previous critics of the event have argued that Garner’s ‘name’, as a signifier, worked to bring her particular discursive construction of Australian feminism to the fore (Darcy, 1998a: 49, Bird, 1996: 48), a detailed analysis of the rhetorical processes through which such authority was established has not yet been produced.

Shifting Celebrity: Garner’s Ambivalent Relation to Feminism

The most important textual sites in the constitution of Garner’s celebrity feminism are reviews and feature articles profiling the author. In Genette’s terminology, such pieces are ‘public epitexts’, which – like the celebrity herself – attempt to curtail particular readings of the book (Genette: 1997). Although feminism – like Garner’s sign – is difficult to pin down, efforts to delimit its meanings are evident throughout the event. Two such nodal points where this occurs are print media biographical profiles of Garner and her self-representation, mainly through her Sydney Institute speech. Such biographical pieces, as an integral part of the ‘author function’, work to ‘constrain the proliferation of meaning’ (Foucault, 1984: 118) and thereby limit the way the text can become meaningful. As the ‘source’ of TFS, Garner’s life narrative circumscribes the feminist stories that circulate throughout the media event. The three dominant aspects of her life narrative central to the event and through which she was authorised to speak were her feminist activism, her own relations with men, and her authorship.

Establishing a feminist past

Throughout the media event, Garner – as both feminist and biological mother – is seen as a legitimate speaker on feminism. These aspects of her subjectivity are commonly invoked as mutually reinforcing forms of authority. Luke Slattery argues:

Garner, a 50-something feminist is well-equipped to make sense of the inter-generational confusions of contemporary feminism. She has lived the struggles of her generation, and has a daughter about the same age as the complainants in this tragedy (Slattery, The Australian Magazine, 4-5/3/95: 33).

This assumption that Garner speaks from a position of epistemic privilege is reiterated throughout the media event. Furthermore, her earlier writing was used to establish her authority to speak on feminism: ‘Ms Garner emerged from the sex wars of the 1960s and 1970s a popular voice for feminism’ (Jackman, Courier-Mail, 31/3/95: 18). In a review in The Bulletin Garner is seen as ‘an old-timer of the women’s movement’ (Campion, 4/4/95, The Bulletin: 89). Her claims to authority (like many speakers in the
(event) were bound to generationalism. As she later suggested, she ‘tried to present the story via the effect it had on a seventies feminist like me and others of my age and experience’ (Garner, 1997: 17). Like all celebrity biographies, these narratives of Garner’s personal history help constitute her ‘media-ted’ identity in the press (Turner, 1993: 133).

While such ‘authenticating “anecdotes”’ (Pearce, 2003: 41) are a central narratorial strategy in TFS, they also characterise most media representations of its author. For example, Garner is seen to have participated in activities that mark her feminist ‘authenticity’:

She’d joined an organisation formed to help change abortion laws and arrange safe terminations for pregnant women; she got involved with women’s consciousness raising groups, exploring friendships with other women and starting up communal households with other single mothers… (Leser, 18-19/3/95, Good Weekend: 34).

As Cath Darcy suggests, accounts of Garner’s past activism are used to position her as a ‘veteran of the feminist struggle’ (Darcy, 1998a: 45). Similarly, the article ‘War and Peace’ by Kate Cole-Adams commences with a caricatured representation of Garner’s feminist past:

When she was a boiler-suited, lipstick-hating, thirty-something, Helen Garner went out one night with a group of women friends and spray painted RAPE: THE END OF EVERY WHISTLE on suburban walls around Melbourne. Twenty years on, the writer is less succinct. And much less certain (Cole-Adams, 8/5/95, Time: 74).

While Garner’s feminism was once dogmatic and fixed, its contemporary form is fluid and hesitant. In The Age, Karen Kissane also suggests that the Garner responsible for TFS now feels distanced from her second-wave self: ‘As a ‘70s feminist she went to consciousness-raising groups, wrote women’s lib newsletters, helped desperate women get abortions. But now she is irritated by her feminist tag’ (Kissane, 27/12/95, The Age: 12). Like Leser and Cole-Adams, Kissane uses a number of familiar tropes, such as consciousness-raising, to historicise Garner’s feminism. Second-wave feminism in these accounts, as throughout the debate, becomes historically fixed and, through emphasising particular activist performances, these journalists represent a metonymic view of second-wave feminism (see Siegel, 1997b: 63).

As these above quotations suggest, in contrast to what Garner refers to as theory-sprouting “campus feminists” (cited in Neill, 24-25/6/95, The Australian, ‘Review’: 2), her feminism is established through a series of second-wave activist performances. Through such historicisation, these journalists suggest that Garner has ‘earned’ her right to speak about feminism. As one commentator argued, TFS was ‘Garner’s remarkably frank reassessment of herself and her place in the feminist cause in the 1990s compared with her own radicalism of the 1960s’ (Johnson, 5/4/95,
Garner’s feminist history that came to be used as the grounds on which she could speak in and of its present. However, as Cole-Adams and Kissane’s comments suggest, the narrativisation of Garner’s past activism commonly works as a segue to her disavowal of contemporary feminism, a gesture that enables her to speak authoritatively and ‘objectively’ about its misdirection. Garner’s judgement, they imply, is not clouded by her affective investment in the misguided feminism of which she speaks. In an article about the Museum of Contemporary Art author event, where Garner read from *TFS*, she too identifies as a feminist yet with qualifications: “I would still call myself a feminist, even though I sincerely and deeply deplore what it has developed into. I’m a feminist in that I want justice for women but I don’t like punitiveness and the disingenuousness” (Freeman, *SMH*, 24/4/95: 3). Here, Garner is the nostalgic feminist, distancing herself from its contemporary manifestations as she had done in the book itself. She stakes her ‘claim to legitimacy, authenticity, and accuracy’ by positioning herself as the opposition to ‘an (imagined) hegemonic feminism’ (San Roque, 1999: 43). Despite this disassociation, in media interviews Garner continues to claim a feminist identity. In these self-representations, her identification with feminism is used to contest the assumption that her text was anti-woman: ‘I have been a feminist for more than twenty years’ (in Gunn, 27/3/93, *The Australian*: 5). These repetitive self-expressions of Garner’s feminist identity are performative speech acts, in that through them she brings herself into being as a feminist subject (see O’Connell, 1996: 49, Butler: 1990). These celebrity narratives, therefore, provide the space for the performance of particular identities, and work to fix Garner as an ambivalent feminist subject, an ambivalence that is central to her ability to speak about a feminism in crisis. In this sense, despite these acts of identification, she engages in a disavowal of feminism.

**Feminism’s Disavowal**

After fixing Garner’s historically specific ‘activist’ self, a number of articles position her as having more latterly engaged in a creative act of self (re)making or fashioning, itself thought to be an important factor in the rejuvenation of celebrity (Wark, 1999: 80). For example, Cole-Adams’ title – ‘War and Peace’ – is evocative of the shift personally experienced by Garner, a traumatic movement from war (second-wave activism) to peace (contemporary humanism). The war-like stage of Garner’s life has been superseded by a contemporary sense of peace symbolised by her transition to a ‘truce

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13 Astrid Henry (2004) examines this as a rhetorical strategy of young popular feminist writers in the US, as Chapter 6 will further show.
with men’ (Cole-Adams, 5/8/95, *Time*: 74), a truce which is represented in the book through her empathic stance towards the Master. David Leser remarks:

At the age of 52 and the midst of a third – but by far the most successful – marriage to author Murray Bail (who admits to finding feminist arguments rather tedious), there is an ease with the world and absence of anger in Helen Garner now that tempers whatever tendency there once was to see all men as brutish, predatory creatures (Leser, 18-19/3/95, *Good Weekend*: 39).

In Cole-Adams’ article, this shift is signified by the burning of diaries that linked Garner to second-wave feminism:

She has burnt the diaries covering her first 35 years because they seemed just to be ‘one huge whinge’. And she is concerned that today’s young women – those who benefited from the struggles of older feminists – seem to be repeating some of her youthful mistakes (Cole-Adams, 6/8/95, *The Time*: 74).

The generational elements of Garner’s narrative were often found to be compelling. The recounting of her burning of diaries, often seen as a feminised, privatised cultural form, can also be seen as a repudiation of the feminine. Garner was once like the Ormond women and their supporters, but has supposedly developed a sophisticated ‘new view’.

In these media narratives, she is an elder feminist stateswoman who, in a linear narrative of progressive self-development, has outgrown the rashness and anger exhibited by younger women. Accordingly, as is common in generationalism, these profiles code young women as inexperienced and immature (Bulbeck, 1999: 6), qualities that are seen as responsible for their inadequate feminism.

Having reached a more mature position from which she is able to cogently and sagaciously speak, Garner explicitly disclaims the label ‘feminist’: ‘At her age, she says, she realises that it is no longer clear where “fault” lies in the problems between individual men and women: “It’s an illusion that it was never clear”’ (Kissane, *The Age*, 27/12/95: 17). In press coverage, Garner occupies an interstitial space, as both feminist (extraordinary) and not-feminist (ordinary). As Henderson and Rowlands argue, she oscillates between positions within and outside the women’s movement, her ‘claims to objectivity, critical engagement, and authenticity merge to produce a powerful yet contradictory speaking position’ (Henderson and Rowlands, 1996: 13). Likewise, Sheridan et al. observe that celebrity feminists such as Garner work to position themselves as ‘insider critics of feminism’ (Sheridan et al.: 2000: 335). She therefore seeks to align herself with feminism while simultaneously disavowing it, a common strategy in media engagement with feminism (Brunsdon, 1998: 101). In this sense, she

14 Such a representation is also common in critical accounts supportive of Garner: ‘Hers is the voice of an older-and-wiser feminist who discovered rather abruptly that she could not tolerate denials of fairness, justice and common sense even when perpetrated in the name of feminism’ (Patai, 1998: 100).
can be seen as what Catharine Orr refers to as a ‘high profile feminist dissenter’ (Orr, 1997: 36), whose dissidence authorises her truth-claims (Deem, 1999: 90).

In commentary both during and after the event, Garner is situated as a kind of *everywoman*. She became the reasonable, rational feminist against whom all others were defined. As one commentator suggested, through her commonsensical position, ‘she deserves to have the support of rational people everywhere’ (D’Auvergne, *The Advertiser*, 24/8/15: 12). As a discourse, ‘common sense tends to appeal to experience as the guarantee of its truth’ (Weedon, 1987: 75), a point substantiated by these authorial profiles. In *The Courier-Mail* Bob Johnson’s review of *TFS* commences:

*This foray by Helen Garner into book length non-fiction is a rational voice of a fifty something feminist in the often irrational and polarised debate about feminism, sexism and sexual harassment* (Johnson, 5/4/95, *Courier-Mail*: 20).

This characterisation is one that Garner herself also deploys in her speech to the Sydney Institute, as she invokes hysterical feminists censors as her interlocutors. In critical commentary too, Susan Grover argues that Garner is ‘posing precisely the questions the general public is already asking about harassment’ (Grover, 1996: 249). Furthermore, another means through which Garner casts herself as ‘ordinary’ is through a real world/academy binary, with the feminism she criticises being firmly located in the field of the latter (as my analysis of the book has shown).

In Leser’s profile, the abstract theorising of the academy is juxtaposed with the ‘reality’ of women’s lives in which the second-wave sought to intervene. To posit a distinction between the ‘real world’ and the implicitly jargon-ridden academy, Leser alludes to the ‘discourse of power’:

*Garner’s feminism manifested itself as a kind of counter-cultural snub to the status quo, rather than the sophisticated, intellectual paradigm of today which has found its way into the universities. It was more practical than theoretical; it had more to do with how to live with broken marriages than with a discourse of power* (Leser, 18-19/3/95, *Good Weekend*: 34).

The above quotation also appears critical of the presence of feminist theory in the academy, assuming that the institutionalisation of feminism signifies a weakening of its (potential) oppositionality. While Garner and the second-wave thus ‘snubbed the status quo’, the article suggests that the apparent institutional context of the new generation represents a kind of co-option from which Garner and her second-wave cohorts, in their somewhat more marginal position, were immune. In addition, the apparent disdain for capital ‘T’ theory, seen as a sophisticated manifestation of the unnecessary – indeed pernicious – politicisation of education assumes that it distracts from the ‘real’ struggles beyond the academy. In media accounts, the academy is also

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15 In the so-called ‘culture wars’, theory is seen to have polluted the academy, and unfairly advantaged women and ethnic minority groups. As Deborah Siegel argues, theory is commonly
a hotbed of radical ideology. Christine Jackman, for example, remarks that Garner ‘found the guns of ideology blazing in the isolated enclaves of academia’ (Jackman, *Courier-Mail*, 31/3/95: 18). For these critics, in contrast, Garner exists outside ideology: ‘Hers is essentially a non-political interpretation’ (Manne, 12/4/95, *The Age*: 13).

In Rosemary Sorensen’s review in the *SMH* (Sorenson, 25/3/95, *SMH*, ‘Spectrum’: 9), this construction of an inside/outside the academy binary – and particularly the role of those inside in attempting to exert control over who is able to speak – is also explicit. ‘Cloistered’ academics are ‘talking to themselves while she is talking to the rest of us’ (Sorensen, *SMH*, ‘Spectrum’, 25/3/95: 9). Having been marginalised by the academic elite, Garner thus defies a restrictive orthodoxy; the act of writing the *TFS* in itself is constituted as a transgressive act on behalf of those ‘outside’. Charged with speaking to/for those ‘outside’, Garner allegedly speaks against the vicious, censoring academics:

There is an arrogant viciousness within the university-dominated intelligentsia which supports the judgement that there are the ‘right’ people – those approved of – and the ‘wrong’ people. Some of the keener vigilantes actually draw up lists, regularly updated (Sorensen, *SMH*, ‘Spectrum’, 25/3/95: 9).

Anti-intellectualism has had currency in Australian public discourse at various times in its history, particularly due to the association of intellectuals with the Left. In this sense, her critique of the academy also aligns her with position of the mythical ‘ordinary’ Australian. However, other critics like John Hanrahan argue that Garner’s efforts to textually position herself as an ‘ordinary Australian’ (Hanrahan, 1995: 25), representing a denial of her racial and class privilege, is one of the most problematic aspects of *TFS* and its subsequent media event. While celebrities are marked by their difference from ‘ordinary’ people, print media stories about them focus on everyday issues such as relationship difficulties and financial management (Craig, 2003: 58). It is the negotiation of this extraordinary/ordinary binary that works as the main source of celebrity power (Craig, 2003: 57).

As forms of celebrity biography, these profiles are concerned with uncovering the hidden truth of their subject (Marshall, 1998: 3-4). The title of an article following the publication of *True Stories* makes this search for the authentic self explicit: ‘This Helen’s for Real’ (Craven, 6/4/96, *The Australian*, ‘Review’: 9). In much media

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16 In *Speaking Their Minds*, Robert Dessaix characterises Garner as a public intellectual, exemplifying the concerns of the Australian public; for Dessaix, Garner ‘articulates widely held but unformulated ideas on matters of public concern (such as gender politics and sexual harassment)’ (Dessaix, 1998: 164).
commentary, the hidden self behind these public performances is sought to illuminate particular readings of *TFS*. For example, Cole-Adams observes:

in the end her search for the truth behind the scandal says less about the gender war than about herself. At 52, Garner, who spent much of her life feeling that she was a victim, has decided it is a waste of time blaming other people for her problems. Particularly men (Cole-Adams, 6/5/95, *Time*: 74).

The assertion that Garner refuses to blame others for her (gendered) problems represents a re-privatisation which sets her up in opposition to feminism. Garner is seen to critique victim feminism through the authority of experience. Here feminism is refigured from a politics of confrontation to a politics of co-operation, a position of reason rather than emotion. The representation of such a personal shift is integral to the establishment of her authority to speak on the mis-direction of feminism.

In ‘Helen Garner: Fact and Fiction’, a profile and review of *True Stories*, Fiona Capp also reinscribes this linear trajectory of personal self-development:

When she was doing research for *The First Stone*, she interviewed a number of feminists of her generation, some of whom spoke about reaching middle age and realising that their political ideals, as they applied them in their own life, distorted and cramped their behaviour towards men. ‘Somehow, in your late 40s or early 50s, you look back and think ‘Why have I been doing this? I can see why I have stuffed up two marriages, hurt people, or behaved in a self-destructive way’” (Capp, *The Age*, ‘Saturday Extra’, 13/4/96: 2).

Here, the act of writing *TFS* is seen as central in this process of self-development, while it is also linked to the simultaneous development of her feminist generational cohort. Feminist conversion narratives are said to have been an important feature of early media coverage of the women’s movement (Hogeland, 1998: 5). However, Garner’s conversion narrative is not to feminism, but against it and towards a purportedly less dogmatic humanism. These incidents in her personal life are used to position Garner as non-threatening to the governing heterosexual imaginary; she wishes to work with men, not against them: “I just don’t want to be involved in some women-against-men thing anymore”’ (in Jackman, *Courier-Mail*, 31/3/95: 18, see also Leser, 18-19/3/95, *Good Weekend*: 39). In these authorial profiles, Garner’s acceptance of men and all their foibles is frequently credited with giving her insights unavailable to younger, more dogmatic, women. Furthermore, her comments are also indicative of the ‘reflexive biography’ theorised by Anthony Giddens, wherein the self is constituted through such continuously revised biographical narratives (Giddens, 1991: 5), an idea which is particularly important in the context of the letters examined in the following chapter.

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17 The fact that Garner did not exhibit hostility towards men may have rendered her more newsworthy. See Spongberg: 1993 who makes this argument about media representation of Germaine Greer.
The Authority of Experience

In much press coverage, Garner is represented as having been significantly injured by her critics, while her emotional injuries are the grounds on which she speaks on behalf of a new tolerance through which to conceptualise gendered interaction. This representation of her own negotiation of the public/private is used to solidify the ground on which she is able to speak about the Ormond case as a failure of such negotiation. Indeed, even her own negotiation of the teacher/student relationship is used as an authorising tool in media profiles. For example, Leser’s article suggests that Garner’s own affair with her tutor at university results in a ‘natural sympathy for the erotic dance “between people who teach and learn”’ (Leser, 18-19/3/95, Good Weekend: 36). Garner’s own negotiation in the realm of sexual politics – be it in an Oedipal context, in narratives of her failed marriages, or her own affair with a tutor – is seen to be as important as her status as an author in enabling her to speak. These cause and effect biographical narratives seek referents, instances in Garner’s life from which TFS was produced, and which act as the basis for the text’s ideologies. These profiles are central to the ‘author-function’, posing questions of the text such as: ‘From where does it come, who wrote it, when, under what circumstances, or beginning with what design? The meanings ascribed to it and the status or value accorded it depend on the manner in which we answer these questions’ (Foucault, 1980: 109).

In these accounts, Garner’s book does not emerge from academe, but is deeply embedded in the politics of the quotidian. This is an assumption made in criticism too: ‘Garner’s writing is the writing of everyday life’ (Richardson, 1997: 97). Further, the book itself is positioned as a ‘search for truth’, mirroring and tracing the narrator’s search for self. As part of the author-function, these biographical narratives establish an explanatory relation between the text and Garner’s biography that ‘is in itself a systematic textual operation which typically identifies certain experiences or events as conditions for – or as relations of – the authorial process of writing’ (Williamson, 1989: 46). In the case of TFS event, Garner’s feminist credentials, or her ability to speak authoritatively about the current state of feminism, are secured through these unrelenting processes of biographical framing. Lynne Pearce (2003) notes that despite the textual properties of individual works, writing deemed feminist has always been hindered by such biographical readings; she refers to this as its ‘biomythological’ context (Pearce, 2003: 24). Likewise, for Henderson and Rowlands, ‘blockbuster’ feminist texts such as TFS, rely upon this ‘cult of personality’ or ‘author as icon’ as a central marketing tool (Henderson and Rowlands, 1996: 10). In the extra-literary field of promotion, writing seen as feminist is marketed through the inclusion of ‘biographical details which link the text to the life and act as a guarantee of its
authenticity’ (Felski, 1989: 93). Garner’s work, which deploys first-person narration and autobiographical elements, fits neatly into the media paradigm identified by Pearce and the marketing strategy identified by Felski; the ‘biomythological’ elements of the Garner story prevalent in these media ‘epitexts’ are those relating to her feminist subjectivity and praxis.

This way of reading Garner’s text, in addition to assuming that the author is the ‘guarantee of its truth’, also fails to recognise that such biographies are themselves discursive constructs (Weedon, 1987: 157-158). While biographical reading practices may have featured prominently throughout this media event, they have for decades reportedly characterised media engagement with Garner’s writing (Brophy, 1992: 279). In Kevin Brophy’s reception study of *Monkey Grip*, she is described as ‘compulsively autobiographical’ (Brophy, 1992: 279), and the journalistic profiles following the book’s publication assume, despite theoretical troubling of such unmediated self-knowing, self-present subjectivity, that *TFS* represents the story of a ‘unique, individuated narrating subject’ (Smith and Watson, 2002: 67). As David Leser observes in his feature article: ‘It is no secret that Garner has always been an autobiographical writer’ (Leser, *Good Weekend*, 18-19/3/95: 33). For Morag Fraser, the explicit presence of Garner in the text is central to its authority: ‘It [*TFS*] is given authority by her preparedness, most of the time, to use herself as the laboratory specimen, to test her speculations against her own vulnerabilities’ (Fraser, 25/3/95, *The Age*, ‘Saturday Extra’: 7).

Her own experiences with men provide further grounds on which she is able to speak. As Garner later suggested, her comments were afforded authority and the status of truth on the grounds of her status as ‘woman’ (in Mercer, 1997: 27). In particular, her earlier battles with men become important and are explicitly seen in Oedipal terms. She is said to have had a troubled relationship with her father, with whom she ‘argued doggedly’ (Cole-Adams, 6/5/95, *Time*: 76). This relationship is briefly invoked by Luke Slattery, as he quotes Garner’s previous work: “We are women who are always fighting our father” (Slattery, 4-5/3/95, *The Australian*: 33). This loaded relationship impacts upon her adult interactions with men:

That battle recurred in her relationships with other men. But recently something has cleared. ‘I can see his faults and he can see mine but they aren’t the issue anymore. We get on well.’ It was partly this laying down of arms that let her write *The First Stone* (Cole-Adams, 6/5/95, *Time*: 76).

While Garner herself suggests that such a Freudian reading is a simplistic rendering of her involvement in feminist struggle, she nonetheless (re)affirms the connection made by the journalist (Cole-Adams, 6/5/95, *Time*: 76). In media accounts of Garner’s life therefore, *TFS* was seen at times as a product of this reconciliation with the (Law of the)
Father. While Romantic tales of her authorship position her as extraordinary, this representation of Oedipal relations, or daughter/father conflict, represents another rhetorical device to universalise her experiences. Although this literal reconciliation with the Father is mentioned only a few times through such profiles, it is undeniably the case that Garner is represented as reconciled to men in ways which other feminists (particularly those associated with Ormond) are not.

The Subjection of Garner
As briefly remarked in Chapter Two, throughout the media event Garner is assumed to have suffered considerably for her ordinary, commonsense opinions. She is a trail-blazer, praised for speaking out against the feminist orthodoxy her book had worked to discursively construct. For example, a number of critics argue that Garner was hounded by feminists because the position she took in the book was ‘taboo’ (Carlyon, SMH, 4/7/96: 13). In this sense, Garner is credited with a form of bravery for her opposition to ‘political correctness’. In The Australian Kate Legge too argues that Garner ‘was to sexual harassment what Pauline Hanson was to multiculturalism’ (Legge, The Australian, 15/11/97: 11). She continues: ‘She asked questions most people keep to themselves for fear of being branded sexist or chauvinist’ (Legge, The Australian, 15/11/97: 11). Likewise, another critic suggests that ‘Ms Garner has hurled herself back into the crossfire’ (Jackman, Courier-Mail, 31/3/95: 18). In subsequent criticism, too, Garner is seen to facilitate ‘widespread public discussion and debate about an issue which almost everyone had hitherto been reluctant to bring up’ (Goldsworthy, 1996: 81). This theme of subjection and vilification drives Garner’s speech to the Sydney Institute, considered further in the next section. In his article on the front page of the SMH on the day the speech was published, Richard Guillat remarks: ‘Its criticisms of rape-crisis feminism struck a raw social nerve at a time of intense debate and sexual harassment laws, and the author was inundated with so many unwelcome calls, she was forced to change her number’ (Guillat, SMH, 9/8/95: 1). TFS is therefore seen in terms of authorial risk-taking, risks with which her previous work had made her familiar (see Jackman, Courier-Mail, 31/3/95: 18).

These biographical reviews seek to establish the effects of such extreme risks on Garner’s selfhood, again invoking an inner core that the media event has damaged. For example: ‘Since its [TFS] blend of heart-on-the-sleeve reportage and personal disclosure caused such a furore last year, Garner confesses to have reconsidered the benefits and costs of sticking one’s neck out’ (Haigh, 30/3/96, The Australian, ‘Review’: 3). Here again Garner is positioned on the side of truth, a positioning with which Mead later took issue. She exposes her inner self, a gesture credited with causing
considerable trauma. Peter Craven likewise asserts that ‘Garner has always, to a risky extent, written from life’ (Craven, 6/4/96, *The Australian*, ‘Review’: 9). As Chapter Two has illustrated, her career, and her life more broadly, is commonly ordered according to ‘before’ and ‘after’ *TFS* (Haigh, 30/3/96, *The Australian*: 3), with its aftershocks continuing to be felt years after its publication. In these biographical pieces, and in reviews and broader features, the debilitating effects of the writing process are deployed to cultivate sympathy for Garner. Throughout the media event, her personal hardship and subjection by irrational feminist critics appears central. Further, in media accounts, less concern was granted to the Master or assertions of his victimisation at the hands of feminists,\(^\text{18}\) than to Garner’s subjection to these very same hands. These accounts mobilise a number of familiar tropes regarding the excessive power of feminists. The way Garner is allegedly repressed by this orthodoxy, both during the writing of the book and after, is used to vindicate her detachment from a particular form of feminist identity and practice. In adopting the position of ‘victim’, Garner represents herself as a feminist subject who has been subject-ed by feminism. Through invoking such subjection, and attributing it to feminism, Garner’s representation of a persecutory feminist orthodoxy within *TFS* comes to re-circulate in an ‘epitextual’ form (Genette: 1997).

Many journalists argue that Garner has grown as a result of this experience of feminist vilification: ‘Despite the often ferocious reaction to her book, it seems her ordeal has strengthened her’ (Harford, 10/8/95, *The Age*: 11). Peter Craven too argues that ‘the narrator at the centre of *The First Stone* is a Helen Garner tossed and buffeted by every turn of the events of her investigation’ (Craven, 25/3/95, *The Australian*: 7).

Leser’s article likewise seeks to establish sympathy for Garner, stressing the personal, legal and publishing difficulties that plagued her writing process. Early in the article he lists a number of factors which interfered with Garner’s authorial independence. According to Leser, Garner went through:

More than two years of high drama to distil and turn into a book what was an event of major political and cultural importance to Australia: to sink your teeth in further when the whiff of legal action is all about you; to go through three drafts and three sets of lawyers and then wait six months to learn whether the manuscript is too litigious to be published; then to have a bitter falling out with your publisher ... (Leser, 18–19/3/95, *Good Weekend*: 31).

Leser quotes Garner: “It was the worst period of my professional life” (Leser, 18–19/3/95, *Good Weekend*: 37). Another journalist observes: ‘Garner, one of the country’s most respected and accomplished practitioners of fiction, is still suffering from the residue of a level of notoriety and public recognition that she had never anticipated’

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\(^{18}\) See McCluskey for an analysis of accused men being constructed as victims of feminism in media discourse (McCluskey, 1997: 61).
(Condon, 31/5/95, *Sun Herald*: 26). Similarly, in ‘The Trials of Helen Garner’ Luke Slattery (Slattery, 4-5/3/95, *The Australian*: 30-33) also represents Garner as under significant personal strain. In this representation of this personal hardship, these articles reinscribes the notion of the author as traumatically giving birth to an original piece of work (Barthes, 1977: 145). In all the above examples, it is the effects of fame on Garner that are emphasised, and therefore such media texts represent a meta-critique of the celebrity industry to which they, through their authorial profiles, contribute.¹⁹

The authorial profiles analysed in this section were largely supportive of their subject; this is unsurprising given their status as a form of ‘promotional discourse’ (see Steele: 2001) for *TFS*. That her authority to speak came to be so vigorously defended, however, also implies its precarious and unstable nature. This is not to suggest that this victim subjectivity went unchallenged. Given the multiple spaces in which Garner is given to speak, Rosemary Neill asks: ‘How is it, then, that Garner has been cast by the media as a tortured victim of a new wave of fundamentalist feminists?’ (Neill, 17/8/95, *The Australian*: 11). The analysis of these articles also demonstrates that, far from being self-evident, Garner’s authority had to be established and re-established throughout the debate. While these interviews and profiles attempt to constitute a particular ‘Garner’, it is also vital to be attentive to her own practices of self-representation.

**Authorial Performances/Performing Authority**

In the context of increased market-driven demands for authorial performances explored earlier,²⁰ the contemporary author not only writes the text, but also speaks it through media interviews, talk show appearances, reviews, news items, and personal appearances at literary events and public readings (Gardiner, 2000: 65).²¹ In terms of news value, Allan Bell argues that news value often depends upon who speaks: ‘something is news just because someone elite said it’ (Bell, 1991: 193). Garner’s newsworthy performances – author events such as the Sydney Institute speech and her reading at the Museum of Contemporary Art (Freeman, 24/4/95, *SMH*: 3) – are concrete manifestations of ‘staged celebrity’ (Rojek, 2001: 121), indicative of the broader performativity of celebrity (and identity) itself. Garner’s celebrity is important as it enables her to circulate a particular discursive construction of Australian

¹⁹ Garner has expressed her profound concern about the various ways in which her text and her name as a cultural signifier have come to mean. See Garner, 1997: 11, in Haigh, 30/3/96, *The Australian*, ‘Review’: 3.

²⁰ This idea of authors as performers is not new, as John Calwelti’s work on the ‘the writer as a person-performer’ suggests (Cawelti, 1977: 165).

²¹ At the Sydney Institute, Garner literally speaks the afterword of future editions of *TFS* (1997).
feminism; it is also important in terms of how it attempts to circumscribe the meanings of her text.

In addition to her self-representation in the media 'epitexts' examined earlier, Garner used her Sydney Institute speech to amend the text bearing her signature, a form of authorial (meta)commentary to 'bring the text up to date' (Ricci, 2003: 118). On the 8 August 1995, she mounted a passionate defence of her text at a large 'author event' hosted by the Sydney Institute.22 This speech is a key moment in the construction of Garner's celebrity during the event. Here Garner inserts herself into critical commentary about the text, speaking back, or rather against, particular public sense-makings of her text. In this speech, she attempts to account for and refute its public decodings.23 Garner’s speech, itself a form of media criticism, generated a significant degree of press coverage, most of which concerned itself with an analysis of the entire media debate surrounding the speech and the book as it had played out since March.

This speech to the Sydney Institute was edited and reprinted, complete with extensive commentary, in the Sydney Morning Herald, The Australian and The Age (9/8/95). While such stories would typically be spatially segregated to the 'Arts' section, in this debate such lines were persistently blurred as the event frequently played out on front and general news pages. It is testament to TFS’s extreme media visibility that such an author event was seen to warrant front-page coverage, with the article accompanied by a photograph of a defiant Garner approximately twice the size of the written text. The Australian edition covering the speech includes a massive colour photograph of Garner on its front page. Goldsworthy notes that this is the first time in its history that an author has so featured (Goldsworthy, 1996: 2). A number of critics (Davis: 1999, Goldsworthy: 1996, Turner: 1996) have mined this photo for its cultural significance, seeing it as 'a severe and dramatic portrait of an embattled woman defying her critics' (Turner, 1996: 16).

Responses to the speech were still appearing a few weeks after its initial publication, further demonstrating the cultural reverberation of which I have previously spoken. The speech was seen to divide feminists, as the Daily Telegraph Mirror’s title suggests: 'Garner splits feminists' (Editorial, 10/8/95, Daily Telegraph Mirror: 20). A number of commentators saw the speech as a 'reassertion' (Editorial, 9/8/95, The Australian: 10) of TFS’s arguments or as a reformulation of the debate

22 The audience literally invested in this celebrity performance, and their attendance at such an event served to demonstrate and perpetuate Garner’s celebrity.
23 Later published in Garner’s collection of essays, True Stories (1996), the speech was also incorporated into the text when TFS was published in the United States by the Free Press (see Garner: 1997).
As Sonia Harford argues, Garner ‘single-handedly redefined the debate over her controversial book, *The First Stone*, steering it towards a broad discussion of the meaning and contribution of feminism’ (Harford, 10/8/95, *The Age*: 10). Through her warnings of the ‘calcification’ of feminist thought Garner is said to have ‘done the feminist movement a great service’ (Editorial, *The Advertiser*, 12/8/95: 20). The *SMH* editorial suggests that the speech will ‘promote further debate’, with Garner having ‘opened the way to fresh ideas, and provocatively’ (Editorial, *SMH*, 10/8/95: 12). The speech, like the book, was further read as a significant marker in public discourse’s engagement with feminism: ‘last night’s address marks an important moment in the debate about feminism and its many complex strands (Editorial, 9/8/95, *The Australian*: 10). The speech was also seen as a retort to Garner’s overwrought feminist critics (Editorial, 9/8/95, *The Australian*, McGuinness, *The Age*, 10/8/95: 12, Editorial, *The Weekend Australian*, 12-13/8/95: 23). The press coverage of the event was further indicative of the meta-commentary which characterised the event; for example, one commentator remarked on the support received by Garner from conservative columnists: ‘the sort of columnists who had seldom a good word to say for feminism, let alone actual feminists, were echoing their newfound heroine to suggest that the women’s cause had been set back by a 100 years by “grimmer tribes”’ (Wynhausen, 13-14/8/95: 23).

The occasion of this speech permits extended coverage of the ‘feminist battle’ to continue, with the *Herald*’s front page covering the speech in an article entitled ‘Helen Garner returns feminist fire’ (Guillat, 9/8/95, *SMH*: 1). Headlines, as abstractions of the coming story (Bell, 1991: 187), become indicative of an embattled author: ‘Garner casts a stone at her critics’ (9/8/95, *The Australian*: 10), ‘Defiant Garner invites more wrath from the wimminists’ (McGuinness, 10/8/95, *SMH*: 12), and ‘Speech by Garner pours fat on feminist fires’ (Sculley and Freeman, 10/8/95, *SMH*: 6). She is also seen to possess a privileged relation to truth, as ‘Helen Garner’s telling truths’ argues (Wynhausen, Jaivin and Oakeley, 12-13/8/95, *SMH*: 23). In each of these headlines, Garner’s agency (and its effects) are emphasised.

As a form of self-narration and authorial commentary, in this speech Garner seeks to gain authorial control over the diverse interpretations of her book circulating in media discourse; her primary means of doing this is to homogenise feminist readings of the book. Garner re-views both her own presuppositions and the event itself. The two main arguments of this speech relate to the alleged censorship of her book and immense power of academic feminists, and the reiteration of the idea that young women are responsible for the effects of their sexuality. In terms of the latter, this speech represents an effort to refocus media attention to the book’s central proposition:
If we were to accept the notion that the text is ambiguous in its conclusions, as some critics argue, the speech conversely permits no such equivocation (Trioli, 1996: 32). However, given that the speech’s overall argument is the same as the book, yet more extreme, one of its most interesting elements is Garner’s discursive construction of the text’s readers. She uses the speech to primarily distance herself from a certain form of feminism and to further Other feminists, who continue to be seen as the feminist ‘furies’ she had invoked throughout TFS.

Discrediting Feminist Readers

Throughout the speech, Garner performs as the narrative voice, seeking to elide the distinction between the subject of utterance in the present and the subject of enunciation in her text; a gesture which characterises most all engagements with media about this text. In ‘The Fate of The First Stone’, therefore, Garner positions both herself – as embodied subject – and her text (as produced by this subject) as under sustained (feminist) attack. Despite Garner’s anti-victim arguments, many commentators (including Garner herself) locate her as a victim of feminism, a mantle which she seems to willing take up in this self-representation.

In this speech, Garner initially accepts her slippery position as author, observing that ‘there are as many versions of The First Stone as there are readers’ (Garner, 9/8/95, SMH: 11). This caveat aside, Garner seeks indulgence from her audience to list ‘a few of the things that I did not say’ (Garner, 9/8/95, SMH: 11). Thus, having apparently relinquished the claim to authorial control, Garner seeks to rein in what she assumes to be wayward interpretations of the text circulating in public discourse. Such ‘authorial commentaries’, when authors become the critics of their own texts, seek not to open ‘the text up to infinite interpretations’ (Ricci, 2003: 123) but to restrict them. In Barthes’ terms, ‘to give a text an author is to impose a limit on the text’ (Barthes, 1977: 147). Furthermore, Garner’s (impossible) attempt to control the meanings of her text represents a concurrent attempt to control the meanings of feminism, particularly as the five misinterpretations with which she takes issue are primarily attributed to ‘hysterical’ feminist readers.

In this speech, Garner responds to both imagined and actual criticisms of her text. Her subject of address appears to continuously shift between her feminist critics, the ‘young feminist’ or the ‘daughter’ (the complainants in the Ormond case) represented as ill-advised by her ‘mother’ (feminists/academics), and the more ‘reasonable’ reader who does not attempt to map dogmatic feminist interpretations onto allegedly apolitical ‘experiences’ (like these feminist mothers and daughters.
allegedly do). This speech becomes a literal ‘Afterword’ in the American edition (Garner: 1997). Thus, the media event – to which Garner’s speech both contributes and responds – altered not just the way the text was read in particular contexts, but the materiality of the text itself. However, the newspaper publication of Garner’s speech-text functioned as a mediatised form of afterword that has the same purpose of this literal afterword, ‘to rectify in extremis a bad reading’ (Ricci, 2003: 136). In a gesture which does not at all allow for (despite her comments) reader engagement, textual deconstructions or the notion that her conscious mind cannot control the spaces where the text ends up, she offers five ‘misrepresentations’ of her text:

I did not say that the two women who brought allegations against the Master of their college ought to have been interviewed by me.
I did not say that women should go back to wearing ankle-length sacks!
I did not say that the correct way to deal with sexual assault or harassment is to knee a man in the balls.
I did not say that women are responsible for the way men behave towards them. And I most certainly did not say that women who get raped are asking for it! (Garner, 9/8/95, SMH: 11).

Readers charged with ‘misreadings’ are journalists, academics and ‘so-called prominent feminists’, although ‘feminist’ and ‘academic’ are conflated. In her opinion piece in response, Rosemary Neill observes that Garner’s speech further exaggerates ‘the idea that puritanical book burners emboldened solely by their own sense of infallibility, are storming university gates and workplaces around Australia’ (Neill, 17/8/95, The Australian: 11). The feminist condemnation of the book appears to have taken on mythical proportions in Garner’s speech. In this assumption of an homogenous feminist reading formation, her reading of the book’s reception is used to further substantiate her claims of an oppressive, irrational feminism.

Her desire to respond to these apparently prominent mis-readings suggests concern about the way particular interpretations privileged in sites such as print media can mediate the text’s consumption. Garner invokes the highly problematised notion of authorial intention as she accuses one critic of performing ‘a grotesque distortion of my intent’ (Garner, SMH, 9/8/95: 11). She charges such readers with the improper usage of her text. Here, she ‘does not trust the reader to come up with the correct meaning of his [sic] work’ (Ricci, 2003: 142). It appears that, despite her above concession about different readings of the text, Garner profoundly distrusts not only the reader, but the entire mediasphere through which such readings come to circulate. As Henry Jenkins suggests: ‘The term “misreading” is necessarily evaluative and preserves the traditional hierarchy bestowing privileged status to authorial meanings over reader’s meanings’ (Jenkins, 1992: 33). Garner even goes to the extreme of suggesting that such readings could categorically have not been produced by reading her book; through her assertions
of a feminist ‘girlcott’, she uses this speech to reconstitute her critics not only as bad readers, but as non-readers.

This notion of a ‘girlcott’, as a distinctly feminist form of censorship, was seen to be the speech’s most newsworthy element, as the article ‘Feminist writer attacks “girlcott”’ suggests (MacLean, *The Age*, 9/8/95: 4). It is not uncommon for feminists to be figured as ‘censors’; this rhetorical strategy is evident in other contexts such as pornography debates and ‘political correctness’ debates (see Lumby: 1997a). Here, feminist critics impinge upon Garner’s artistic freedom as writer, seeking to unnecessarily politicise authorship. In this sense, Garner adopts a victim subject position in this speech, as in the authorial profiles analysed earlier. Throughout the media event, as in the book itself, the story of Garner-as-victim comes to dominate (see Mead, 21/9/95, *SMH*: 13). Furthermore, the academy/real world binary is reactivated in her speech, as she represents academic feminists as intellectual elites who do not, unlike herself, speak in a language ‘that the person in the street can understand’ (Garner, 9/8/95, *SMH*: 11). Implicit in such rhetoric is an assertion of contempt by academic feminists towards such ‘average’ readers and popular feminist textual production:

If *The First Stone* had been a jargon-clogged pamphlet bristling with footnotes, if it had sold a comfortably obscure, say, 3,000 copies over a couple of years the response to it from feminism’s grimmer tribes would have been much less poisonous. But among those who maintain a victim posture vis-a-vis the big world where one can earn a comfortable living by writing in a language that the person in the street can understand nothing is more suspicious than a book which appears to have succeeded (Garner, 9/8/95, *SMH*: 11).

As previously argued, Garner attempts to position herself as ‘ordinary’ and apolitical, while (academic) feminists are straight-jacketed by their dogmatic ideology. This trope of a victim-centric feminism has been seen as central to media representation of feminism (McCluskey: 1997), particularly in light of ‘third-wave’ or ‘anti-victim’ texts produced in the US (Sorisio: 1997, Bailey: 1997, Orr: 1997, Siegel: 1997a and 1997b). The assumption that feminists were represented in this way has led to the type of critical condemnation of the media event discussed in Chapter Two, and criticism on media representation of feminists in Chapter One. However, this trope does not govern media characterisation of feminism during TFS media event. Although supported by right-wing commentators such as P.P. McGuinness, Garner’s representation of feminism in the speech itself came under considerable media scrutiny.

In contrast to the conservative commentators thought to dominate the debate, following the publication of the speech a number of women (and indeed men) used the discursive space of the event to directly attack Garner and suggest that her assumptions about the need for young women to be responsible for their physical presence in the
public sphere were offensive (see Neill, 17/8/95, The Australian: 11, Edgar, 11/8/95, The Age: 13, Raynor, 14/8/95, The Age: 11, Porsolt, 18/8/95, The Australian: 11). Her representations of feminism in particular were problematised; for example, one commentator argued that ‘Garner does an injustice to feminism’ as she ‘helps to bolster the male mythology that feminists are all vicious ideologues’ (Edgar, 11/8/95, The Age: 13). As Chapters Five and Six will further show, although Garner’s celebrity relied upon the strategic claiming and disavowal of feminism in favour of a more ‘reasonable, rational’ humanism, this is not to suggest that such celebrity was successful in the containment of oppositional voices in the debate. In this sense, through Garner’s celebrity performance, space was opened for such contestation to occur. In the next section, however, I consider how another celebrity feminist attempted to circumscribe the meanings of Australian feminism and to augment Garner’s generational assumptions.

Celebrity Journalist/Editor: Anne Summers as Feminist Media Commentator

In contrast to Garner, Anne Summers emerged in the event, not as a feminist to be commented upon, but as an authorised commentator on feminism. Summers, whose authority predated yet was bolstered by the event, helped to actively shape media discourse on TFS, particularly in relation to the generational paradigm. While Garner functions as a celebrity in the general, literary and feminist sense, Summers functions purely as a celebrity feminist in the Wickean sense: a high profile, culturally sanctioned commentator on feminism. The form of celebrity embodied by Summers is qualitatively different from that of Garner and Mead, and predominantly entails self-representation and feminist commentary in her own sporadic feature articles. In terms of volume, Summers’ was not the most prolific feminist commentary of the event. However, her accumulated celebrity capital and sustained use of print media to circulate her feminist opinions ensured the cultural reverberation of her voice throughout the event. The articles signed by Summers circulate as privileged narratives of the current dilemmas within feminism. Her authority manifests literally through the allocation of discursive space and symbolically through the way she is seen to speak on behalf of all Australian (second-wave) feminists. That being the case, she used her ‘media voice’ to support Garner in a number of senses and helped to manage the direction of the debate in a

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24 Following the speech, a number of cartoonists lampooned Garner’s matyr like status, ridiculing in particular her own claims of crucifixion, (SMH, 12-13/8/95, The Australian, 9/8/95: 11) and feminist censorship (SMH, 10/8/95: 12, The Australian, 10/8/95: 10). In particular, cartoonists used this form of visual signification to contest the way she was being elevated by conservative Similar cartoons accompanied Mead’s speech to the Sydney Institute (The Australian, 21/9/95: 11).
Summers’ most visible contributions to the event were her own feature articles, appearing in Sydney Morning Herald and in its weekend supplement, the Good Weekend (of which she was then editor). Despite her high media visibility, neither the source nor the form of her authority has received much critical attention; this is even more remarkable given the way that journalists themselves are increasingly conceptualised as celebrities.

News discourse, like all other forms, is hierarchically organised. Those who produce the news are constituted as ‘authorised knowers’ (Ericson et al., 1989: 3). In the entertainment-driven news media even journalists themselves have become celebrities (Hargeaves, 2003: 126) or ‘star journalists’ (Tunstall, 1996: 172): ‘The rise of journalism about celebrities was accompanied by the rise of celebrity journalists’ (Downie and Kaiser, 2003: 228). The shift in news values which renders journalists celebrities is derided by advocates of public communication (Downie and Kaiser, 2003: 229). One of the casualties of this ‘celebritisation’ of media is purported to be journalistic objectivity and impartiality (see Chambers et al.: 2004). Summers’ commentary is not the type of depoliticised ‘lifestyle journalism’ condemned by these critics, but a form of cultural and political commentary. As a generic form within news discourse, the commentary symbolises ‘the interpretive moment in the news cycle’ (McNair, 2000: 61). While the boundary between fact and fiction is now commonly blurred in news discourse, the commentary piece marks one of the sites within which the journalistic ‘I’ has been historically exposed.

Commentators such as Summers also fulfil an important commercial function for the newspapers in which they feature. The commentator is ‘crucial to securing brand identification and consumer loyalty to a journalistic provider’, as individual ‘star journalists’ come to accrue a ‘specific exchange value’ (McNair, 2000: 64). For McNair, the use value of such commentators is defined as ‘interpretation’ and their ‘exchange value in a marketplace of many interpreters is predicated on their ability to interpret better than others’ (McNair, 2000: 64). In this sense, Summers’ exchange value is based on her relationship to Australian feminism. During TFS event, the Good Weekend ‘brand’ was tied to its ‘star’ feminist editor, representing specific form of privilege (Tunstall, 1996: 172). As a ‘star’ editor, Summers’ writing is granted another layer of authority.

In contrast to other cultural producers, the ‘feminist journalist’ has received little critical attention, with the two subjectivities commonly perceived to be mutually exclusive; journalists purport to be objective, while feminists work to dismantle such

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25 See Summers’ defence of Garner at the 1995 Elizabeth Jolley Lecture at the Perth Cultural Centre (Thursday 10 August, the day after Garner’s speech).
androcentric notions. As Mary Coombs argues, ‘the feminist insistence on perspective and its rejection of objectivity are deeply threatening to traditional ways of doing business in journalism’ (Coombs, 1997: 52). As outlined in Chapter One, much media criticism continues to position the feminist as an outsider, ex-centric to the dominant media narratives surrounding feminism. The feminist journalist, therefore, is somewhat of an anathema, a point made by Van Zoonen in her study of the experiences of feminist journalists at university and during internships. She concluded that feminism and professional journalism were overwhelmingly seen to be ‘at odds’ (Van Zoonen, 1994: 57). Likewise, Chambers et al. pessimistically argue that women journalists are unable to ‘use their public forum to promote serious feminist debate or serious debate about feminism’ (Chambers et al., 2004: 230). The example of Summers, I argue (whatever one may make of her politics), in part contradicts such cynical assumptions.

As editor, Summers is a ‘debate manager’ (Ericson et al., 1989: 367), managing the contributions of others, while also herself acting as a contributor with an ‘insider’s’ perspective on Australian feminism. In this sense, her authority is also doubly coded. Summers’ position as commentator and editor is rare, given that for feminists ‘access to news, and especially voice in the news, constitutes a daily struggle’ (Barker-Plummer, 1995: 308). Through her editorship of the Good Weekend, the need for such a ‘daily struggle’ in which other feminists continue to be engaged is eradicated. In this position, Summers also mediates public discourse in a very literal sense. As editor she is granted a significant degree of autonomy not granted to either other journalists or feminists. In this sense, Summers is in control of her self-representation in ways unavailable (despite their efforts at such management) to either Garner or Mead. That said, in recognition of the contingency of meaning, she cannot control the spaces where her texts may arrive or the uses to which they will be put (see Threadgold, 1998: 89).

As suggested in Chapter One, in much feminist media criticism those involved in attempts to fix the meanings of feminism are thought to be those with little or no direct experience of feminism; on these grounds, their stories are discredited. In these critical narratives, women such as Summers do not figure prominently. However, through women like Summers, the relationship of feminists to the Australian media is said to have shifted; feminists, as Bulbeck observes, are not simply represented by the media, they are the media (Bulbeck, 2001: 2; see Lumby: 1997, Baird: 2004). Catharine Lumby too notes Summers’ considerable privilege in the public sphere: ‘Like other prominent feminists of her era, Summers now speaks from a position of immense authority. She’s a powerbroker in an unofficial but highly influential political network spawned by the women’s movement of the 1970s’ (Lumby, 1997a: 156). For Lumby,
feminists often fail to recognise the authority with which women like Summers are invested and the ways in which they have accordingly reconfigured public space, especially the print media. Furthermore, in the introduction to the revised edition of *Damned Whores*, Summers’ failure to acknowledge her own feminist celebrity is clear, as she suggests that American feminism has (in contrast to its Australian counterpart) become consumed by a lamentable desire for fame and celebrities (Summers, 1994: 12). This failure to recognise her own privilege represents one of the most obvious limitations of Summers’ commentary during the event, as my analysis of ‘Shockwaves’ will suggest.

Summers’ position of privilege in relation to the stories of feminism circulating in print media derives from a number of sources. Summers’ status as ‘celebrity feminist’ is a complex amalgam of the positions of second-wave activist, co-founder of the feminist journal, *Refractory Girl* and the Elsie Women’s Refuge in Sydney (Pearce, 1998: 203), academic, writer, Prime Ministerial advisor on women under the Keating government, editor of both *Ms* magazine in America and *Good Weekend* in Australia (1993-97), and femocrat. Her published doctoral thesis, *Damned Whores and God’s Police* (1975), was one of the earliest works to address the elision of women from Australian history. Whatever one may think of her politics, her feminist credentials seem impeccable, thereby securing her media visibility as feminist spokeswoman.

While Summers’ life narrative may be important to her authority, it is not the primary subject of her commentary. 26 The celebrity feminist journalist is not subject to an invasive media gaze as are other celebrities; she is not the object of discourse, but its subject. This is an important distinction, which again emphasises the problems with homogenising culturally specific varieties of celebrity. As argued earlier, the ‘celebrity feminist’ has a unique relationship with contemporary theoretical debates surrounding feminism which she can then articulate, or rather translate, for a less specialised audience. As Margaret Henderson argues, media culture relies ‘on leader figures/theorists who can also double as celebrities if needs be whose role is to understand, interpret, or chronicle feminism’ (Henderson, 2002b: 5). The metaphor of translation is often deployed to signal the processes via which specialist knowledge is reconstituted to common knowledge by journalists (Hartley, 1996: 26), and Summers has occupied such a privileged mediating role in relation to feminism for decades. In the circular logic of celebrity upon which I have previously commented, such feminist

26 During the event, Summers herself was the subject of informal allegations of sexual harassment (Summers, 27/7/1995, *The Age*: 9), which she used her piece in *The Age* to rebut. She worried, though, that her previous support for Garner would buttress claims that she had herself engaged in harassing behaviour.
‘big girls’ ‘get to speak because they are leaders, they are leaders because they are exceptional, but they speak for us because they are leaders’ (Henderson, 2002a: 182).

As the brief historical sketch above suggests, Summers’ feminist celebrity – unlike that of Mead and Garner – at once proceeds and exceeds the temporality of TFS media event as she continues to write regular broadsheet columns and publications on the status of Australian women. Her most recent publication, The End of Equality, appeared in 2003. The book’s blurb reaffirms her status as ‘groundbreaking feminist’; this assertion is used as the ground on which she can speak about the failures of the liberal feminist project. Her position within the Australian print media makes it impossible to ignore that some form of feminism, though perhaps limited, is being articulated within this space. Given this substantial authority, it is important to look at how she uses it to circulate particular stories about Australian feminism during TFS media event.

‘Shockwaves’ Earlier Iterations
As remarked earlier in this chapter, the celebrity feminist is important not merely for who she is but for what she says. In 1994, the revised edition of Damned Whores and God’s Police included a ‘Letter to the Next Generation’, initially published by Refractory Girl in 1993. As a media commentator whose capital in the journalistic field was not contingent upon the event, Summers used it to relocate and reconfigure a debate she had commenced in the alternative media a few years prior. Many commentators have seen this preface as a prelude to ‘Shockwaves’, or indeed as an earlier iteration of this piece (Genovese: 1996, Spongberg: 1997, Grahame: 1998). With similar letters from second-wave feminists, such Phyllis Chesler’s Letters to a Young Feminist (1997), the format of her article as a letter ‘written to an unnamed, unspecified, and (most important) unresponsive “young feminist” posits the exchange of knowledge not as dialogue but rather as instruction’ (Henry, 2003: 217). The readers she assumes are the ‘daughters of the revolution’, the first generation to have grown up following the reformism derivative of 1970s activism. Thus commences the letter’s deployment of the mother/daughter paradigm as the preferred model for conceptualising feminism’s past, present and future. Much feminist work has been produced on the way in which public feminist debates have come to be played out in an

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27 Kate Douglas has written on the important interpretive function of ‘blurring’ in the reception of women’s writing (2001).
28 Charlotte Brunsdon makes this point of the ‘postfeminist’ film, ‘some form of feminism is going on in this girly space’ (1998: 101).
29 In this sense, the letters published in the Good Weekend analysed in the following chapter can also be seen as replies to this earlier form of letter.
Oedipal fashion. As *Chapter Six* will further show, the publication of *TFS* (re)produced a form of generational discourse-discord articulated by Summers a year earlier.

Through her letter, Summers seeks to rectify what she perceives to be a profound lack of historical consciousness among young Australian women, a charge commonly levelled at young, supposedly apolitical, people. The letter directly addresses young women (or rather young feminists) and appears conciliatory in tone than its successor, as she seeks to offer the type of origin story of the women’s movement problematised by a number of feminist critics (King: 1994, Heller: 1997). Such ‘origin stories’ obscure ‘feminism’s historical lack of ideological coherence’ (Heller, 1997: 309-310) and substitute the particular narrative of one high profile second-wave feminist for the whole; this is evidenced particularly in the section ‘Our Story’, where she purports to narrate the history of the Australian second wave for young women: ‘I want, while there is still some chance of communicating, to tell you the story of the modern women’s movement’ (Summers, 1994: 510). She offers little explication of who exactly is invoked by this ‘our’, or indeed who its deployment thereby excludes. Throughout the letter, Summers positions herself as central to the Australian women’s movement, a strategy evident in other textual sites bearing her signature (see Henderson, 2002a: 184).

The unified feminist sisterhood invoked in the letter, the unproblematic ‘we’, represents a ‘fantasy of retrospection’ (Kavka, 2000: x). In such a fantasy, the heterogeneity of her generation of feminists is elided by what Kavka calls a ‘trick of memory’ (Kavka, 2000: ix). While Summers posits her story as the story, feminist histories should not obscure the ‘politics of history writing as a form of memory’ (Friedman, 1995: 29). E.A. Kaplan likewise emphasises that the narrativisation of feminist past by who ‘were there’ must be recognised as having been formed ‘through the blindesses and forgettings that characterise memory’ (Kaplan, 1997: 13). Summers presupposes a history of feminism with ‘fixed “truths” that must be handed down like precious heirlooms’ and which remains untouched by the vagaries of memory (Friedman, 1995: 29). She does not acknowledge the specificity of her own memory in the construction of this monologic story; instead she attempts to obscure the role of her own subjectivity in this construction, and in doing so reinscribes the masculine, positivist epistemology of history writing as an objective reconstruction of the past (see Friedman, 1995: 13). While Summers does in fact foreground her role in these events, implicit in her address is that her story is that of all the women who participated in the Australian second-wave. In this sense, she does not position this narrative as one among many (necessarily interested) tales to be told, but presents her epistolary history as an unproblematic ‘reflection’ of a homogenous second-wave feminism in Australia.
In addition to its overt didacticism, ‘Shockwaves’ bears a number of rhetorical and ideological similarities to this ‘Letter’. ‘Shockwaves’ is important both as one of the earliest pieces of public commentary on the book and as illustrative of broader media engagement with feminism. Furthermore, it represents Summers’ most substantial contribution to the event, throughout which – in the logic of cultural reverberation – it loudly resounded. The 1995 Good Weekend annual women’s edition dovetailed with the publication of TFS at the start of April; therefore, it is unsurprising that Summers opportunistically used a forum that she managed to articulate her concerns that feminism, as currently practiced – or not, as she implies – had strayed far from its claimed originary aims. Not insignificantly, the edition also contained David Leser’s supportive profile of Garner and TFS extract analysed earlier in this chapter.

‘Shockwaves’, particularly in its circumtextual location to the first extract of the book to appear in print media, helped provide the interpretive framework through which most commentators came to read the book. Other critics have remarked upon the importance of this piece. For example, Henderson and Rowlands argue that ‘Summers proposes a public and intellectual context for the reading and discussion of The First Stone’ (Henderson and Rowlands, 1996: 11). As later chapters will also demonstrate, Henderson and Rowlands do not overstate the role of Summer’s article in the event. ‘Shockwaves’ itself discursively set in train the forms of cultural shock that her article claimed to be cataloguing.

In ‘Shockwaves’, Summers uses Garner’s text as a conduit for her previously expressed generationalist concerns. The similarities between the two texts are emphasised throughout the event: ‘The First Stone is a letter from an older feminist to a new generation of feminists’ (Little, 1/4/95, Herald Sun: 13). For Kerryn Goldsworthy, this is a problematic rhetorical manoeuvre, as Summers’ article comes to be wrongly ‘conflated in popular memory with Garner’s own position’ (Goldsworthy, 1996: 69). Here Goldsworthy attempts to extricate Garner from the generationalism which she sees as more appropriately attributed to Summers, suggesting that the latter launched a hostile attack on young feminists while Garner merely critiqued contemporary feminism and its prevailing orthodoxies (Goldsworthy, 1996: 69). For Goldsworthy, Garner’s text was subjected to a ‘careless reading’ by those perceiving it as a generationalist narrative; she characterises such a reading as ‘destructive’ and ‘misguided’ (Goldsworthy, 1996: 68). Unlike the TFS’s tentative ruminations, Summers’ article was thought to be ‘aggressive and polemical’ (Goldsworthy, 1996: 69). Like Goldsworthy, Mary Spongberg (1997) sees Summers, not Garner, as responsible for the

30 See McLaughlin and Reid: 1994. ‘Shockwaves’ is located immediately before Leser’s ‘Generational Gender Quake’.
event’s preoccupation with generationalism (Sponberg, 1997: 238). In contrast to Goldsworthy or Spongberg, I am not concerned with attributing the increased circulation of generationalist tropes to an individual. Rather, this prominence must be perceived to be the product of a number of intersecting texts and discourses, and even as pre-existing TFS debate.

Rhetoric and Summers’ Mode of Address
Rhetorically, like much popular feminist writing, ‘Shockwaves’ is a form of polemic. In such writing: ‘Positions are communicated most forcefully, and most effectively, when they become personal, and in most polemic writing this involves an upfront identification of both oneself and one’s opponent through the use of personal pronouns’ (Pearce, 2003: 30). Her imagined interlocutor is the ill-defined ‘next generation’, while she identifies herself as one of the key players in the Australian second-wave. In the ‘Letter’ and ‘Shockwaves’, as in her autobiography, Summers claims for herself a central position in the women’s movement (Henderson, 2002a: 184). She wishes to ‘present a retrospect justification of personal and political actions, and to offer a history lesson to the next generation’ (Henderson, 2002a: 182). In this article, the ‘revolution’ to which she refers is one in which she features prominently. Here, then, her article can be seen as part of a broader preoccupation in media with historicising feminism.

Like many of the media event’s texts, ‘Shockwaves’ is heavily indebted to generational tropes and familial metaphors. For example, in a patronising tone, Summers’ laments the supposed inactivity of young feminists in Australia:

This generation, in Australia at least, is strangely inarticulate. Not one of them has leapt into print to describe and defend the view of the world she and her friends favour; nor to take on the ideas of the founders of the 1970s women’s movement. It is a puzzling silence (Summers, *Good Weekend*, 18-19/3/1995: 26).

Here, Summers laments the lack of ‘Oedipal rebellion’ (Roof, 1997: 70) by young women, a silence signalled by their textual absence – an absence further marked by the hypervisibility of their feminist ‘elders’ (i.e., Garner and Summers). She also sets up a clear ‘adversarial dynamic’ between her assumed audience, the feminist ‘we’ of her generation, and the object of utterance, the ‘they’ of the younger generation (Pearce, 2003: 35).

It seems surprising that Summers identifies a lack of young feminists ‘in print’ as indicative of their non-existence. There are two particularly problematic features of this assumption: that identification as feminist is contingent upon a written manifestation of one’s ideology, and that this ‘silence’ may not be due to the lack of circulating manuscripts but to publishers assumptions about feminism’s currency (or lack thereof) i.e., its viability as a commodity. Summers assumes that it is young
women’s disinterest in engaging with public discourse which is responsible for their ‘silence’. She grudgingly concedes that articulate feminist women exist in the academy, but identifies a failure on the part of these women to insert their voices into public discourse. As a result of such a failure, she suggests, ‘non-academics’ did not have access to an appropriate interpretative framework for understanding the complex issues brought into public discourse by the Ormond case (Summers, Good Weekend, 18-19/3/1995: 27-28). Summers here elides her own privilege, particularly in relation to her ability to speak authoritatively on the condition of contemporary Australian feminism. She assumes that young feminists have the capacity to simply write themselves into the mediascape at will, as she appears capable of doing by virtue of her institutional position. As Henderson and Rowlands observe ‘this sort of institutional currency has given her authority to speak and audiences to speak to’ (Henderson and Rowlands, 1996: 10), authority for which her following comments fail to account: ‘Why isn’t there someone – or several people – willing to take the risk involved in putting down on paper (or any medium) a passionate perspective of how life seems through twentysomething eyes?’ (Summers, Good Weekend, 18-19/3/1995: 29). She suggests that ‘it takes considerable effort to track down, keep track of, the thoughts of comparable young Australian women’ (Summers, Good Weekend, 18-19/3/1995: 27).

Summers’ call for the mobilisation and public circulation of feminist discourse by young women fails to acknowledge that this requires the exercise of a specific form of symbolic capital (Lemke, 1995: 38). Not all women have access to public discourse or deem such participation either appropriate, valuable or relevant. As a celebrity feminist journalist, despite questioning whether it could be ‘opportunity’ that stops young women from taking on their feminist foremothers (Summers, Good Weekend, 18-19/3/1995: 29), Summers does not recognise that subjects are differentially positioned in terms of access to discursive resources. In this regard, it important to be mindful of asymmetrical positions in discourse: ‘Calls for open debate and a free exchange of views, however, can be naive and potentially oppressive if they fail to address the unequal starting points and positions of the antagonists’ (Jay, 1997: 50). By prioritising writing, Summers assumes a very specific reading and feminist subject, an Other who mirrors her own privilege in terms of class, education and race. Through this failure to recognise the way specific modalities of difference can prohibit one’s access both to material and discursive resources, Summers positions herself as normative. In the Australian context, where indigenous women underscore dominant feminism’s reinscription of colonialist discourses,31 such a failure is particularly troublesome.

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31 As Jackie Huggins observes, ‘white women are colonists too, they are part of the dominant culture which continually oppresses us in this country’ (Huggins, 1998: 59).
Summers appears unable to concede the ambivalence of the policy outcomes secured by second-wave agitators for white, middle-class feminism’s Others (Moreton-Robinson, 2000: 107).

Like Garner, Summers invokes an academy/real world binary, as she suggests that young women who have ‘spent years on campus, arguing theories and being cosseted by a comfortable set of shared assumptions among most of their colleagues, had in no way prepared them for the real world’ (Summers, Good Weekend, 18-19/3/95: 29). For Summers, this is ‘Helen Garner’s point ... and most women would agree with her, that the world out there is better than it used to be when she and I were entering the workforce’ (Summers, Good Weekend, 18-19/3/95: 29). Here again is the ‘ressentiment’ discussed in Chapter Three, as Summers suggests that life in the public sphere was much more difficult than life on campus. Although she does not explicitly concur with Garner’s assertion about the young women’s excessive feminist behaviour, this point implies some generational synchronicity.

As in ‘Letter to the Next Generation’, she attributes a certainty and unified vision to the ‘early women’s movement’ which the current generation lack. In assuming this lack of coherency or unified movement to be the result of the daughter’s failure to distinguish herself from the mother (‘they still live under the banners and slogans of their mothers’ generation’), she deploys the debate’s governing trope and seeks to fix its participants according to their generational affiliation. Summers own conceptualisation of the mother/daughter relationship appears indebted to the psychoanalytic concepts governing much talk, both critical and popular, on this relationship: separation, individuation, autonomy and differentiation (Walters, 1992: 158). For Summers, her feminist daughters have failed to ‘repudiate the maternal’ (Walters, 1992: 228). Chapter Six is devoted to an analysis of the limitations of this generationalist narrative and the assumptions it makes about feminist histories, presents and futures.

Summers claims an authentic feminist identity, against the unstable identities of the next generation of feminists:

The warriors of the early women’s movement learned, above all, to take on the fight. That meant being sure about who we were and wanted to be, and what we wanted from society at large. Perhaps the problem young women face today is that they still live under the banners and slogans of their mothers’ generation; they have yet to map out what they think is worth fighting for (Summers, Good Weekend, 18-19/3/95: 29).

Here, as throughout the article, Summers reinscribes the nostalgia articulated in TFS and invokes the fiction of a uniform feminist ‘we’. However, while both Garner and Summers lament the form of feminism they see reflected in the next generation, their vision of such a young feminist is diametrically opposed; for Garner, she is too dogmatic, too doctrinaire; for Summers her ideological alignments are not clear, her
activism all but invisible. Summers’ inactivist then contradicts with Garner’s punitive ideologue. These two discursive constructions could not be more in conflict, a point little conceded in the perpetual homogenisation of Garner and Summers in both the media event frame and subsequent academic criticism. However, they do in effect represent two sides of the same coin: Summers fears women’s lack of interest in formal politics while Garner, through the example of the Ormond women, argues that young women’s feminism is expressed in inappropriate ways (Harris, 2004: 135). Finally, Summers assumes the inertia of the current generation: ‘Maybe the third wave will lead the way to a calmer and more reconciled future. I just wish they’d get started’ (Summers, Good Weekend, 18-19/3/95: 29). As a ‘forecast for feminism’, Summers’ impatience here embodies a fear about the future of political movements and the process of social change which is commonly projected onto young women (Harris, 2004: 136).

Summers uses the discursive space made available by Garner’s book to help circulate her own critique of young women and the way they practise feminism, and in this sense she deploys her celebrity capital for a rather questionable cause. Her provocative claims augmented TFS’s generational aspects and helped to ensure that the restrictive mother-daughter paradigm dominated throughout the event. Furthermore, Summers’ celebrity was not produced solely during or within TFS media event. As Emma Grahame observes that ‘Summers remains an influential figure in Australian feminism, whose long connection with the media ensures that her views on feminism will continue to be heard in the public sphere’ (Grahame, 1998: 499). This is not to assume that her celebrity authority remains uncontested; on the contrary, both her utterances and their authorisation within media are called into question by the letters to the editor analysed in Chapter Five. The final celebrity feminist to be considered here is Jenna Mead.

Competing (feminist) Truth-Claims: Jenna Mead as ‘Eye-Witness’ Celebrity
In this section I examine the ways Jenna Mead was represented (and represented herself, for news media do not simply manipulate unwitting celebrity feminists) during this event and how she was afforded a particular relation to truth. Mead is remarkable as a celebrity feminist during this event, given that she was the only public commentator who was actually involved with the Ormond case and the young women at its centre. Much of her authority is undoubtedly bound to this putative epistemic privilege. In contrast to Garner and Summers, Mead’s celebrity is entirely a product of this media event and, not surprisingly, has dissipated as it becomes an historical event.
Despite even Garner’s assertion that Mead ‘would have to feature as a central force in anyone’s account of these events’ (Garner, 1997: 12), apart from her own self-reflexive commentary, her role in the media event has been overlooked. This section seeks to redress that critical imbalance through underscoring the contestation of Garner’s truth-claims made possible by Mead’s own, alternative form of feminist celebrity. Like Summers, through her media interventions, Mead aims to steer the debate on a particular course – back to its generic classification and into the (mine)field of ethics and authorial responsibility. Through (re)focusing on such elements, in contrast to Summers, Mead attempts to discredit Garner’s stories of feminism. The celebrity that Mead performs results in the type of discursive ‘countercurrent’ described by Fiske, a space of oppositionality occurring concurrently with the hegemonic ‘currents’ embodied by Garner and Summers.

Mead featured as a relatively regular commentator in the event’s various stages, either through citations in articles, interviews, or her own journalistic pieces. In terms of mainstream media, as early as a week after the book’s publication Mead appeared in an interview entitled ‘The other side of Ormond’ (Kissane, 6/4/95, The Age: 15), a full-page feature appearing in The Age. The act of Mead speaking publicly, given both her refusal to speak to Garner and the Ormond women’s own silence, is itself considered newsworthy. For example: ‘Except for an interview in the literary journal RePublica, she has not told her side of the story until now’ (Kissane, 6/4/95, The Age: 15). Here, Mead’s capital as a news source is built on the journalist’s claims of exclusivity. The print media desire for feminist speakers, or speakers on feminism, to respond to Garner is most evident in newspaper attention directed towards Mead.

The appearance of Bodyjamming facilitated a reinvigoration of the event, wherein Mead’s relation to the events at Ormond become even more pronounced. Although Mead’s book did not inspire the same media uproar as TFS, as a contribution and response to the event, its high visibility was assured. As the title of one frontpage article suggests, ‘New book to rekindle College row’ (Trioli, 24/10/97, The Age: 1). With the publication of Bodyjamming, biographical narratives in print media featuring Mead became more prominent and the persistence of battle metaphors was ensured. For example, Kate Legge’s review, entitled ‘Coming out fighting’, argues that the book represents a ‘collective assault on Helen Garner’ (Legge, The Australian, 15/11/97: 27). She is ‘one of the chief stone-throwers in Australia’s feminist civil war’ (Lyall, 13/11/97, The Australian: 15). In other media accounts Mead is seen as a ‘central foe of Garner’s’ (Harford, 10/8/95, The Age: 11), dealing Garner ‘brutish blows’ (Slattery, 25/9/95, The Australian: 11). As these comments suggest, the positioning of Mead as a celebrity facilitated the representation of this event as a feminist battle between two ideologically
disparate combatants. Representations of Mead, however, disrupt generational narratives. Neither ‘mother’ nor ‘daughter’, she represents the many feminists between the waves who are said to ‘go missing’ in the dominant generational narratives of feminist history (Henry, 2003: 214). Mead, as an occupant of such an in-between generational space, troubles the wave model of feminist history and the mother/daughter positioning occupied by many of the event’s speakers.

Mead’s commentary exhibits the self-reflexivity that characterised the entire media event. Like Garner, she also reflected on the discursive construction of her celebrity persona in both critical commentary and during the event itself. In an article published by Mead in *The Age* on 16 August, she self-consciously observed:

> I will never be as powerful or as popular as Helen Garner. I am neither a famous novelist nor any kind of cultural icon. The media remains the most uneven of playing fields (Mead, 16/8/95, *The Age*: 17).

Here, however, Mead under-estimates her own power and value as one of the event’s central news actors (see Darcy: 1998b). In *Bodyjamming*, she suggests that her ability, despite many efforts, to ‘set the record straight’ was hindered by the limited subject positions open to her in news discourse:

> Actually what I needed, as one shrewd journalist eventually pointed out to me, was to do an interview in which I ‘came across’ as a ‘real person’ and not a ‘feminist bitch’. My problem was that I had not got my persona ‘right’ for the narrative in which I had become a leading player, as I was usually described. I was already typecast as the ‘feminist ideologue’ who ‘tried to stop Helen Garner’s research’ – which was code for ‘victimised’ her (Mead, 1997a: 27).

Mead also criticises Garner’s celebrification, and her condemnation of the celebrity sphere governs her own response to the event. However, as Wicke observes, ‘even those who repudiate the public sphere of celebrity for its so-called faulty representations of women are not immune to its allure’ (Wicke, 1998: 397). In her desire to tell the tale of a monologic print media, Mead fails to concede the cultural legitimacy she was (albeit temporarily) granted in media discourse. That said, in a critical analysis of the way the ‘bodies’ of the Ormond women were discursively constituted through newspapers of the early 1990s, Mead exhibits a pronounced self-reflexivity that directly contradicts her disavowal of authority at various times in the media texts of the event. She remarks:

> As a participant in the Ormond case, my position, my access to information, investments in and experience of the case have been profoundly influential: mine is a situated knowledge. That knowledge constitutes a certain kind of privilege (Mead, 1997b: 253).

She follows this acknowledgement of her own speaking position with the assertion: ‘In the Ormond case, I have also the privilege of signing my own name’ (Mead, 1997b: 253). She expressed the same discomfort with the processes of celebrity that Garner had, as one commentator suggested after Mead’s speech to the Sydney Institute:
Yesterday she revealed that among the personal jibes she was to endure, as the saga dragged out over a number of years, were comments from all over Melbourne that she was a conspirator. At the same time, her family had come under a lot of pressure, she had lost her job and her professional reputation had suffered (Harari, 22/9/95, *The Australian*: 3).

In her speech, Mead attempts to engender sympathy for the personal toll inflicted on her by Garner’s representation. In this way, she appropriates Garner’s narrative of subjection, repositioning herself from a conspiratorial feminist to a victim of TFS. This emphasis on the effects of the book on her life also afforded her a moral authority to speak about its inadequacies. Despite the above assertions of her distortion in media coverage, Mead did successfully reposition herself and thereby circulate an alternative narrative: one in which she was not a ‘feminist bitch’ but a privileged ‘truth’ teller. As the next section will show, her authority to speak is over-determined.

**Sources of Authority**

Due to the Ormond women’s decision not to subject themselves to media scrutiny, Mead represents the only character from *TFS* (apart from the highly visible narrator) available as a journalistic source. Having been certified as newsworthy, Mead is ‘empowered, within limits, to make news’ (Gitlin, 1980: 146). In ‘A Player in the Ormond drama defends her cause’, a title which seeks to personalise and thus emphasise the subjectivity of Mead’s account, the by-line aims to provide Mead with a form of authority based in her proximity to the Ormond College: ‘Jenna Mead, a former tutor at Ormond College, takes issue with Helen Garner’s views about feminism and the Ormond College case’ (Mead, 16/8/95, *The Age*: 7). Most journalists emphasised Mead’s position at Ormond, remarking that she was ‘a member of the Ormond College Council at the time the allegations were made’ (Trioli, 24/10/1997, *The Age*: 1), ‘the academic who advised the two young women after the night in question’ (Duffy, 8/11/1997, *The Australian*: 34), and ‘the academic who closely supported the two students in the Ormond College affair’ (Kissane, 4/4/95, *The Age*: 15). Mead was also referred to as ‘the equal opportunity expert when the two young women complained they had been harassed by the master of the college’ (Meade, *The Australian*, 23/4/1995: 5). She was also characterised as ‘an expert in feminist theory’ (Slattery, 21/9/95, *The Australian*: 1). As this comment suggests, Mead’s academic feminism is commonly contrasted with Garner’s more activist variety (see Lyall, 13/11/97, *The Australian*: 15), a rhetorical gesture which reinforces the binary mobilised in representations of Garner between the previous activist generation and the current more theoretical one. Many newspaper titles invoke Mead’s academic status: ‘Academic casts new stone’ (Slattery, 21/9/95, *The Australian*: 1), “Demonised”
academic reveals private toll of uni sex scandal’ (Harrari, 22/9/95, The Australian: 4) and ‘Medieval academic works into thoroughly modern furore’ (Lyall, 13/11/95, The Australian: 15). That said, throughout the event it tends to be Mead’s personal, rather than institutional, authority which is most commonly foregrounded.\textsuperscript{32} She is also the most high profile defender of the young women’s actions, thereby further complicating the idea that these sexually harassed young women and their course of action failed to receive any support in media discourse.

As these examples demonstrate, as an advisor to the young women involved in the Ormond case, Mead’s celebrity is informed by the authentic quality of ‘being there’. Her narratives, therefore, are primarily legitimatised as ‘eye-witness’ accounts; in press coverage of the speech, she is believed to offer ‘little-known facts about the case’ (Gibson, 20/9/95, The Age: 1). In news discourse, the ‘eye-witness’ is granted a privilege relation to ‘truth’, providing the journalist with an insider perspective on a news event to lend credibility to their account. In the ‘hierarchy of credibility’ (Ericson et al., 1989: 342) applied to news sources, the eye-witness – especially one with Mead’s pre-existing institutional privilege – must be situated at its highest point. As the quality marking Mead as ‘especially remarkable’ (Langer, 1998: 52), this eye-witness subjectivity also produces a form of celebrity which contrasts (and competes) with that embodied by Garner and Summers.

The celebrity afforded Mead in the print media is predicated on her relation to the events mapped in \textit{TFS}. Witness, as a verb, has a dual function; first, it is a sensory experience of being in the place where something happens, and, second, ‘witnessing is also the discursive act of stating one’s experience for the benefit of an audience that was not present at the event and yet must make some kind of judgement about it’ (Durham Peters, 2001: 709). As a tutor at Ormond and advisor to the young women, Mead witnessed the actions taken by them and therefore what she has seen authorises what she says (Durham Peters, 2001: 709). This process of turning such ‘private experience’ into a ‘public statement’ is itself fraught: ‘The journey from experience (the seen) into words (the said) is precarious. Witnessing presupposes a discrepancy between the ignorance of one person and the knowledge of another: it is an intensification of the problem of communication more broadly’ (Durham Peters, 2001: 710). That being said and despite these difficulties of the witness’s (un)reliability (Durham Peters, 2001: 710), the centrality of the witness in news discourse cannot be over-estimated. While other self-identified feminists were visible in the event as news sources, Mead’s eye-witness authority was of a fundamentally different order. The most important by-product of this witnessing is the production of her specific form of celebrity.

\textsuperscript{32} See Darcy, 1999: 47, who makes this argument about Braidotti’s essay in \textit{Bodyjamming}. 
‘Celetoid’ or the ‘Accidental Celebrity’

In Chris Rojek’s (2001) terminology, Mead’s celebrity is of the attributed order, a category reserved for those who come to media notice following an extraordinary occurrence in which they play a major part. For Rojek, such an attributed celebrity is a ‘celetoid’, a compressed and concentrated form of celebrity (Rojek, 2001: 20).

Similarly, in Rein et al.’s framework, Mead is the ‘accidental celebrity’, whose route to visibility, in contrast to Garner’s which is produced out of a larger marketing apparatus, is not as obviously orchestrated (Rein et al., 1998: 86). For both Rein and Rojek, the accidental or attributed celebrity achieves only a short-lived visibility: ‘Evanescence is the irrevocable condition of celetoid status’ (Rojek, 2001: 22), and Rein et al. argue that while ‘accidental celebrity provides an initial kickoff, sustaining and expanding it are often difficult or impossible’ (Rein et al., 1998: 86). Mead, however, proves adept at such sustenance and expansion. She continued to generate news interest, particularly when journalists caught in a binary paradigm requiring two sides to every story sought a feminist authority to provide an alternative perspective to that of Garner. In this sense, she became part of ‘an unfolding drama’ that transfixed the newspaper reading public (Rein et al., 1997: 95).

While all celebrity relies upon an abstract Other (i.e., the audience), Mead’s celebrity is most literally contingent upon Garner. Her very newsworthiness, like her celebrity, is established relationally. In this sense, she functions as a form of counter-celebrity, using the authority granted her in the media primarily to destabilise that of another celebrity feminist. Furthermore, her celebrity is a product of TFS narrative and its persistent classification as a form of non-fiction – the ‘Real’ Mead was absent from the narrative, obscured by Garner’s caricature of academic feminists. As Caitlin Mahar observed, this splitting of Mead into six characters in TFS ‘is the most obvious in a range of strategies that work to suggest, as Mead long ago pointed out, that Garner is reporting the existence of a real feminist conspiracy’ (Mahar, 1998: 53). In news discourse, Mead positions herself as the embodiment of Garner’s literary (and literal) deception. She thereby engenders media sympathy through her positioning as the party whom Garner has, through these unethical textual practices, wronged. Mead’s presence in the event enables us to consider what happens when the Other upon whom Garner’s narrative (and narratorial self) is based (re)asserts itself in public discourse, when the liberties Garner has taken with the ‘real’ erupt to a point of crisis. Through this textual strategy, Garner ‘bolsters the alleged power of feminism’ (Murphy, 2002: 54): ‘Once feminism is inflated into an intellectual bully who malevolently enforces a restrictive orthodoxy it becomes easy to argue for its demise’ (Murphy, 2002: 54). Here, then,
Mead represents an important challenge to the idea of a hegemonic feminist orthodoxy, particularly in the university context. Her media presentation of a unified self is used to suggest the impossibility of the ‘feminist conspiracy’ surrounding Ormond and upon which Garner’s paranoid critique of feminism so heavily relies. While Mead may not have been granted the same cultural legitimacy as Garner, she was certainly given many opportunities to circulate her alternative understandings of feminism and sexual harassment, as journalists quoted her and she performed in the same forum through which Garner had re-fuelled the debate: the Sydney Institute.

**Right of Reply: Mead at the Sydney Institute**

Although opportunities for a ‘right of reply’ within Australian media discourse are believed to be scarce (Daniel, 1997: 37), both Garner and Mead were afforded and exercised such rights on a regular basis. It is Mead’s oppositionality, in the very concrete sense of her opposition to Garner, that affords her access to the Sydney Institute forum and ensures its viability as news. Her speech was, like Garner’s, published nationwide as part of this exchange between them. Appearing in *The Age*, *The Australian*, and the *Sydney Morning Herald* and covered in papers around the country, including the *Hobart Mercury*, *The Daily Telegraph Mirror* and the *Courier Mail*, the speech was accompanied by contextualising articles which offered further publicity, and is indicative of the perpetual struggle over the meanings of the text and feminism enacted by media responses throughout 1995-96. As in the responses to Garner’s speech cited earlier, Mead’s speech is credited with bringing ‘fresh life to the bitter exchange surrounding Helen Garner’s *The First Stone*’ (Slattery, 21/9/95, *The Australian*: 1). Though not engaged in face to face interaction, the claims and counterclaims of Garner and Mead worked as a form of public debate, the importance of which has recently been emphasised by Simon Cottle: such dialogic exchanges are important for readers, who are ‘are able to consider the reasons and rhetoric, the claims and counter-claims, and the arguments and performances enacted by opposing interests and to evaluate these as they unfold in interaction’ (Cottle, 2003: 153). In this ‘mediated play of difference’, he argues, diverse identities embody and advance competing discourses (Cottle, 2003: 153).

Like Garner’s in the preceding month, Mead’s speech attracted substantial news interest, most of which was positive. Kimina Lyall asserted that ‘the feminist academic was surprisingly generous to *The First Stone*’ (Lyall, 28/10/95, *The Australian*: 6). However, in Richard Guillatt’s article, which appeared in the same edition of the

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33 Following the publication of *Bodyjamming*, Mead was invited back to the Sydney Institute to extend this preliminary commentary on the event which was in process at the time of her first speech.
Sydney Morning Herald as the reprinted speech, ‘Dr Mead leaves no stone unturned’, Mead is sensationnally and satirically pictured, grinning cheekily while literally sinking her teeth into a copy of TFS (Guillatt, 21/9/95, SMH: 7). In The Australian, Mead’s speech was entitled ‘When it comes to sex and power, Garner doesn’t get it’ (Mead, 21/9/95, The Australian: 11), with a by-line encapsulating Mead’s argument: ‘The First Stone is a misleading patchwork of fact and fabrication’. In the Sydney Morning Herald’s reprint of the speech, entitled ‘First Stone pushes panic buttons’, the by-line read: ‘In a fresh round of stone throwing, academic Jenna Mead accuses controversial author Helen Garner of a ghastly caricature of feminism’ (Mead, 21/9/95, SMH: 13).

The Age made explicit this battle between Garner and Mead through unambiguously entitling Mead’s speech: ‘Mead v Garner’ (Mead, 21/9/95, The Age: 15). This sense of a rhetorical battle is facilitated by their responses to each other’s interventions throughout the event: ‘Garner and Jenna Mead are equally frank in their contempt for each other’s discursive modes’ (Goldsworthy, 1996: 71). In the course of the event, Luke Slattery observes: ‘In the exchange between Mead and Garner, one senses a keen struggle for control’ (Slattery, 25/9/95, The Australian: 11). This narrative of duelling feminists has punctuated the history of media engagement with feminism, and the assumption that ‘there’s nothing better than two prominent feminists “having it out” in public’ (Flutter and Else-Mitchell, 1998: xxi) will be further considered in Chapter Six.

Mead’s speech is deeply affective as she attempts to engage with Garner’s textual rendering of events in which she appears heavily implicated. She presents her own way of knowing as (ethically) superior to Garner’s misrepresentation.34 The speech emphasises Garner’s lack of commitment to truth and objectivity throughout: ‘The key to The First Stone is this lack of interest in truth’ and ‘ignoring the facts prove convenient’ (Mead, 21/9/95, SMH: 13). In other locations and through other textual forms, Mead had been making such claims regarding the book’s untruths since TFS’s publication. For example, in a letter to the editor of Australian Book Review she suggests: ‘My concern is that readers have been misled about the ‘truth’ of this book and its status as ‘non-fiction’ (Mead, 1995: 3). Similarly, in an interview early in the debate she attacked the text through recourse to the idea that the book was inaccurate and partial in its account (Kissane, 6/4/95, The Age: 15).

In Mead’s speech, it is Garner’s textual strategies, and their problematic relationship to the Real, that most irks her: ‘Real people rub shoulders with invented

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34 Mead’s speech also makes an important contribution to the representations of Garner circulating in print media. In Sydney Morning Herald, the speech is accompanied by a large cartoon of Garner. She sits at a desk penning what is obviously TFS, and appears blindfolded, thus ‘blind’ to the truth that Mead uses her speech to articulate (21/9/95, SMH: 13).
characters’ (Mead, 21/9/95, SMH: 13). Rather than invoking the misrepresentation of the Ormond women involved in the case, she strategically focuses on her own alleged ‘distortion’. Like Garner’s, Mead’s speech represents a significant act of self-representation. As I have suggested, while analysis of modes of self representation in fiction or even in academic writing have been pronounced, the self-representational practices of feminists in more overtly non-fictional forms, such as news, have been under-analysed. The ‘real’ is distorted by Garner, as Mead suggests:

Since all the fictional conspirators are versions of me and, as Helen says repeatedly, I wouldn’t speak to her, how does she know whether I am ghastly, punitive, puritanical or politically correct? ... Of course she doesn’t know. But she’s not interested either because it’s not facts that push buttons; it’s panic (Mead, 21/9/95, SMH: 13).

Rather than suggest that Garner’s ‘feminist conspiracy’ should be read as a discursive construct, Mead resorts to the ‘fact’ that she was split into six different characters in the book to ‘suggest that [Garner] is reporting the existence of a real conspiracy’ (Mead, 21/9/95, SMH: 13). Like Garner, Mead attempts to shutdown certain interpretive possibilities of the book. In her speech, she mobilises a fact/fiction dichotomy in order to contest Garner’s account, claiming to access the ‘reality’ distorted by Garner. Her speech suggests that notions of ‘objective journalism’, ‘fact’ and ‘truth’ still have currency in public discourse as she invokes each of these terms to critique Garner’s account: ‘The book substitutes hearsay and innuendo for fact and evidence’ (Mead, 21/9/95, SMH: 13). Mead’s will to truth is, however, entirely strategic, and works as her primary rhetorical device for challenging what she argues to be Garner’s reactionary politics. As Louise McNay observes, an oppositional discourse can ‘break down the monolith of ‘official’ or received truths’ through a strategic deployment of the notion of ‘truth’ (McNay, 1993: 138). As a result, a fluid space is opened up, ‘where alternative truths – other ways of living and of conceiving of the world – can be articulated’ (McNay, 1993: 138).

Mead uses her access to the ‘facts’ to problematise Garner’s representation of feminism, which she identifies as one of the narrative’s attractions: ‘The lure of The First Stone is that for the first time, someone has got these “ghastly, punitive, puritanical feminists”, a whole conspiracy of them, exposed in print’ (Mead, 21/9/95, SMH: 13). She challenges both the generic categorisation of TFS and the grounds on which Garner’s authority is predicated: ‘The First Stone isn’t a work of investigative journalism or feminist inquiry. The character Helen poses as a pseudo-intellectual claiming the high moral ground of truth and the credentials of feminism’ (Mead, 21/9/95, SMH: 13). TFS ‘cannibalises the lives of real people, licenses misinformation and prejudice, and encourages misogyny and panic’ (Mead, 21/9/95, SMH: 13). Given Mead’s own positioning as advisor to the young women in the case, it is ironic that she
casts her own speech as offering an objectivity, a factuality, which Garner failed to offer. That is, Mead’s own entanglement in the events at Ormond meant that her account was just as interested as Garner’s. Nonetheless, Mead’s choice to contest Garner’s work on the grounds of factual inaccuracies and misrepresentations opened a space for others to problematise the text on ethical grounds, and therefore represents a successful rhetorical manoeuvre to contest Garner’s (claims to) authority. In her study of the interaction between the women’s movement and media discourses, Barker-Plummer (1995) emphasises the complex strategies deployed by women in the ongoing struggle to be ‘given voice’ in news:

News, like signification or knowledge more generally, is a resource, then, but a resource whose strategic use requires that sources articulate their experiences within its terms. Like other forms of discourse, news is a system of meaning, one that comes with its own encoded and implicit assumptions about reality. Using that discourse constrains what it is possible to say (Barker-Plummer, 1995: 321).

However, as Barker-Plummer also emphasises, the use of such discourse is enabling for feminists. As this section demonstrates, Mead strategically does articulate her experiences within news discourse’s own terms, particularly through her invocation of truth. In doing so, she is given voice in a textual climate sometimes (though not inevitably) hostile to feminists. By taking up a position within news discourse to counteract the ‘facts’ of Garner’s account, Mead helps to sustain the ‘web of facticity in news discourse’ (Ericson et al., 1989: 397). That is, that news possesses a privileged relation to truth. Though constrained by the news context in which she chose to operate, Mead’s strategic use of the print media to represent Garner and her book as ethical failures should not be under-estimated.

**Mead’s Celebrity Challenge to Garner’s Ethics**

There never was a feminist conspiracy. We ask novelists to speak about our public ethics and our private values. We ask journalists to tell us the truth about events in our daily lives. Helen Garner confuses the first with the second; in *The First Stone* she fails to distinguish between her private agendas and issues of ethical conduct (Mead, 16/8/95, *The Age*: 17).

One of the most powerful effects of Mead’s celebrity, and her attempts to challenge Garner’s truth-claims about feminism, is a public (re)consideration of the ethics of Garner’s textual strategies. These concerns have been mirrored in recent academic work on the ethics of storytelling, particularly that which claims a privileged relation to truth such as life writing or non-fiction. As Paul Eakin remarks, ‘a writer’s ethical responsibility to tell the truth about biographical fact extends every bit as much to the “nonfiction novel” as it does to memoir’ (Eakin, 2004: 2). Such concerns were salient

35 Likewise Mark Davis argues that Garner’s major failing is her lack of acknowledgement that non-fiction, unlike fiction, requires empirical validation (Davis, 1997: 161).
during the media event, and also serve to challenge the idea that Garner was subject to little scrutiny. In the above quotation, Mead sees TFS as a significant ethical failure. In terms of the claims of news actors such as Mead, while ‘gaining visibility is a necessary condition for communicative impact’, the ‘career of a discursive message’ will most likely be stifled ‘if it does not succeed in provoking reactions from other actors in the public sphere’ (Koopmans, 2004: 9). In this regard, as a result of Mead’s relevations, Garner’s authority was further scrutinised by other news commentators. Some opinion piece writers questioned Garner’s ethics and her subversion of readerly expectations. In ‘There’s a fraction too much faction’ in The Australian, Mathew Ricketson invokes the sanctity of the contractual writer-reader relationship, suggesting that Garner’s fabrication signified an authorial breach of trust. He conflates non-fiction with journalistic writing, arguing: ‘Sure, there are going to be gaps in the accounts of events, but the reader should be able to have faith that when the writer says someone did something they did’ (Ricketson, 14/9/95, The Australian: 15). He continues:

If the reader cannot believe Garner on such a central point, a pall is cast over the entire book. That may sound like an overstatement, but people have higher expectations of a book length work of non-fiction than they do of the news media, with its twin daily imperatives of time and space. They believe the author has spent probably a year, maybe more, gathering material and weighing the plausibility of different people’s accounts before arriving at what they believe to be their best possible version of the truth (Ricketson, 14/9/95, The Australian: 15).

Likewise, in the Financial Review Brian Toohey launched his disappointment at ‘the effect of misleading readers’ in a different direction (Toohey, Financial Review, 5/9/95: 17). From a political economy perspective, he criticised Pan Macmillan for publishing the book despite the fact that it was aware of its pivotal illusion. For Pan MacMillan ‘maximising returns to shareholders’ was primary, and for Toohey, the company proceeded with publication for purely commercial reasons (Toohey, Financial Review, 5/9/95: 17). In Toohey’s rendering, the company was at fault for publishing a work of so-called non-fiction incapable of sustaining its truth-claims. In this sense, Garner (and her publisher) can be accused of ‘false advertising’ (Douglas, 2001: 813), an implication also made by Toohey.

The question of Garner’s ‘truths’ engaged many commentators, particularly as the book’s status as a piece of work laying claims to represent ‘real’ events remained largely uncontested throughout the debate. As Chapter Two has shown, the marketing and reviewing system in which the text was implicated positioned it as a factual piece of writing, and thus it is unsurprising that questions relating to its truth claims came to the fore following Mead’s ‘relevations’ of distortion. Critics such as Toohey and Ricketson attempt to make Garner accountable once Mead’s counter-claims trouble Garner’s own. As Sean Burke argues, when a text is ‘ethically troublesome’, questions of
signature necessarily assert themselves (Burke, 1995: 289). Burke observes: ‘Such situations of ethical crisis, in spite of and because of their extremity, reveal that an ethical contract has always already been put in place on the basis of the relationship of the signatory to the text’ (Burke, 1995: 289). For these critics, Garner’s distortion of Mead represents a breach of this pact, which in turn attentuates her authority.

Media critique of Garner following Mead’s revelations about TFS’s factual inaccuracies suggests that the author of non-fiction can be called to account for her transgressions, including ‘misrepresentation of biographical or historical truth’ and the ‘infringement of the right to privacy’ (Eakin, 2001: 113-114). As life writing theorist, Paul Eakin, argues: ‘You don’t make the front page of the [newspaper] for violating a literary convention’ (Eakin, 2001: 115). Garner is seen, not to have violated a literary convention, but to have violated a person through a calculated act of misrepresentation; as one critic subsequently argued, this deceptive textual strategy represents ‘one of The First Stone’s grossest and most infamous misrepresentation of the facts’ (Mahar, 1998: 53). In underscoring this dimension of the text, Mead thereby facilitates the opening of a space for an ethical (re)consideration of Garner’s claims to truth, and in this sense, her celebrity produces unforeseen effects.

Furthermore, in strategically representing herself as the unified self artificially ‘split’ within Garner’s narrative, she acts as very material challenge to the feminist conspiracy on which Garner’s tale of feminism’s demise was predicated. Through her assertions of Garner’s untruths, it is not so much that Mead offers an alternative form of feminism, but that she undermines the authority upon which Garner’s stories of contemporary feminism’s myriad inadequacies are based. In this sense, Mead’s celebrity represents a significant challenge to Garner’s ability, in the language of journalistic practice, to ‘accurately reflect’ upon the state of contemporary feminism.

**Conclusion**

As this chapter has shown, contemporary media culture and feminism have been reconfigured by this marked shift towards celebrity. In terms of the constitutive elements of the media event mapped by this thesis, this chapter has demonstrated how various forms of (feminist) celebrity were constructed, managed and intersected. Rather than arguing that their authority was commensurate, I focused instead on the textual processes via which these three women were differentially authorised to speak

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36 These ethical questions have also preoccupied subsequent feminist criticism on the event. Foong Ling Kong, for example, argues that ‘you have a responsibility to be true to your subjects’ (1997: 74), while I have already referred to Lucy Frost and Cassandra Pybus’ responses to the ethics of Garner’s textual practice. However, Mead’s speech facilitated a period of more intense engagement with questions of Garner’s ethics.
on feminism. Each form analysed here has underscored the different modes of ‘celebrity feminism’, enabling them to make certain truth-claims about feminism and to construct particular feminist selves. Firstly, Garner’s celebrity feminism, now considerably faded (although her literary celebrity continues unabated), represents an instance of how ‘particular modalities of renown come and go’ (Newbury, 2000: 282). Garner used the celebrity granted her in print media to (re)circulate her book’s main presuppositions about an irrelevant, immature feminism, a gesture made possible by a failure in news discourse to posit a distinction between the narrator of *TFS* and the author-effect, ‘Helen Garner’, produced within the media texts. Garner’s celebrity presence within the event constitutes a specific form of ‘epitextuality’ (Genette: 1997), which works to delimit the meanings of *TFS* and, in turn, feminism. The book’s own ‘maximum visibility’ was tied to the other celebrity narratives analysed in this chapter. The second celebrity feminist analysed here, Anne Summers, continues to be called upon to regularly speak on (behalf of) feminism in media discourse, and contributes to understandings of feminism through publications such as her autobiography (Summers: 1999) and the recent polemic, *The End of Equality* (2003). Summers helped to ensure that the dominant frame for reading the book (and the event) would be generationalism. Thirdly, through attention to Mead, I have demonstrated that she featured as celebrity feminist only within the terms, and temporality, of the event with an assumed access to truth not granted other speakers. In so vigorously counteracting the truth-claims of the event’s central celebrity, her presence within the event demonstrates the oppositional possibilities of ‘celebrity feminism’.

As Wicke argues, celebrity feminism is in the final instance a ‘mixed blessing for feminism’ (Wicke, 1998: 387). Although Garner’s, Summers’, and Mead’s celebrity enabled them to circulate particular narratives relating to feminism in print media, the politics (and the exclusions) of these stories are often questionable. However, the ability of writers such as these to control ‘information and its flow’ (Purves, 1990: 31) is not uniform and cannot extend to what readers actually do with the material circulating in the name of these commentators. Moreover, though celebrities ‘stand out in a crowd’, this immense cultural visibility is ‘always dependent on the willingness of the crowd to pay attention’ (Lumby, 1999: 115). Whatever the authority of the celebrity, it is always contingent upon the audience. Although Garner attempted to have the last word in this discursive war through her defensive letter to the editor after the publication of Mead’s speech (Garner, *The Australian*, 21/9/95: 5), she was not the only one to take advantage of this traditional form of participatory culture to critique the direction of the debate and question its key contributors. It is to the contributions of such ‘reader-writers’ during this media event that I now turn.
Chapter Five
Readers Writing *The First Stone* Media Event: Letters to the Editor, Australian Feminisms and Mediated Citizenship

The making of mainstream public opinion is mainly a routinised affair, the business of pundits as opposed to lay citizens. Occasionally, however, something happens that explodes the circuits of professional opinion-making-as-usual and calls for widespread and intense public debate (Nancy Fraser, 1997: 99).

This response [letters to the editor] from young women was evidently unexpected and Summers, who has made a career out of tracking shifts in public opinion, was seriously wrong-footed. This does not happen very often or very publicly in the media. The scale and conviction of this response – the range of people entering the public domain – indicated that ordinary Australians were not giving any credence to the columnists on the topic of sexual harassment and feminism (Jenna Mead, 1997a: 23-24).

Introduction
Feminist media critics have suggested that ‘questions of audience are never far away from any feminist work on the media’ (Baehr and Gray, 1996: 101). Accordingly, this chapter turns to a material form of audience participation in media culture: letters to the editor. In this chapter, consistent with his culture as a river of discourses metaphor, I focus on what John Fiske would refer to as ‘countercurrents’, points in the debate where dominant or hegemonic voices legitimated elsewhere become subject to intense scrutiny (Fiske: 1996). In demonstrating readers’ critical media literacy, these letters suggest that assumptions regarding the effects of the event on its implicitly passive consumers are difficult to sustain. In contrast to the notion that it is only within alternative or independent media outlets that readers are able to articulate their dissatisfaction with ‘mainstream’ news, this chapter emphasises the importance of the letters forum in the performance of (mediated) citizenship. Here, I also demonstrate that reader-writers effectively extend the parameters of debate laid by celebrity feminists such as Garner and Summers to move into deeper ruminations on feminism, identity, and representation. Letters to the editor, therefore, are both proactive and reactive: ‘Letters can be proactive in the sense of redirecting the coverage being given by the newspaper, and even initiating a new issue …’ (Ericson et al., 1989: 339).

1 An article based on this chapter was published in the *Journal of Australian Studies* (Taylor: 2004).
Building upon *Chapter Four’s* focus on the ways in which the book came to circulate in media discourse, yet in contrast to my own textual analysis in *Chapter Three*, this chapter sees the meanings of the book as relative to its uses (Williamson, 1989: 88). As in other chapters, I engage with the self-representational practices of letter-writers, particularly those taking up an explicitly feminist subject position.

These voices, like those of all contributors to the debate, are constrained and enabled by a number of factors interrogated throughout this chapter. In particular, it is important to be conscious of the role of the event itself in their realisation and subsequent publication. As Bill Bonney and Helen Wilson argue: ‘Prominent people tend to render newsworthy the events they participate in. In the case of other people, it is in the event, not the person, that the “news value” – marketability – resides’ (Bonney and Wilson, 1983: 312). The public audibility of these voices, therefore, seems contingent on the event. Nonetheless, the presence of their voices – if transient and conditional – remains significant. Bringing these voices to the fore is central to my aim of refiguring the event and questioning claims of its monologism. While emphasising its participatory dimensions, I remain conscious that these reader-writers would be unlikely to receive the same type of cultural legitimation as those to whom they primarily respond (i.e., Garner, Summers, and other prominent media speakers).

Letters to the editor, as a form of critical response to other texts, suggest much about the manner in which reader-writers relate to the published material constitutive of the event, including *TFS* itself. As ‘public acts of interpretation by citizen critics’ letters to the editor ‘can reveal the very unsettled and polyphonic nature of texts as well as the widely divergent judgments of actual readers’ (Eberly, 2000: 2). In this chapter, I argue that reader-writer attempts to make sense of the media event function as a site for the construction of particular selves. Throughout the following analysis of these letters, by relating their content to relevant feminist criticism, I will also underscore the ways in which the concerns raised by reader-writers are consonant with those preoccupying academic feminists. In this sense, the letters – like other aspects of the debate – demonstrate that conversations and contestations over feminism, its past, present and future, are occurring in textual locations less privileged than the academy.²

Letters to the editor are analysed here as a form of cultural practice, and, in terms of content, as specific contributions to the debate sparked by *TFS*. Thus, these letters are important both in terms of what their existence suggests about audience activity, mediated citizenship and performative identity, and what they literally say about Australian feminism, women and representation. While this chapter largely

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² Critics such as Katie King have highlighted the dangers of locating feminist theorising solely within the academy (King, 1994: 89).
focuses on the letters published in a specific edition of the Good Weekend, I also engage with other relevant letters to newspaper editors published sporadically during this period. These include letters to the editors of magazines such as Time, Who Weekly, and the ‘alternative’ newspaper, Green Left Weekly, which each offered reader responses to articles on TFS or the health of an allegedly ailing contemporary feminism.

Although letters to the editor have long been a part of mainstream media, their significance can be seen to have shifted in a contemporary media climate witnessing a diversification of participants, a more nuanced notion of media publics, and forms of citizenship that are increasingly media-ted. Such letters need to be read in the context of this ‘changing role of the mass media in political discussion, participatory democracy and public discourse’ (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994: 1). Attention to participatory sites of media can result in the ‘broadening of the notion of political action to include the discursive’ (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994: 28). These letters provide a discursive space through which to consider these concerns. Further, the majority of letters appear with signatures coded as feminine. For the women participants talking back to specific representations of women and feminism, this potentially democratising gesture is particularly important. As Michael Bromley observes, while the letters forum is often seen as the ‘genuine voice of the public’, traditional correspondents to the editor were ‘white, middle-class men’ (Bromley, 1998: 150). The identity markers proffered by the reader-writers examined here suggest that the profile of such a correspondent is perhaps not as uniform as it may have been in the past.

**Letters and the Media Event**

Debate in the letters forum was not limited to so-called ‘mainstream’ print media, but was also conducted in the literary press. Australian Book Review, for example, published a number of letters in June, July, and October 1995, responding to both TFS and the truth-claims of the event’s central figures in particular. Karin Wahl-Jorgensen suggests that the letters section ‘gives voice to people who don’t usually have one, or who don’t usually choose to use it’ (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2000: 158). However, throughout 1995, the discursive space of the letters page was populated, not only by those not otherwise authorised to intervene in the debate, but also by its central figures. The latter, unlike less privileged reader-writers, had a surfeit of textual sites in/from which to speak. As I argued in the previous chapter, during the event this space is used by those who perceive their voice to have been mis-read, such as Garner herself (July 1995, ABR: 3, 23-24/9/95, The Age: 5), Jenna Mead and Cassandra Pybus (ABR, June 1995: 3), other prominent feminists such as Meaghan Morris, and less recognisable
members of the community; it is the contributions of the latter with which this chapter is preoccupied.

Throughout the media event, commentators foregrounded their awareness of the intertextual network to which they were contributing and often responded directly, and affectively, to the positions taken by other commentators. In this hyperreality, the locus of discussion became the representation of a particular construction of feminism, of *TFS*, of Garner, and of young feminists in media discourse. These letters are likewise preoccupied with such issues, and are critically valuable as both reflections on the debate and (its) cultural politics and as engagements with – and instances of – contemporary Australian feminist discourse. In their commentary on public discourse’s sanctioning of particular ‘feminist’ voices over others, these letters are indicative of the general self-reflexivity and meta-commentary that came to characterise media engagement with *TFS*. Generally, as Stephen Tanner observes, ‘the media receive bad press in letters to the editor’ (Tanner, 1999: 72). For example, in a letter published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 21 August 1995, a reader-writer contests media constructions of feminists, quoting from material previously published in the *Herald*:

In all my years of wandering through the groves of academe, the Left, the taxi industry, the museum world, the conservation movement and the Public Service, I never have located Helen Garner’s ‘grimmer tribes’ (*Herald, August 9*), nor yet Paddy McGuinness’s ‘stalinoid wimminist fanatics’ (*Herald, August 10*) (Gavin Gatenby, *SMH*, 21/8/95: 10).

Similarly, Meaghan Morris’ letter, published in the same edition under the hyper-alliterative caption ‘Fiery feud among feisty feminists’, commences:

What a relief to see the *Herald* (*August 16*) give some space to Dr Jenna Mead’s view of the Garner (as distinct from the Ormond) affair. For a while there, it looked as though the only way to avoid media denunciation as a Nazi, a Stalinist, a wimminist thought-policer and a grim, thin-bodied fundamentalist feminist was to confess total agreement with *The First Stone* (Meaghan Morris, *SMH*, 21/8/95: 10).

These reader-writers are highly critical of the tropes being deployed to represent feminists in news discourse. As one editor in Ericson et al.’s study suggested in relation to readers’ letters, his desk functioned as the newspaper’s ‘complaint department’ (Ericson et al., 1989: 343). These preliminary examples suggest letters to the editor can be seen as a limited form of ‘watchdog on the press’ (Bromley, 1998: 158) or as a means to redress ‘unreasonable coverage’ (Ericson et al., 1989: 308). Furthermore, letters to the editor, as a form of reader media criticism, are more likely to be critical of the coverage to which they are responding (Tanner, 1999: 62). Letters extremely critical of press coverage of a particular issue, and which therefore disagree with the newspaper’s view, do not appear to be censored or discriminated against by the editor (Tanner, 1999: 62), a point substantiated by the many critical letters punctuating *TFS* event.
The letters pages during this time were not solely populated by oppositional voices or those questioning the way the event was playing out in print media discourse. Those disagreeing with more progressive commentators in the debate also used the letter to the editor to talk back. For example, in *The Age* one reader-writer takes issue with Don Edgar’s earlier opinion piece which itself challenged another commentator, P.P. McGuinness (Kim Cornish, 13-14/8/95, *The Age*: 12). Further, a series of four letters were grouped together under the heading: ‘Disagreements within feminism’ (12-13/5/95, *SMH*: 34) and respond to Cassandra Pybus’ review of a few days prior (Pybus, 9/5/95, *SMH*: 15). Such letters demonstrate that general media commentators, as well as those central to the debate, were not immune from the public scrutiny hosted by the letters page. The letters interrogated later in this chapter also self-consciously locate their own positions vis-a-viz other articulations of the debate. The letters forum, as Brian McNair asserts, ‘provides a space in which debate can take place between citizens, in full view of the readership as a whole, in exchanges of opinion which may continue over a period of days or even weeks’ (McNair, 2000: 108).

In the previous chapter I mentioned that the event’s key celebrity, Garner herself, chose the letter to the editor forum to counteract the truth-claims offered in Mead’s speech to the Sydney Institute. In a reflexive gesture characteristic of the meta-commentary enveloping the event, Garner’s letter appeared in the *Weekend Australian* (Helen Garner, *The Australian*, 23-24/9/95: 5) framed by an article entitled ‘Garner denounced academic’s attack as disgraceful slur’ (Meade, *The Australian*, 23-24/9/95: 5). This letter offered more, therefore, than just commentary on press coverage; the act of Garner writing itself generated further media attention. Her letter appears not only alongside other letters, editorials and opinion pieces, but is relocated to the material site of ‘factual’ news. Such repositioning from the actual ‘Letters’ page to page five of the paper affords Garner’s letter a form of authority denied others. Further, Garner’s letter was published not only with her printed name, like other letters, but also with her signature, thus again differentiating her letter from the contributions of ‘ordinary’ everyday reader-writers who are not permitted to literally sign their letters. In her letter, validated by the aura of a signature, Garner addresses Mead’s truth-claims with her own counterclaims. Garner writes: ‘Jenna Mead speaks at length about what she calls my “lack of interest in truth”. This is a disgraceful slur, particularly coming from someone who so determinedly obscured my own search for it’ (Helen Garner, *The Australian*, 23-24/9/95: 5). Garner here launches an attack on Mead, not on the media which had given her voice. She also used the letters to the editor forum in *Australian Book Review* in a similar fashion, to challenge and attack Mead: ‘If only Dr Mead were an imaginary character – but it would strain the ingenuity of a better writer than I am
to have dreamt her up' (Helen Garner, ABR, July 1995: 3). Garner’s use of this forum notwithstanding, in this chapter I am concerned with less privileged speakers.

Although ‘newspaper pages are mainly one-way streets’ (Daniel, 1997: 37), the letters section does provide a site where the flow can become multidirectional. The letters published during the debate, and particularly in the special edition of the Good Weekend upon which this chapter focuses, illustrate that efforts to delimit feminism publicly – particularly through investing celebrities with the authority to define it – can be questioned from below. These momentary textual eruptions into the mediasphere suggest the impossibility of controlling the meanings readers make of material that they find in media culture. Some critics have asserted that the debate was dominated by a small number of elites (see Mead: 1997a, Davis: 1997). Even if this were the case, it is also the case that what readers actually did with such supposedly homogenised voices at the localised level of reception is something to which we are not privy. However, through such forums as letters to the editor, readers try to make their own interpretations public. As such, letters to the editor can be seen as a ‘micro-level form of audience research’ (Collins, 1997: 128). In alignment with the positioning of this thesis as a form of (albeit recent) cultural history, texts such as letters to the editor, as ‘material instantiations of readers’ responses’ (Rodden, 1989: 71), provide important primary material for this thesis. While some articles have briefly mentioned these letters (Genovese: 1996, Mead: 1997a, Ling Kong: 1997), there has been no detailed analysis of either these Good Weekend letters or others published during the event.

Letters to the editor, as responses to other published material, are a self-consciously intertextual form. The letters examined later in this chapter are in dialogue, not only with each other, but also with other letters, features, books, opinion pieces and cartoons (Perriam, 1982: 38) that circulated during the event. Letters in dialogue with other can be classified as part of the ‘rejoinder’ genre, where reader-writers ‘engage with ideas already in circulation by responding to a previous letter or to a particular magazine item’ (Newman, 2004: 83). The individual threads of the intertextual web in which these reader-writers are enmeshed are not only these articles, but include TFS itself and various representations and self-representations of ‘Garner’ circulating in print media discourse during this event. The articles to which these letters primarily respond, David Leser’s article and Summers’ maternalistic vision of feminist in-activism, ‘Shockwaves at the Revolution’, appeared in the Good Weekend’s annual women’s edition (18-19/3/95, SMH); both texts were analysed in the previous chapter. As Kerryn Goldsworthy emphasises, these articles were published the same weekend as TFS and represented the first detailed discussion of the book to appear in mainstream media (Goldsworthy, 1996: 69). The 1995 women’s edition aimed to ‘stir up scandal
around *The First Stone* (Spongberg, 1997: 238), and the letters analysed in this chapter suggest that Summers was successful.

**Reader-Writers in Public Discourse: 'Shockwaves Start an Avalanche' (Good Weekend, May 13, 1995)**

In May 1995, four pages of letters were published under the rubric, ‘Shockwaves Start an Avalanche’ in the *Sydney Morning Herald’s Good Weekend* supplement. As the introductory sentence to the letter pages suggests: ‘The articles on sexual harassment and feminism’s gender gap in our recent issue generated the greatest volume of mail in the magazine’s 10-year history’. In a later article, Summers herself suggests that the response to Leser’s article and her own ‘deliberately provocative essay’ was ‘enormous’ (‘DIY Gen’, 21/9/96, *Good Weekend*: 26): ‘It produced the greatest amount of mail this magazine has ever received – more than 300 letters’ (Summers, 21/9/96, *Good Weekend*: 26). However, only twenty-seven letters made it to the publication stage which, we are told, ‘have been edited for space and legal reasons’. Many of the letters in *The Good Weekend* contest the particular narratives of feminism, past and present, which various articles and TFS have privileged. In the spirit of the meta-commentary governing *TFS* media event, in their discussions of the event journalists also invoked the ‘Shockwaves’ letters. Here, what newspapers were publishing was itself news. For example, the large number of letters is interpreted as a generational challenge to Summers:

> When Summers wrote about young women failing to make a contribution to feminist debate, the bags of letters the magazine received disputing this showed she was out of touch with the younger generation (Neill, 23-24/6/95, *The Australian*, ‘Review’: 1).

In ‘Myth of the Generation Gap’, Karen Fletcher similarly observes: ‘The article provoked an avalanche of mail, much from young feminists asserting that they did, in fact, exist – but were finding it a little difficult to get a book deal’ (Karen Fletcher, *GLW*, 24/10/95: 32).

The title – ‘Shockwaves Start an Avalanche’ – frames Summers’ earlier article (a form of letter from the editor) as the catalyst for this epistolary avalanche. Further, visual signifiers also position the letters as responses to Leser and Summers; text boxes containing small photographs of their earlier pieces are inserted into the layout of the letters. These letters effectively contest the assumptions of Summers’ article, not only in

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3 In *Yours in Sisterhood: Ms Magazine and the Promise of Popular Feminism*, Amy Farrell titles her chapter on letters to the editor of *Ms*, ‘Readers Writing *Ms*’, although she does not explicitly use the term reader-writers in the chapter.

terms of content, but in terms of the letters as a site for the performance of (feminist) identity. Some of these reader-writers directly address Summers and/or Garner, as if their letters function as a form of interpersonal communication. Of course, as editor, all these letters are technically addressed to Summers. However, many address her not as the Good Weekend’s editor, but as the celebrity feminist interlocutor who offered a particular discursive construction of the young feminist that they felt required contestation. Summers, therefore, is addressed on at least two different, though complementary, levels. Similarly, when Summers’ ‘Letter to the Next Generation’ – ‘Shockwaves’ earlier iteration – was published in a special edition of the feminist journal, Refractory Girl (1993), the letters column was used to challenge her assumptions. The following reader-writer attacks Summers, accusing her of selling out:

Anne Summers’ piece in Refracting Voices was an insulting piece of claptrap. I am one of the young feminists she insults. She wouldn’t know a feminist, especially a young one, if she fell over one. I think the subtext of her story was that she knows she has sold out and that’s why she has no contact with young women and the struggles they are fighting for (Tanya Goddard, 1993: 20).

Though this letter was not part of the event and appeared in a feminist publication, this defence of young women’s feminism is common throughout the event’s letters.

These letters provide a space for (some) readers to re-view versions of feminism circulating in the mediasphere to make sense of, contribute to and challenge, dominant narratives about feminism. There are a range of ‘discursive repertoires’ (Hermes, 1995: 7) through which reader-writers achieve such contestation, including use of personalised, autobiographical discourses and also more specialised forms of feminist discourse. In the topology of dominant, resistant and negotiated readings (Hall: 1980), the majority of these letters can be classified as resistant in that they use this space to challenge Summers, Garner or other prominent commentators. As Virginia Trioli observes, ‘of those young women published nearly two-thirds responded angrily to the suggestion that they were any less active than their feminist mothers’ (Trioli, 1996: 148). However, not all reader-writers contradict the discursive construction of feminism offered by Garner and Summers. This diversity is unsurprising, for letters to the editor are often assumed to be a representative sample of the opinions of the paper’s readership (McNair, 2000: 109). Some letters reinscribe the narratives of feminist dis-ease articulated by Garner and Summers, while others are demonstrably hostile towards feminism. For example:

Feminists pump silly girls’ heads full of fanatical propaganda about rape, sexual harassment, male violence, for 20 or 30 years…. Really, feminism’s never been anything but a stupid, dishonest, poisonous cult (Geoffrey Bewley).

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5 In her essay in Bodyjamming, Ann Curthoys interviewed five women via a series of email questions; her respondents agreed with the objections of reader-writers regarding Summers’ representation of young women (Curthoys, 1997: 205).
Another reader-writer reinscribes assumptions about the allegedly ubiquitous political correctness:

If Helen Garner has sparked some debate with her new book, then we should all be deeply grateful to her because in the current climate it takes great courage to cast the first stone (Wednesday Kennedy).

These sentiments are echoed by another reader-writer: ‘Helen Garner’s stand against the Stalinists of political rectitude is brave indeed’ (John Edwards, see also Robyn Fordice-Wheeler, *SMH*, 11/8/95: 34). As in the media texts considered in the previous chapter, these reader-writers see Garner, rather than those involved in the Ormond case, as courageous.

In individual letters published sporadically during the event, reader-writers characterised the young women’s actions as a ‘cruel overreaction’ (Barbara Curthoys, 13/5/95, *SMH*: 34). In an article framed by the headline ‘The stone that’s still unturned’, another reader-writer argued that feminists had perpetrated a ‘monstrous wickedness’ against the Master (Kim Cornish, 14/8/95, *The Age*: 12). In a letter responding to Susan Mitchell’s opinion piece arguing that ‘feminist clashes are healthy’ (Mitchell, *The Australian*, 5/7/95: 13), one reader-writer expresses concern about the event as a ‘public display of profanely insulting and vitriolic debate’ (O’Kane, *The Australian*, 10/7/95: 8). Not insignificantly, the letter appears with the title: ‘Feminist Rage’. In expressions of support, for Garner rather than the Master, others used letters to the editor forum to defend the author’s right to freedom of speech (Daniel Mandel, 10/8/95, *The Australian*: 10). While in the Adelaide newspaper, *The Advertiser*, under the heading of ‘Deserves Accolades’, one reader observed: ‘Feminist author Helen Garner has done a great service to women with her courageous challenge to the “sacred cow” that is feminist doctrine’ (J. D’Avuvergne, 24/8/95, *The Advertiser*: 12). Another reader-writer criticised both Mead’s speech and *The Australian’s* coverage of her assertion that Garner failed to truthfully represent events at Ormond, emphasising that ‘Ms Garner is not a journalist, she is a creative writer’ (Tony Knox, 26/9/95, *The Australian*: 12). This letter received a response on 29 September 1995, as another reader-writer defends Mead and argues: ‘Mead is not attacking Garner for being a creative writer. She is not even attacking Garner, only Garner’s apparent olde worlde ideology: that it is women’s role to give and give in’ (John Blundell, 29/9/95, *The Australian*: 8).

Other reader-writers in *ABR* used the letters forum to agree with Summers’ and Garner’s assumptions about a generational divide: ‘It is a sad truth that the generational gap between younger feminists of the nineties and the old vanguard of the seventies does exist’ (Diane Brown, *ABR*, July 1995: 3). Similarly, under the heading ‘Feminism: a generational divide’, another reader-writer was ‘horrified to see what
extremes feminism has gone’ (Mary Forbes, 7/6/96, SMH: 12). For the above reader-writers, Garner and her views need to be defended and supported. Letters such as these are a useful corrective to the potential romanticisation of this discursive site as necessarily and a priori counter-hegemonic, oppositional or pro-feminist.

Reader-writers variously engaged, often explicitly, with questions relating to what constitutes feminism and feminist subjectivity. These included: which voices are publicly sanctioned to construct narratives about feminism (its past, present and future); the exclusions of particular forms of feminism; the limitations of liberal feminism, as the ‘dominant imagined form in Australia’ (Henderson, 2002a: 179); the relationship between men and feminism; the contemporary operation of power (both in a micro and macro sense); the relationship of contemporary feminisms to stories of the ‘second-wave’, including generationalist discourses and notions of feminist teleology, and feminism in the academy. However, prior to moving onto close textual analysis of these and other relevant letters, this chapter will engage with broader questions about the function of the letters section in a climate where media culture functions as a crucial site of engagement with the political. Letters to the editor, as a form of participation in public discourse, are one node in a network of cultural practices through which not just political identity, but identity in a more general sense, is publicly constituted. The following section will examine the shifting significance of letters in such an environment.

**The ‘People’s Forum’? Letters to the Editor and Democracy**

In terms of readership, it has been suggested that letters to the editor ‘are often the most vital and first-read parts of a magazine or newspaper’ (Gibian, 1997: 147), and readership studies have substantiated such claims (Wahl-Jorgensen, 1999: 53). As Ericson et al. argue:

> The letters forum is designed to handle debates over meaning, including especially the interpretation of facts and different meanings based on different values and ideologies. It is one of the key forums for public contests in the control of information and cultural meaning (Ericson et al., 1989: 352).

From the production perspective, a survey concerned with the best indicators of public opinion found that Australian journalists rated letters to the editor as second behind election results in successfully providing an insight into public opinion (Schultz, 1998: 152). Letters have also been referred to as ‘conversations on paper’ (Baron, 2000: 77), while their personalised, often autobiographical features have resulted in comparisons with dinner table conversation (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2000: 162); others have likened the pages to a ‘“debating society that never adjourns”’ (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2000: 1). Letters contribute to the legitimacy (and thus marketability) of the newspaper: ‘Letters are a
sign that the newspaper is an open forum for public opinion, helping to sustain the fiction that it is a free marketplace of ideas’ (Ericson et al., 1989: 341). As these comments suggest, some celebrate the letters form through the rhetoric of democratisation. Such assumptions reveal a tendency in journalism theory and in the move towards ‘public journalism’ to view letters as a conduit for the ‘revival of publicness’ believed to be in decline. However, much of this criticism on the democratic potentialities of the letters forum (including Wahl-Jorgensen’s) does not take into account its gendered dimensions and exclusions.

Letters to the editor published during this ‘media event’ are certainly part of a public conversation over the meanings of feminism. Surprisingly, though, given that this cultural activity demonstrates the participation of audiences which contemporary critics are often at pains to underscore, recent academic studies on the phenomenon of writing letters to the editor seems to have been displaced by a focus on non-literary forms of audience participation. These include studies on talk shows, talk-back radio, and fandom (see Livingston and Lunt: 1994, Gibian: 1997, Jenkins: 1992, Lewis: 1992). The talk-show in particular has been lauded as a new, affective public sphere that facilitates the performance of so-called deviant or non-hegemonic sexual identities (see Gamson: 1998) and class, inter and intra-racial and familial conflict. Further, recent studies on the Internet, ‘cyberdemocracy’ and its potential as a revitalised public sphere also stress the interactivity of computer-mediated communication (Schultz, 2000: 206-207). In fact, traditional forms of print media are implicitly seen to lack the same participatory opportunities as these ‘new technologies’, and therefore contemporary critical attention to this more traditional realm appears slight. In addition, few critics have explored the letters to the editor forum as a site wherein readers can respond to literary texts, or as a site for the performance for either gendered or feminist selves.

One critic, however, to recently explore both its limitations and potential as facilitating (participation in) the public discourse of this zone is Karin Wahl-Jorgensen (Wahl-Jorgensen: 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002). While letters to the editor are a form of communicative interaction with a long history, Wahl-Jorgensen perceives letters as of the same order as other, newer forms of audience participation:

With the proliferation of political radio and television talk-shows that invite viewer/listener participation, arenas other than the letters section encourage citizens to participate in the process of democratic discussion. All of these venues provide a particular mediated site for culturally diverse and geographically dispersed groups and individuals to communicate about matters of common concern. The letters section is expressive of the view of the press as the place where democratic conversation should happen (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2000: 123).

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6 For example, Brian McNair’s comments on electronic media providing ‘greater representativeness’ than letter to the editor (McNair, 2000: 106).
In light of the above comments, it is valuable to (re)view the letters page in the context of ‘mediated publicness’ (Thompson: 1995) and shifting configurations of the political, citizenship and public space.

Other critics have taken up this idea that contemporary media, through its constitution of ‘publicness’, provides diverse opportunities for its consumers. While Lumby sometimes underestimates the impediments to participation in this ‘highly diverse and inclusive forum’ (Lumby, 1999: xiii), in her analysis readerly participation is not confined to the level of reception. On the contrary, the contemporary media climate provides unique space for audience intervention at the level of production, through practices such as letter writing, sending in photographs to magazines like ‘Picture’ (see also Albury: 2001), and telephoning talk-back radio programs. Thus, the perception that media is imposed upon an unthinking mass becomes even more untenable. Lumby observes:

From right-wing talkback radio, through highbrow current affairs shows which appeal to the well-educated, daytime talkshows which deal with the disasters of everyday life, to the most amateur website, the media is a vast collage of diverse viewpoints, audiences and forms of speech (Lumby, 1999: 249).

Processes of ‘debate, protest, and dissent’ are conducted largely within the space of media culture (Lilburn, 1999: 2). For the critics cited above, the contemporary mediasphere affords myriad participatory opportunities for its citizens, and functions as an important site for political activism. While letters to the editor as a participatory form have a long history, their significance and cultural currency has arguably shifted in a climate where the monologism of media discourse is able to be contested on a number of fronts. Furthermore, while letters to the editor are not in themselves a form derived from increased flows of information associated with the new technologies, contextually they are part of a network of practices where citizens are able to publicly speak and, in thus doing so, perform as particular subjects. Although these critics welcome such performances of cultural citizenship (see Hartley: 1999), others are understandably more wary (see Buckingham: 1999), particularly as all citizens remain classed, raced and sexed. In the conclusion to this chapter, I return to the dangers of assuming the universal accessibility of such forms of (media-ted) citizenship.

**Letters to the Editor as Mediated Citizenship**

As part of the reconfiguration of citizenship outlined above, Grahame Murdock argues that securing ‘cultural rights’ is central. For Murdock, one of the rights of cultural citizenship is the right to participation, where traditionally asymmetric relationships between media producers and audiences are destabilised (Murdock, 1998: 12). Likewise, Norman Fairclough sees critical media literacy as essential to effective
citizenship (Fairclough, 1995: 201). Through the articulation of critical responses to media, private consumers are reconstituted as public citizens (Livingston and Lunt, 1994: 91). As part of this process of critical literacy recommended by Fairclough, readers should be prepared to answer questions such as ‘What can be done about this text?’ (Fairclough, 1995: 205). For Fairclough, this question emphasises that media texts are ‘a form of social action which can be responded to with other forms of social action.’ As he suggests, letters to the editor represent one such form of (textual) activism. In Fairclough’s analysis, critical literacy encourages readers to go beyond the reception of media texts to become active agents in these ‘communicative events’ (Fairclough, 1995: 205). The critical reader of media culture also often makes explicit the interpretative resources which they use in their daily interactions with media. As Livingston and Lunt observe, critical readers often comment upon ‘the coherence of arguments, on the adequacy of the data presented in support of claims, on the motivations behind media appearances, on what could have been said but what was omitted’ (Livingston and Lunt, 1994: 71). The letters analysed in this chapter substantiate such a point. As Christine Gledhill notes in her work on negotiation in meaning production, letters to the editor are themselves a form of critical practice enabling readers to intervene in the social construction of meaning:

The critical act is not finished with the ‘reading’ or ‘evaluation’ of a text. It generates new cycles of meaning production and negotiation – journalistic features, ‘letters to the editor’ ... and so on. In this way traditions are broken and remade. Thus critical activity itself participates in the social negotiation of meaning, definition, identity (Gledhill, 1988: 74).

As Gledhill implies, letters to the editor – as well as the other texts of the media event – can be seen as a material form of active readership.

In her study of Ms magazine, specifically the chapter ‘Readers Writing Ms’, Amy Farrell suggests that the letters to the editor section exemplifies the notion of sophisticated readerly activity now more or less axiomatic in literary theory and cultural studies (Farrell, 1998: 153). The model of communication where readers passively imbibe mass cultural products has long been superseded by forms of criticism that affirm the agency of readers in the act of meaning-production (see Hall: 1980). In theorising this shift to the paradigm of active readership, Liebes and Katz argue that readers have now been ‘granted the critical ability’ of which earlier models deprived them (Liebes and Katz, 1993: 114). These letters illustrate, as Lumby argues, that the relationship between readers and media is not simply a ‘one way flow of power and knowledge’ (Lumby, 1999: 7), rather readers always deploy a degree of interpretive agency. Many studies of semiotic democracy or readers ‘making over’ texts arguably

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7 Livingstone and Lunt note too that reading texts itself is a form of ‘social action’, 1994: 70.
overestimate the power of readers. The act of writing a letter to the editor, however, moves this form of consumer activity to a different level. Here, the reader is not only active in the interpretation of TFS and the subsequent media texts, but is also a producer, self-reflexively offering a textual intervention into this debate. Therefore, while populist models of audience activity, and resistance in particular, symbolically align the audience with production, letter writing materially actualises this process. For John Hartley, however, the term ‘reading’ itself already encompasses such interventions:

‘reading’ is the discursive practice of making sense of any semiotic material whatever, and would include not only decoding but also the cultural and critical work of responding, interpreting, talking about or talking back – the whole array of sense-making practices (Hartley, 1996: 58).

Geoff Danaher too argues that, particularly for the contemporary ‘media savvy public’, distinctions between producers and consumers no longer hold sway (Danaher, 1998: 19).

In terms of theorising this shift from cultural consumer to producer, John Fiske’s work is valuable. In his analysis of fandom, he illustrates the movement from ‘semiotic productivity’ (readerly engagement in making meaning of texts) to ‘textual productivity’ (Fiske, 1992: 39). Like Henry Jenkins (1992), Fiske looks at forms of cultural production, such as zines, which are produced and circulate within various fan communities. The production and circulation of texts which talk back to others – whether one is in control of their dissemination or not8 – must be seen as a practice distinct from everyday acts of reading which do not inspire, or enable, such interventionist gestures. Feminist critics too have advocated such a distinction between interpretive agency and acts of production (McLaughlin, 1993: 219-220). For Lisa McLaughlin, ‘consumptive practices are often deemed to remain private practices’ (McLaughlin, 1993: 216), separate from public life. In McLaughlin’s rendering, such privatised acts of consumption need to be contrasted with readers actually ‘doing something ... writing, speaking out, engaging in representational practices in the public domain’ (McLaughlin, 1993: 219, emphasis original).

Given women’s historical lack of recognition, despite demonstrably prolific efforts, in the fields of art, literature and other forms of cultural production, it remains incumbent upon feminist critics to maintain this division between acts of symbolic production (such as ‘active’ reading) and those of a more material nature (such as writing). Therefore, as this chapter focuses on the material result of a specific form of readerly activity, and as this thesis in a broader sense is consumed by whose (feminist)

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8 For example, the dissemination of zines is, to a degree, controlled by their producer, while letters to the editor are at the mercy of the editor and newspaper and are subject to editing or are simply not published at all.
voices are audible in public discourse, I maintain this distinction between consumption and material production. In this regard, I concur with David Buckingham who argues, ‘however much we may want to argue that cultural ‘consumption’ is in fact an active, productive process, it is clearly different in kind from cultural production’ (Buckingham, 1993: 209, emphasis mine). In the next section, I consider such an ‘in kind’ difference to involve the public, textual performance of particular selves.

**Media Events and the Performance of the Reader-Writer Self**

This thesis conceptualises the dialogue about feminism precipitated by *TFS* as a ‘media event’, and media events are often characterised by the writerly activity or participatory opportunities to which I have alluded above. John Fiske suggests that media events, as points of maximum turbulence, ‘invite intervention and motivate people to struggle to redirect at least some of the currents flowing through it to serve their interests’ (Fiske, 1996: 8). While opportunities for visibility are often contingent upon media events bringing such issues to the fore, for Dayan and Katz, media events themselves require active audience involvement for their sustenance (Dayan and Katz, 1992: 120). Media events ‘invite an hermeneutic engagement by their audience’ (Chaney, 1993: 136); such audiences, however, do not merely pre-exist the event to which they contribute. Stressing audience activity, D.M. Ryfe argues that letters written following media events ‘offer a rare glimpse into how media audiences transform themselves into media publics’ (Ryfe, 2000: 768). In deploying a performative metaphor, he also suggests that there is not a ‘real’ public existing outside these mediations, but that it is brought into being – or ‘peopled’— (Hartley and McKee, 2001: 22) – by such moments (Ryfe, 2000: 767). Publics are therefore not preconstituted, but rather are formed through such acts of intervention. Consequently, in ‘striking the pose of a public’ (Ryfe, 2000: 767), letter writers are engaging in a form of media citizenship. The pose struck in this event, and thus the textual community invoked, is largely a feminist one. However, this space does not exist outside cultural hierarchies, and the universality of the critical and cultural competencies required for such participation can never be assumed. Of the letters forum, Brian McNair argues that:

> this mode of public access, now as in the past, assumes a facility and ease with formal letter writing conventions which relatively few citizens have. It presupposes the kind of ... citizen which the institutions of the public sphere theoretically exist to assist in bringing into being (McNair, 2000: 109).

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9 Catharine Lumby makes a similar point: ‘while we speak back to the social as we encounter it in the media, we are simultaneously spoken by it. Audiences and readers are textual objects too. We are called into being by the media, and we construct our subjectivity in its shadow’ (Lumby, 1997b: 6). Similarly, MacKenzie Wark argues that ‘the media are the very means of communication by which publics form in the first place’ (Wark, 1999: 37).
The letter to the editor forum, therefore, should not be romanticised as a sphere accessible to all readers.

The contingency and performativity of publics is also applicable to modern subjectivity in a broad sense. Many letters commence with an authorising, performative statement; these ‘I am’ comments serve to position respondents in relation to the various questions raised during the debate and also work to temporarily fix the identity of reader-writers. While autobiographical narratives position reader-writers as legitimate participants in this debate, such narratives are central to the constitution of the contemporary self: ‘Every day we are confessing and constructing personal narratives in every possible format’ (Smith and Watson, 1996: 2). Letters to the editor, therefore, are a form of life-writing through which identity is constituted. Further, as a form of storytelling, these letters are not simply practical and symbolic actions, but can be seen as part of the political process itself (Plummer, 1995: 26).

Rather than facilitating the *exhibition* of self – for this implies a pre-existing, inner self expressed through discourse – this space enables the *performance* of self. While referring to the performative dimensions of identity generally, this notion of ‘striking a pose’ can also relate to the performances of contemporary feminism. For some reader-writers, these letters provide the opportunity to perform their feminist identities in a highly visible fashion. Indeed, the entire debate can be seen in terms of such a process.

Given that ‘reflexive biography’ (Giddens: 1991) is now commonly seen to be important in the constitution of self, through the storytelling aspect of letters readers are able to adopt new identities and roles (Ryfe, 2000: 780). As Anthony Giddens argues, ‘the reflexive project of the self … consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised biographical narratives’ (Giddens, 1991: 15). Such revision includes mapping these biographies onto TFS media event’s dominant narratives. Therefore, it is not only publics that are brought into being through the letters forum, but also the selves of individual reader-writers. In this sense, these letters – as sites of ‘epistolary self-creation’ (Earle, 1999: 2) – are part of a broader narrativisation of self and confessional culture. As subsequent analysis will illustrate, almost all reader-writers use a personal tale as a pathway into the issues raised to ‘maximum visibility’ by TFS media event (Fiske: 1996). For example, this reader-writer concurs wholeheartedly with Summers by positioning herself as part of the same generational cohort:

I wish I was your longed-for twenty-something feminist putting pen to paper with my passionate perspective. I’m not, I’m a 45-year-old second waver who also wishes they’d get started (Nancy Smyth).

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10 Inevitably, following reconceptualisations of subjectivity, autobiography – or life-writing – has been the subject of much critical work in the last decade or so, particularly by feminists. See Smith: 1993, Smith and Watson: 1996. For a more general collection, see Paul Eakin’s edited collection, *The Ethics of Life Writing* (2004).
Likewise, the following woman positions herself as a disaffected second waver, deploying the familiar trope of ‘angry’ man-hating feminists:

Well, okay, here goes, I’m not a feminist, but I’m a woman who is sick to death of whinging women. I was happy to call myself a feminist in the 70s, but have grown progressively more alarmed with every so-called victory. ... I am angry with women waging constant war against men (Jan Carroll).

The commencement of the letter makes clear that, even though this woman does not identify as a feminist, she nonetheless feels entitled to engage in this contestation over what she perceives as the inadequacies of its metamorphosis. Further, the seemingly apprehensive ‘Well, okay, here goes’ appears to anticipate criticism, thereby making the assumption of a feminist orthodoxy which she assumes to be her interlocutor. The above reader-writer, though not explicitly, aligns herself with Garner, whom she believes takes a more ‘reasonable’ stance on women’s relations with men than other feminists.

In contrast to this letter, rather than disavowing feminism, the following reader-writer expresses a sense of indebtedness to ‘second-wavers’ as she identifies the various subject positions which she feels able to occupy due to feminist progress:

As a woman who is a wife, a mother, a part-time student and who has a career, I plod along. And I do so by choice. Because of the work of the second-wave feminists I am able to combine these roles (Susan Griffin).

Other letters likewise make explicit their own positionality, particularly through offering biographical details relevant to the debate. The two following reader-writers identify themselves as the subjects addressed by Summers, and find her criticisms personally offensive:

I am 24, a journalist, a writer, filmmaker, I own my own business and promote the interests of young women, feminist or not. I was offended by so many aspects of Summers’s article (Monica Davison).

Another reader-writer similarly suggests that ‘as a twentysomething Australian woman, who does call herself a feminist, I have rarely read anything so patronising as Summers’ essay. “Where are the young feminists?” she asks. Well, we are everywhere. Things are different now (AS)’. This reader-writer, like many others, responds directly to truth-claims made in ‘Shockwaves’ about the public (in)visibility of young feminists. For example:

Life through the eyes of a twentysomething is pretty good. I consider myself to be part of a privileged generation of women. Through my eyes there appear to be limitless opportunities for smart, educated and energetic people. But our world is definitely not a perfect one. There are many issues that do need our attention and we will address them in our own way and in our own time. Don’t write us off because we’re not writing it all down – yet (Alexis Lindsay).

As I will later argue, many reader-writers use this space to posit the existence of this purportedly elusive generation.
Reader-writers often draw attention to the positions from which they speak in a way which underscores the failure of others (such as Summers and Garner) to do so. For Christy Newman (2004), the demographic claims identified by writers of letters to the editor, such as age, gender, and employment status, are used to lend validity to their utterances. As she notes in her recent study of letters to the editor published in Australian health magazines:

Authorship positions are constructed via a series of textual acts that involve both linguistic techniques and cultural performances. That is, letters draw upon demographic characteristics and political positions in order to make public claims to an entitlement to participate (Newman, 2004: 70). While identity markers such as education, age, employment status, and family position (Newman, 2004: 70) are used to lend validity to reader-writer claims to speak authoritatively, racial and ethnic markers are conspicuously absent in their self-identification both within the ‘Shockwaves’ letters and other letters to the editor published throughout the event. In terms of most prevalent identity markers in these letters, a number of reader-writers explicitly situate themselves in terms of age. These letters, therefore, need to be seen in light of the notion of ‘generational warfare’ which came to prominence in media during this time, and to which my final chapter is devoted. Ann Curthoys argues that both Summers and Garner were discursively constructing the generationalism of which they spoke: ‘I don’t see any grounds for believing there is a generationally-based war beyond Garner’s book itself and Anne Summers’ recent writings’ (Curthoys, 1995: 210). In true media event (or ‘hyper-real’) style, this war exists because it is represented.

There are letters from both sides of the purported ‘generational divide’; many readers specify their age so as to clearly situate themselves on the generational axis that was increasingly structuring public discourse on feminism. However, while it appears that writers respond within the dominant narrative of generationalism mobilised by Summers and Garner, this is not to suggest that they do not complicate it. As Ann Genovese suggests: ‘Hundreds of letters poured into her [Summers] office, not just from women my age who felt insulted that there was a transcendental feminist position, an imperative that denied all room for subjectivity and difference, but from women of Summers’ own generation’ (Genovese, 1996: 149). The following reader-writer substantiates Genovese’s claim:

The feminist messages to young women need to be unequivocally empowering and positive, otherwise the gains that women have made will dissolve … when these two women take decisive action, how are they greeted? With the support and encouragement one would expect? Not from Helen Garner (Susan E. Street). Similarly, another reader-writer disrupts notions of generational affiliation by defending the young women against Summers’ efforts to map a particular feminism
onto them: ‘She [Summers] demands of them [the twentysomething generation] a type of feminism which existed in her day and which involved an allegiance that has little meaning for them’ (Kathryn Owler). This reader-writer seeks to problematise Summers’ maternalist discourse, and makes explicit the limitations of these governing Oedipal metaphors:

She argues that these young women tend to support the feminist agenda while choosing not identify as feminists because they fear appearing unfeminine, anti-men and aggressive. I suggest this to be a very unsympathetic reading which positions women as naughty children of estranged feminist mothers like herself, who refuse to listen to their parents (Kathryn Owler).

The logic of generational affiliation was earlier complicated by a reader-writer in Refractory Girl, whose letter responding to Summers’ ‘Letter to the Next Generation’ was signed: ‘An ashamed RG Subscriber of the Older Generation’ (Ann Nikkelson). Like reader-writers who used this form to talk back during TFS event, this woman takes Summers to task for her representation of young women:

The bad old days are still here for these young women. They still have to fight for every choice, every freedom, every opinion and their dignity. Inequality and sexism have only had an odd corner knocked off in the past two decades and while women of today are grateful for the fighters of the past they are fighting just as hard and with just as much passion (Ann Nikkelson, 1993: 20).

This reader-writer, although self-identifiably part of the second-wave generation, defends the young women who were the subject of Summers’ attack. These letters both respond to and are part of this ‘battle’ that revolves around questions of feminism and (its) representation. While often initially critical of celebrity feminists Garner and Summers, reader-writers generally move into the larger issues of feminism, sexual harassment and representation. Their ability to do so, however, is contingent upon the editor to whom their letters are, in the first instance, addressed.

**Editing the Public: The Role of Anne Summers**

Letters to the editor are said to provide the genre through which ‘readers’ opinions appear in the press in their least mediated form’ (Hall et al., 1978: 120). The editor, however, plays an important mediating function. For Ericson et al., the contributions of letter writers are equivalent to other forms of ‘copy’, which are ‘used at the discretion of editors’ (Ericson et al., 1989: 339). It is important not to underestimate the role of the editors, as ‘mediators of discourse’, in this process: ‘Newspaper editors, rather than citizens, determine who gets access to the conversation’ (Wahl-Jorgensen, 1999: 58). As the previous chapter argued, as a celebrity feminist Anne Summers not only articulated issues of feminist concern in the space offered by this new ‘synthetic’ feminism (Sheridan et al.: 2000); but she also provided a site where others – those not similarly in possession of this celebrity capital – could engage in media discourse about the
meanings of feminism, and particularly about questions of whose meanings came to be circulated other overs. Although arguably overstated, one letter makes explicit Summers’ role in the provision of such a space: ‘At last! Thank you to Anne Summers for opening up a forum for us young budding feminist writer/activists’ (Marie Kain and Lucy Schulz).

Many of the reader-writers emphasise that allegations of ‘silence’ with which Summers charged young women are indicative less of a lacksidaisical attitude on the part of such women than of the lack of enunciative spaces provided for such women within sites of public discourse. Responding directly to one of Summers’ central truth-claims, one reader-writer suggests: ‘There is certainly not a lack of young feminists in Australia. So we need to understand the reasons why they are not speaking out or not being heard’ (Leith Greensdale). This reader-writer draws attention not merely to the idea that various factors can work to impede women’s communicative freedom, but that these alternative voices and ideas, in remaining unheard, are not being granted cultural currency. As I previously mentioned, such expressions underscore Summers’ reluctance, particularly in ‘Shockwaves’, to recognise the relative privilege and concomitant authority that she enjoys as a ‘celebrity feminist’. Throughout this thesis, I have argued that it does indeed matter who is able to speak, as do the conditions under which such speech is not only made possible, but legitimated.

As in the case of talk show participants, letters can be seen as part of an ‘institutionally managed forum for public debate’ (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994: 36). Summers, as editor (and celebrity feminist), opens up a space for reader-writers to enter into public debate, to become ‘part of the array of public personalities who are granted voices and personal opinions in the public sphere’ (Marshall, 1997: 135). Summers, particularly in her capacity as editor but also through laying down her challenge in ‘Shockwaves’, literally authorised the debate that offered women (and men) the opportunity to contest – or perhaps reinscribe – her particular discursive construction of Australian feminism. For Jay Rosen, participation in a media public is contingent upon this intervention of an intermediary:

the problem is not that citizens know too little or participate too rarely to qualify as a public. It is that no-one can be a member of a public when not addressed as such by journalists, political leaders, public officials, intellectuals and fellow citizens (in Schultz, 2000: 217).

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11 In his 1994 study on celebrity, Joshua Gamson argues that such audience management is central to talkshows in particular: ‘The producers attempt to control audience behaviour, to elicit particular behaviours that are in line the production needs of the program’ (Gamson, 1994: 111-112).

12 While it is possible to rather cynically argue that Summers received so many responses because she literally provoked them (she asked: ‘why aren’t such voices in print?’) these letters also responded to the less hortatory article by David Lesser about TFS and the general intertextual field of the event.
In this instance, it is Summers’ hortatory ‘Shockwaves at the Revolution’ that fulfils such an enabling function. As Rosen suggests, whether or not one is given voice in media discourse is, in the final instance, contingent upon a series of media professionals, the most significant of which is the editor.

The writer of a letter to the editor, like any form of text, has little control over how it comes to mean. In acknowledgement of the role of the editor in the actualisation of the type of publics constituted in the letter forum, Jacques Derrida asserts:

A magazine can censor more or less what it wants when it wants, it can refuse to publish responses, oversee their length and framing, control their date of publication, and so forth. There is a terrible unilateralness in the occupation of public space by a form of speech that is, finally, private (Derrida, 1992: 433).

For Derrida, it is the very form of a letter (usually a private genre) that ensures its troubled reception in the public sphere. There are numerous ways in which editors exercise their ‘editorial discretion’ (Bromley, 1998: 150) in relation to letters, including ‘subtle practices’, such as: the way letters are organised on the page; which letters are chosen for publication; how soon they are published after they are received (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2001: 310); and the headlines under which letters appear that work to delimit their meanings. Of the semiotics of the letters’ layout, Perriam observes: ‘Letters may be arranged in a single edition so that they are in perpetual dialogue with each other – qualifying, commenting, highlighting, detracting, merely by their proximity on the page’ (Perriam, 1982: 54). In this sense, the twenty-seven ‘Shockwaves’ letters are grouped together to create the appearance of a ‘virtual public’ (Wark: 1997) in dialogic exchange. Most of the letters published are supportive of feminism, suggesting that Summers helps to bring into being a form of feminist public.

The question of publication timing is also pertinent to the ‘Shockwaves’ letters, as they were published two months after the articles to which they primarily respond. While perhaps due to the sheer volume of material, it is also possible to take up Wahl-Jorgensen’s suggestion relating to the commercial function of the letters section. For some editors, the letters forum is not seen as intrinsically valuable, but only in terms of marketplace success (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2001: 310). This view of the letters section as ‘customer service’, articulated by the editors within Wahl-Jorgensen’s study, is referred to as the ‘normative economic justification’: ‘The letters to the editors section is justified as simultaneously a democratic forum and a revenue booster for the newspaper’ (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2002: 129). Expectant readers, therefore, may have returned each Saturday in anticipation of the responses which the Good Weekend, as was its usual customer service practice, could be expected to publish.

13 Although Summers’ ‘Shockwaves at the Revolution’ encourages young readers to ‘tweak the nose of the old guard’, Amy Farrell’s comments regarding Summers’ editorship of Ms suggest that readerly participation was not encouraged but rather suffered (Farrell, 1998: 188).
Letters were most likely selected for inclusion firstly by the degree to which they were thought to occupy discursive terrain traversed by Summers, whether or not it was to contest her assumptions or endorse them. Reader-writers were the ‘subject’ of their own discourse, yet were also ‘subject’ to Summers’ (editorial) authority (Shevelow, 1989: 90). It is important to remember that, although editorial practices and selection processes impact upon what finally appears in print, reader-writers are neither passive constructions of the magazine nor of Summers (Scott, 1998: 8). Rather, as Joan Scott emphasises, reader-writers often deliberately construct the type of self to which the magazine or newspaper seeks to appeal, thereby increasing their chances of publication (Scott, 1998: 8). For example, many reader-writers chose to locate themselves in the event via a marker of generational difference and could be readily seen as contributors to a larger cultural conversation with Summers and her readership. As Wahl-Jorgensen observes in her interviews with editors of letters pages, such professionals are ‘in a position to push the buttons of the readership and turn them into a letter-writing public’ (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2000: 125-126). While Summers was central in creating this fleeting textual community, Wahl-Jorgensen perhaps over-estimates editors’ ability to predict how certain topics may affect readers and thus motivate them to intervene in this mediated space. Nonetheless, her point is sound in that editors can function to empower through giving readers the physical space in which to speak, and thus help to turn the readership into citizenry (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2000: 126). For the remainder of this chapter, I focus on what reader-writers actually did with this space once it was so provided.

‘Discursive Repertoires’

Many readers either contest or support Summers and/or Garner through anecdotally positioning themselves in relation to the issues raised by their prior contributions to the event. In this sense, reader-writers mirror Garner’s own rhetorical strategy of interpreting the Ormond case through a series of personal anecdotes. It is commonly accepted that readers draw upon experiential and textually-mediated knowledge in order to make a text mean; these, however, letters make this process public. Many of the published letters view the debate and all its intertexts autobiographically and accordingly take up the storytelling potential of letters to construct themselves in

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14 While Joan Scott expresses concerns about the ‘authenticity’ of letters – that is, that they may not have been written by a member of the audience but by a member of the editorial team – Kristy Newman argues that such concern with ‘authenticity’ is in itself misplaced, as all narrated ‘I’s’ are constructed (Newman, 2004: 61).
15 Wahl-Jorgensen does not romanticise this space, but recognises the material conditions which determine who is afforded the opportunity to speak publicly (see Wahl-Jorgensen, 2000: 131).
16 Joke Hermes outlines her usage of this term in Reading Women’s Magazines (Hermes, 1995: 7).
relation to the debate. For example, one reader-writer defers to her experience of
university life to support Garner’s truth-claims regarding the oppressive nature, both
intellectually and interpersonally, of the university environment:

A first-time university student at 32, I have been deeply disturbed by an
environment that has lecturers and students afraid of uttering a statement that
could have them on trial for discrimination. ... In an atmosphere fuelled by
political correctness, you can now be hanged for uttering the wrong word. The
resulting fear and suspicion engenders an intellectual paralysis and a drying out
of male/female relationships (Wednesday Kennedy).

Here, personal experience is used as a form of moral authority, a common rhetorical
strategy in letters to the editor forums (Newman, 2004: 131). For this reader-writer, the
politicisation of the academy is seen as repressive, a rhetorical strategy identified in
Chapter Three as commonplace during the debate. Conversely, another reader-writer
invokes her own experience of harassment in a university in order to support the
women’s search for succour through legal channels:

As a woman who has also experienced the failure of university structures to deal
with sexual harassment, I believe that it is because the structures to protect
women from a whole range of behaviours are inadequate that these ‘trivial’ battles
must be fought (Belinda Johnston).

In the absence of the voices of the complainants, this reader-writer tells her own sexual
story. For Plummer, the public articulation of such stories is ‘part of the process
through which contemporary politics is being rewritten’ (Plummer, 1995: 145).
Through telling her own ‘trivial’ story, this reader-writer attempts to question the
trivialisation of sexual harassment elsewhere in the debate. Such reader-writers,
therefore, invoke the ‘authority of experience’ in their evaluation of TFS, a common way
of reading (Pearce, 2003: 49).

These letters also need to be considered in terms of affect; in the act of writing to
the editor, certain affective investments are made. Indeed, culture – and identity itself
– relies upon such investments for its maintenance. I am concerned here with how such
investments lead to a particular act, communication with others across time and space
to in turn become part of a public dialogic exchange. As Claudia Collins argues in her
analysis of audience letters written to the producer of US sitcom, Murphy Brown,
‘something makes them pause in the process and write to report their reaction’ (Collins,
1997: 110). Further, as Anderson et al. argue, ‘provocative stories, of course, invite
participation, stirring people to talk and action’ (Anderson et al., 1994: 106).
Unsurprisingly, a general dissatisfaction with an aspect of the debate and its
machinations, particularly the dominance of certain voices, is often expressed as a
central motivating factor. These letters also demonstrate how readers attempt to
‘connect’ to the texts of the media event. As Lawrence Grossberg argues:
A text does not carry its own meaning or politics already inside of itself; no text is able to guarantee what its effect will be. People are constantly struggling, not merely to figure out what a text means, but to make it mean something that connects with their own lives, experiences, needs, and desires (Grossberg, 1992: 52).

These letters show how audiences use the texts of the event to constitute particular stories, identities, and communities. For Grossberg, such processes are primarily affectively organised. Affect both operates within and produces ‘mattering maps’ which govern our relations to texts and events:

these maps tell us where and how we can become absorbed – not into the self but into the world – as potential locations for our self-identifications, and with what intensities. This ‘absorption’ or investment constructs the places and events which are, or can become, significant to us. They are the places at which we can construct our own identity as something to be invested in, as something that matters (Grossberg, 1992: 57).

The examination of these letters enables us to glimpse what readers actually do with the narratives of feminism that circulate at this time, how the mass-mediated texts of this debate become part of the ‘mattering maps’ (Grossberg: 1992) through which readers come to understand themselves and the world. Through their letter writing, reader-writers make visible investments in particular notions of feminism and, in doing so, constitute themselves as particular subjects in the context of the debate.

Letters commonly address one or more points in the representations of feminism offered by Garner and Summers, or news coverage in general. Many reader-writers use this discursive space to question the meanings given to feminism by Garner and Summers, and seek to emphasise that feminism, as an experiential reality, a daily material practice, exceeds the limited constructions given prominence by these two ‘celebrity feminists’. While reader-writers appear to work within the terms of debate set by Summers and Garner, they also use their letters for its extension. In a different, yet related context, Sheridan et al. illustrate how Greer’s celebrity feminism often inspired letters to the editor, which – even while at times critical of Greer – facilitated a broader consideration of questions surrounding women’s rights (Sheridan et al., 2000: 339).

Furthermore, such reader-writers underscore that feminism, in its many guises, will necessarily escape such efforts to delimit its meanings. One reader-writer even questions the logic underpinning the desire for any sort of definitional closure, particularly as such gestures are often accompanied by a hierarchy of different ways of performing a feminist identity. She cites Urvashi Butalia’s comments: ‘I asked my mother what kind of feminist are you? “I don’t know, what does it matter?” she said’ (Rachel Petro). In this sense, these letters illustrate a preoccupation with feminist identity and its performance.
Feminism and the ‘Problem’ of Identity

At a time when the ‘universal feminist “I” has been called into crisis’ (Siegel, 1997a: 61), when identity is conceived as a perpetual becoming, many of these letters suggest a preoccupation with feminist identification and how feminist identities can be performed. As Ann Genovese argues, much of the dialogue following TFS’s publication is indicative of an emergent ‘public ambivalence about feminist identities’ (Genovese, 1996: 141), and both these letters and the general debate about the Ormond women’s actions as signifying the excesses of feminism substantiate this point. During this event, the issue of what a feminist identity could actually mean in an apparently altered material and discursive climate came to the fore. As Chapter Two has discussed, similar questions of who can, or who desires, to claim a feminist identity have recently preoccupied the academy.

Many reader-writers chose to map their own trajectory of feminist engagement to counter the discursive construction of feminism offered by Summers and Garner; others seek to foreground a relation to feminist ‘gains’ while calling into question its use-value in a socio-political context which they read as irrevocably inflected with feminism. In relation to Garner, one letter particularly problematises the assumption that the Ormond women’s actions were informed by an academic feminism. Drawing upon the notion of lived experience to suggest that women who have encountered sexual harassment do not need to ‘read about it or hear it in a lecture’ (Belinda Johnston), this reader-writer implies that these women do not need an academic framework to constitute their sense of themselves as violated subjects. For this reader-writer, the experiential provides a valid ground for the epistemological. Furthermore, she invokes a commonality of experience among women in order to assert the effects of what Garner has deemed to be minor instances of harassment; such occurrences, she suggests, constitute women’s daily realities. This reader-writer draws upon an experience women endure daily: subjection to the masculine gaze and violation of bodily integrity:

Men squeezing your breasts and hanging their tongues out of truck windows are little everyday reminders of the powerlessness many of us have felt or feel when what Garner seems to think of as more ‘real and legitimate’ abuse occurs (Belinda Johnston).

Her comment also underscores embodiment as something of which women are made to feel conscious on a daily basis. This reader-writer thus resists the meanings which Garner attempts to map onto women’s experiences of harassment, contesting particularly her efforts to hierarchise or construct some manifestations of sexual assault as more valid than others. Thus, she constructs a counter-discourse which questions Garner’s attempt to ‘grade’ offences and her narrative of feminism’s excess (posited due
to a failure to engage in such gradations) that became increasingly pronounced following the publication of *TFS*.

Many reader-writers, such as the above, can be seen to employ what Linda Grant describes as a ‘feminist interpretive lens’ through which to make sense of certain experiences. Grant observes that ‘experiences mean little in and of themselves. They key is in how they are interpreted’ (Grant, 1993: 125). Furthermore, central to this interpretation is the question of the readers’ discursive resources. Most of the reader-writers examined in this chapter clearly have mobilised (a form of) feminist discourse, the supposedly ‘commonsensical’ nature of which they often seem to posit (Winship, 1987: 149). These reader-writers exhibit a form of ‘feminist literacy’ facilitated by mainstream media itself (Hogeland, 1998: 4). Feminist literacy is constituted as ‘a set of interpretative strategies for reading both texts and everyday life’ (Hogeland, 1998: 17). Lynn Thomas uses her ethnography of *Inspector Morse* viewers (1995) not simply to map how feminism has been incorporated at the level of content, but how feminism frames the discussion of the text in particular contexts (Thomas, 1995: 11): ‘If feminism has a role, then its presence will be felt not only in texts, but also in the talk about texts’ (Thomas, 1995: 11). Many reader-writers seem to deploy these forms of feminist literacy to read the texts of the debate and the various institutional and social contexts in which they operate. Thus, it is in this sense that feminism can be seen ‘as a hegemonic discourse, although one contested, riven and fragmented in the fluid politics of the 1990s’ (Schaffer, 1998: 322-323). The ‘fluidity’ upon which Schaffer remarks is evident in many of these reader-writers’ efforts to make sense of what feminist identification now means, with some even positing the inherent productivity of such a fluid politics of identification. Having said that, many reader-writers do identify as feminists, quite pointedly in response to Summers.

**Explicit Identification as Feminist**

In addition to the so-called ‘private individuals’ cited above, writers of letters to the editor often represent a particular group (Morris and Love, 1996: 46), whether political, social or cultural. Some reader-writers foreground their identification with feminist groups such as the ‘Young Women’s Electoral Lobby’ (WEL) in Sydney, the ‘Young Women and Feminism group’ from Victorian WEL, and university women’s departments. As WEL members and campus activists, reading subjects operating within specific politico-interpretive communities, the writers of these letters tend to be quite polemical and exhibit a sophisticated familiarity with feminist discourse. In

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17 For further information on the Women’s Electoral Lobby, particularly its role in the 1972 election, see Lake, 1999: pp.238-241. See also Lilburn: 1999.
Wahl-Jorgensen’s frame, this type of letter represents a form of ‘activist publicity’, where members of a counter public sphere use the forum to bring attention to broader political goals (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2001: 308). For these reader-writers, the letters forum operates as the sphere of political intervention envisaged by the critics cited earlier in this chapter. One letter explicitly contests the truth-claims of Summers’ article:

Anne Summers’ criticisms and judgement of young women are unfounded and untrue. Her belief that young women of the 90s, while quite willing to enjoy the benefits had fought for by 70s feminists, refuse to call themselves feminists because of the negative stereotype, is insulting to many of us active, young feminists and invalidates the endless political work we are engaged in (Bridget Cleaver and Tina Wilson-Schembri).

As feminists operating within the framework of a political organisation (i.e., WEL), the writers of this letter suggest that Summers’ comments negate their activism. These reader-writers dispute Summers’ claims through reference to their own engagements in traditional (and liberal) spaces of feminist activity, such as the Women’s Electoral Lobby. Further, these young women, in the act of letter writing, are reconstituted from object to subject in the debate (i.e., the debate centred on young women and their articulations of feminism). Letters such as those from WEL members and university women’s officers, which specify their organisational affiliation, arguably do so in an effort to increase their authority and, in turn, their chances of publication (Ericson et al., 1989: 346).

The effect of the feminist signature ‘WEL NSW’ is two-fold: these reader-writers seek both to lend institutional authority to their comments and to contest the notion that political activism among young women is uncommon. Rather than suggest that there is currently a diversity of spaces for the performance of feminist identity, these women directly contradict Summers’ characterisation of the non-activist third wave and defend their own feminist political identity. Furthermore, these writer-readers’ deployment of the fact/fiction, true/false framework suggests that the ‘objective’ discourse of newspapers is thought best contested on its own terms, a strategy also deployed by Mead, as Chapter Four has shown. In this regard, Perriam (1982) has observed that mirroring the text into which it will be inserted is a common strategy in letters to the editor: ‘A letter to the editor may be aimed at the general readership of the public, but how and what we will write will be influenced by the medium through which it is exposed, the newspaper itself’ (Perriam, 1982: 1). Reader-writers, then, adopt the generic conventions of the paper to which they contribute.

Writers who explicitly identify as activists engage directly with Summers’ truth claims in ‘Shockwaves’. The following reader-writers take issue with Summers’ suggestion that young women refuse to identify as feminist, assuming Summers to be disconnected from young feminists who do chose to perform their feminism in activist
channels: ‘It is a sweeping statement to say that young women are not embracing the term feminist and demonstrates Ms Summers’ lack of involvement with today’s young, active feminists’ (Bridget Cleaver and Tina Wilson-Schembri). Moreover, some critics have recommended the use of letters to the editor as a specifically feminist form of media intervention. Jennifer Pozner (2003), for example, links it to other activist practices. Here she addresses young women in particular, suggesting that:

instead of getting depressed when confronted with derogatory reports in the media, we can get demanding. We can lobby our leaders, submit public comments to the FCC, and write letters to editors calling for media companies to be held accountable to the public (Pozner, 2003: 51).

In this sense, the writing of a letter to the editor is one in a series of activist practices in which the WEL women (and indeed all these reader-writers) are engaged. Like the other women from the WEL, the following reader-writer also seeks to contest Summers’ assertions about the inactivity of the younger generation through the juxtaposition of ‘real’ political struggle with the zone of celebrity: ‘There’s little doubt that the next generation of Australian feminists is articulating the direction and goals of feminism through practical efforts rather than heavily marketed personalities’ (Kate Spearitt, Young Women and Feminism Group, WEL Victoria). This letter, like many others, offers counter-truth claims to those articulated by the women thought to possess ‘knowledge’ about feminism and its current manifestations (i.e., Garner and Summers).

In another context, a letter to the editor of *Time* magazine responds to the profile on Helen Garner featured three weeks earlier (Cole-Adams, *Time*, 6/5/95: 74-76). This reader-writer uses her recent membership of WEL to counteract criticisms of young feminists as victim-centred:

Criticisms of the younger women’s movement focuses on the perception that its members see themselves as victims. I am a young woman (age 30) who recently joined the Women’s Electoral Lobby. What attracted me most was that WEL does not have a victim mentality (Valerie Ritchie, *Time*, 29/5/95: 12).

Rather than defending the Ormond women’s actions, this reader-writer takes umbrage with Garner’s representation of young feminists as victims, and uses this space to disabuse the public of such a notion. She continues to sing the praises of the WEL, stressing its potential empowerment for both self and Other: ‘Its members focus on taking responsibility for the situation in which we find ourselves and lobbying for

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18 However, it should also be noted that within Nancy Fraser’s distinction between ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ publics – the former impacting upon decision-making processes, the latter on opinion formation – the letters from WEL women see them constituted as part of a ‘weak’ public in that their contributions could not alter political decision-making (Fraser, 1997: 89-90, see also Lilburn: 1999), but were instead attempting to contest particular public understandings of harassment and feminism itself.
change. As a group we empower ourselves and other women’ (Valerie Ritchie, *Time*, 29/5/95: 12). In the context of her own feminist practice, this reader-writer perceives WEL’s desirability to be its transcendence of the ‘victim feminism’ criticised by Garner and others in the debate.

These explicit identifications with feminism represent significant political and rhetorical gestures. The following reader-writer, although asserting her feminist identity with pride (as others do), also mobilises what appears to be an implicitly humanist discourse of respect for the Other:

Maybe the word, as you define it, is dead for women like me. Maybe there is no longer a word for a woman who is equal to her, works for herself, teaches her babies to care about all people and lives without prejudice (Monica Davidson). In this sense, the letters forum offers a diversity of opinions in relation to the manifestation of feminism in the everyday. These conflicting perspectives work to create the sense of public within the letters forum. For this woman, the signifier feminism is rendered redundant in the context of what appears to be a humanist ontology: ‘I call myself a feminist, with pride, but I think the movement and its terminology are moving on’ (Rachel Petro). Here, it appears that the imposition of a definition on feminism is an exclusionary gesture. Having suggested the potential superfluity of feminism as a signifier, like the previous reader-writers, she offers the performative utterance: ‘I call myself a feminist’. She therefore strategically takes up the term in order to problematise Summers’ assertions, while suggesting the need for gestures towards feminism’s resignification. Other readers similarly feel the need for identification to be an important symbolic gesture, with such self-definition itself signifying fulfilment of a feminist agenda: ‘And I call myself a feminist, thanks in part to women like you and those who came before, and because I have earned the right to call myself whatever I want’ (Monica Davidson). This reader-writer expresses a debt to Summers, as a representative of the second-wave. Another reader-writer defiantly asserts: ‘I am a proud feminist, not just a privileged one’ (Fiona Deed). The above examples suggest that, for many of these reader-writers, explicit public identification as a feminist maintains its currency and desirability.

In contrast to those reader-writers who explicitly adopt a feminist subject position, others suggest that the effort to fix the meaning of feminism, in an abstract sense, is largely unimportant when attempting to ‘be’ feminist. This reader-writer emphasises that the gesture towards fixing the meanings of feminism is itself the province of a privileged minority. While it appears that such a stance may reinscribe somewhat of a theory/reality dichotomy, theorising about feminism being juxtaposed with the actuality of ‘doing’ feminism, it is significant that reader-writers underscore that it is impossible to stabilise feminism, either as a signifier or as an identity. Thus,
definitionally and ontologically, feminism is seen to escape the grid of meaning which Summers, Garner and other commentators seek to impose. For example, this reader-writer looks for a more fluid way of both conceptualising and living feminism:

My closest friends and I, we seem to be looking for mobility, for a flexible life, freedom from the fixed, from the rule – looking to make our own choices, based on our own sense of justice, based in forgiveness. We are taking it [feminism] apart and putting it back together again (Lynette Thorstensen).

While these comments appear to assume a restrictive feminism against which the reader rails, her comments resonate strongly with much theoretical work on the instability of identity, including identities with obvious political investments such as feminism. In the context of feminist theory, the imposition of definitional closure itself is often seen to be an inevitably reductionist and exclusionary act. As Sally Robinson observes, fixing the meaning of feminism, like the fixing of ‘Woman’, can function negatively: ‘Rather than consolidate the identity of feminism’, she suggests, ‘it is important to keep that identity as an open question, to embrace diverse, and perhaps even contradictory, feminist practices …’ (Robinson, 1991: 192). Furthermore, identity in general is no longer conceptualised as static, but instead as shifting and fluid; all identities – including feminist – are plural and historically specific. To this end, Arlene Stein suggests that such lack of fixity should be seen as productive: ‘today’s more “decentred” movement may present new democratic potential. Many women who felt excluded by an earlier model of identity now feel that they can finally participate in politics on their own terms’ (Stein, 1997: 390). One reader-writer offers meta-commentary on the debate as she suggests that it is the media, along with Garner, who seek such troublesome delimitation: ‘The media, and Helen Garner, don’t seem to recognise that the women’s movement is diverse and defies labelling’ (Valerie Ritchie, *Time*, 29/5/95: 12).

As in the above example, reader-writers respond directly to Summers’ assertions about feminist inactivity among young women. Asserting the pervasive presence of feminism in a variety of cultural forms, this reader-writer confidently observes:

Books are not the only way of presenting a worldview. For an editor of a magazine, I’m surprised at her tunnel vision. The third wave is diverse. Why is it so necessary to write it in a book a la Naomi Wolf? Pick up a magazine, turn on the TV, go to the cinema, access the Internet, it’s all there: power relations, sexual harassment, life when you don’t have a PhD in women’s studies, the world through twentysomething eyes – for all women to see (Alexandra Sosnov).

It is this presence in the everyday, the reader-writer implies, which testifies to feminism’s persistence and availability to young women. The writer invokes various forms of popular culture – TV, the Internet, cinema and magazines – as spaces where
the ‘third wave’ can be seen to actively engage with feminism. Moreover, this reader-writer, in contesting Summers privileging of books as being the ‘only way of presenting a world view’, implies that she reinscribes the high/low culture binary. This reader-writer suggests a generational nexus between popular cultural forms and the ‘diverse’ third wave. In privileging the printed word, she suggests that Summers neglects the new forms of technology with which young women engage.

For this reader-writer, like many feminist cultural critics, feminism exists in the shifting representations of gender offered in various sites of popular culture (Dow: 1996, Brunsdon: 1998, Read: 2000, Hollows: 2000). Significantly, she does not question the ‘waves’ model as a way of conceptualising feminist activity, which has been problematised by various feminist theorists (see Orr: 1997, Bailey: 1997). Like others, this letter draws attention to Summers’ educational capital from which her own authority to speak is, in part, derived. In contrast to Summers’ advocacy of mainstream publishing, she argues that popular culture is available to all women as consumers of culture, not simply an elite. Whether or not young women access or work within such reconfigured creative spaces of feminist activism, my point here is that this reader-writer contests Summers’ assumptions through the articulation of alternative truth-claims. However, in writing to the editor, this reader-writer takes up Summers’ call for written expressions of feminism, even while thematically problematising her privileging of writing as a form of feminist practice.

Many of these letters engage with what constitutes feminist practice, or what Ahmed et al. refer to as the ‘difficulties of doing feminism in the present’ (Ahmed et al., 2000: 6). Some writers represent Summers’ way of conceptualising feminism, and the performance of feminist identity, as outmoded, requiring both new ways of speaking and being feminist. One reader-writer argues that ‘feminism is not homogenous nor is it monolithic; it manifests in many ways’ (Foong Ling Kong). Another suggests that alternative feminist practices (i.e., those which do not rely upon a highly visible collectivism) are seen by Summers as illegitimate, particularly as young women do not engage in more traditional forms of activism or feminist praxis:

It is not a struggle that is very visible in a collective sense and perhaps this is one of the reasons behind what Summers calls the ‘puzzling silence’ of young women. It is a struggle in which the victories are often individual victories in individual offices or factory floors. Armed with avenues to redress inequality and discrimination – the Sex Discrimination Act, equal employment and affirmative

19 While this reader-writer differentiates the younger generation from Summers’ through an increased engagement with popular culture, as Catharine Orr argues: ‘This newest wave is returning to popular culture, the medium through which feminism captured the popular imagination – and thus political clout – in the late 1960s and early 1970s’ (Orr, 1997: 41).
20 Anita Harris has argued that young women currently practice their feminism through engagement with new technologies, particularly as such sites afford them access not similarly granted by mainstream media (Harris: 2001a).
action policies – younger women are now out there using them and making them work. In other words, the battle in many areas has moved on (Leith Greensdale).

For this reader-writer, feminism is a set of localised practices that preclude adequate definition (Kavka, 2000: xi). As E.A. Kaplan argues, feminism needs to be conceptualised in terms of “performance” rather than fixed procedures’ (Kaplan, 1997: 19). Like many others, the above reader-writers mobilises the notion of feminist progress, symbolised by ‘markers of governmental or bureaucratic recognition’ (Henderson, 2002b: 9). Feminist politics, the above reader-writer argues, have to be reconfigured in light of liberal feminist advances. Therefore, for reader-writers such as this one, the story of Australian feminism is one of overwhelming success. However, while this reader-writer celebrates the reforms resulting from feminist engagement with the State, others use this forum to underscore the inherent limits of liberal feminism.

**The Limits of Liberal Feminism**

One of the most important aspects of the ‘counter-discourse’ developed in these letters is the extension of the debate into broader ruminations of feminism’s so-called accomplishments. A number of these letters are informed by the assumption that feminism in Australia, in its multiple guises and practices, has helped transform women’s individual and social identities, producing a ‘general, but not invariable, uniform or non-contradictory, shift in women’s conditions of existence and understanding of those conditions’ (Larbalestier, 1998: 157). In these letters, many readers invoke legislative and policy changes, such as equal employment opportunity, anti-discrimination and sexual harassment laws, childcare provisions, and affirmative action, in order to either justify the need for alternative forms of feminism and/or to signal a form of feminism ‘progress’ which renders redundant previous ways of conceptualising feminism (and being ‘feminist’). For example, one reader-writer confidently asserts that ‘the battle ... has been won – and we are now implementing the peace’ (Leith Greensdale). Many reader-writers draw attention to the way in which this negotiation with the reformist social changes initiated by femocrats of the ‘second-wave’ can itself be seen to constitute contemporary feminist practice. In addition, the need for such active negotiation is posited as the prime site of difference between contemporary feminism and the earlier, apparently more activist based, feminism of the ‘second-wave’:

The real challenge for young Australian feminists now is how to engineer transformations of the male ‘old order’ through intelligent use of legislation,
clever orchestration of the vehicles of public opinion [such as media] and constant personal courage (Meredith A. Doig).

However, importantly, some reader-writers identify a disjuncture between rhetoric about the success of liberal feminist reforms and the material reality of negotiating subject positions, such as worker and mother, which remain largely conflictual.

After offering a personalised narrative about such processes of negotiation, one reader suggests the need for a reappraisal of the liberal feminist agenda which advocates women’s negotiation between the public and private spheres on an individual level:

Perhaps what we need now in feminist debate is an appraisal of just how practical such role combinations are, how healthy for us and importantly, strategies to assist us to pull it all off if we decide to go ahead (Susan Griffin).

Thus, this particular writer ignores the issues raised or sanctioned by Garner, Summers or Leser, and uses the discursive space opened up by this debate to problematise the liberal feminist ‘solutions’ which have to come stand for feminism in public discourse. Such concerns have also been raised in academe. In a collection of essays about ‘feminist transformations’, Ahmed et al. echo the sentiments of some of these reader-writers as they observe that it is ‘inevitably the case that feminists have fought for changes which, when realised, turn out to be dubious or only partial solutions’ (Ahmed et al., 2000: 6). In taking up such ideas in letters, reader-writers extend the parameters of the debate, and (re)claim this space for a broader discussion of contemporary feminism and the challenges it faces.

Summers’ relationship to the State is of a fundamentally different character from that of many of these writers, a fact which they seek to expose. In response to her assertions about the invisibility of young feminists, one letter remarks: ‘Perhaps Summers can’t see through her corporate cataracts’ (Marie Kain and Lucy Shultz). That many of these letters address the question of Summers’ privilege suggests readerly concern with the way in which particular voices are legitimised over others in relation to the way feminism is (publicly) permitted to mean. One reader-writer makes explicit the position of privilege occupied by Summers, particularly in relation to having the skills, the time and the space through which feminism can be publicly articulated: ‘Many of us would love to participate in public discourse’ (Fiona Deed). This woman also argues that participation media debate such as the one managed by Summers and to which she herself contributes is a luxury which many can ill afford. She also links her ‘silence’ to the socio-political climate of an increasingly user-pay education system, in contrast to free education offered during the Whitlam years, explicitly addressing the privilege accompanying participation in public debate:
unlike women of her generation, I do not have access to limitless and affordable, if not free, formal education. I don’t have the time to spend in controversial and often counterproductive debate (Fiona Deed).

This reader-writer problematises the pervasive mythology that all contemporary women have been granted more opportunities than their second-wave counterparts. Her comments imply that the teleological model governing much public discourse about feminism fails to account for the way in women’s rights have deteriorated or been eroded: ‘The model of a seamless progression of events towards an improved future disallows the consideration of such deterioration’ (Mills, 1997: 60). Feminism, as Barbara Marshall argues, has an ambivalent relationship to conventional notions of ‘progress’, particularly in relation to the notion of choice which is often deployed to signal this progress: “choices” must be subjected more thoroughly to open and public argument, to expose the structural inequalities which limit some voices while favouring others’ (Marshall, 1995: 159). It is such exclusions that make it difficult for feminists to celebrate the concept of ‘progress’, as these reader-writers emphasise.

To challenge Summers’ complaint of young women’s failure to participate in public discourse, one reader-writer suggests that ‘power needs to be continually fought for at the local level, and that means the here and now of our lives’, as opposed to in highly visible sites such as media or publishing (Marie Kain and Lucy Shultz). As Patricia Mann observes in her work on feminist agency: ‘Individuals become agents of social change as they engage in social relationships in ways that leave a particular mark on these institutions and discourses’ (Mann, 1994: 157). Thus, for this reader-writer, feminism is enacted primarily at the local level. Other letters similarly seek to further expose the privilege of those participating in the debate, particularly through emphasising that not all women benefit from the reforms of liberal feminism; as the title of Gisela Kaplan’s history of the Australian women’s movement indicates, such sociopolitical shifts have largely been a ‘meagre harvest’ (Kaplan: 1996). The ambivalence of this reader-writer toward such liberal reforms is clear:

Why, you ask, is it that Australian women haven’t had much to say on the subject? We’re too busy working 10 hours a day in the office, coming home to bake our bread, then feeling guilty because we only managed to make sandwiches with it (Leanne Faraday-Brash).

This reader-writer implies, as feminist critics have, that women’s movement into the workforce has brought about new forms of subordination (Felski, 2000: 203). Grafting masculinist, liberal models of citizenship onto women has been limited, particularly

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22 Robyn Ferrell underscores the limitations of such a narrative: ‘The revolutionary story of liberation from an oppressive past into a better future (precious though it is) can blind feminism into thinking itself as more than history, as messianic moment in which women’s state was changed forever ... if we think of feminism on the model of narrative suggested by a telos of time, we make the idea of liberation seem less and less plausible’ (Ferrell, 1997: 195).
given women’s lack of a ‘wife’ means that ‘women will never be liberal individuals’ (Mann, 1997: 229). Similarly, this letter implies the failure of liberal feminist reformism to effectively reconstitute the public/private boundaries, instead naturalising the ‘double shift’ of the ‘working mother’s’ day.23 She proclaims: ‘All the emancipated women I know are still burdened with the emotional (if not actual) responsibility of the home and the parenting’ (Leanne Faraday-Brash). Thus, the ‘reality’ and the ambivalent implications of reformism are here used to contradict the often commonsense liberal discourse of gendered equality. There has also been much criticism of the way women have traditionally been positioned as emotional labourers (McMahon, 1999: 200). For this reader-writer, rather than contesting or transforming existing social relations, liberal reforms can actually codify and entrench such relations (Brown, 1995: 12). Similarly, in Rosemary Hennessy’s materialist feminist framework, this disjuncture is indicative of capitalism’s need to draw upon women as a pool of labour without a significant disruption to the symbolic anchors of patriarchy (Hennessy, 1993: 100-110).

As the above examples have shown, the usually sutured – thus invisible – tensions between the subject position ‘worker’ and ‘mother’ are rendered visible in these letters. However, one reader-writer argues that feminists have been too successful in allowing women to combine work and motherhood. In a letter arguing that Garner ‘deserves accolades’ (which was the accompanying headline), J. D’Auvergne uses her appraisal of the book as the basis for her own condemnation of feminism and its distortion of women’s ‘natural’ role: that of mother. She seeks, like those above, to extend the debate, but in less progressive directions:

By far the most sinister legacy of the feminist movement has been the price paid by those children who lost their mothers to ‘careers’. Unbelievably, feminists have managed successfully to convince both mothers and governments that committing babies and toddlers to institutions (read long day care) is good, even desirable. ... To a ‘feminist’ being ‘just a mother’ carries the same status as being a non-person (J. D’Auvergne, The Advertiser, 24/8/95: 12).

Such comments emphasise, like those cited earlier in this chapter, that the letters to the editor was not only the province of those attempting to disrupt media narratives of the unreasonable or hysterical feminists typified in Garner’s account by the Ormond women. Conversely, as above, some reader-writers use this genre to support (and expand) Garner’s critique of feminism.

Starting from a contestation of Summer’s privilege, as the embodiment of liberal feminism, a number of reader-writers use the space provided by Summers to

23 Moira Gatens (1996) has problematised the normative, masculine subject of liberalism; this framework assumes ‘male heads of households who have at their disposal the services of an unpaid worker/mother/wife’ (Gatens, 1996: 64). See also Carol Pateman’s The Sexual Contract (1988).
argue that the reforms for which she is seen as responsible have worked to ‘reproduce the subjectivities that will be adequate to capital’s extending markets and to elicit consent to the way things’ (Hennessy, 1993: 104). Further, Hennessy’s comments are pertinent to the way these reader-writer question Summers’ own privilege: ‘The (liberal) feminist is still very much defined through an (invisible) hierarchy of social differences that takes for granted class privilege, values white over black, and sutures her as sexualised female firmly within a heterosexual symbolic order’ (Hennessy, 1993: 110). One reader-writer draws attention to the efforts of indigenous women to challenge such an economy: ‘Many women have keep felt excluded from the feminist movement for good reason. Aboriginal women entreat feminists to listen to their experiences of racism’ (Rachel Petro). Another letter, in arguing that feminism needs to continue to fight on a number of fronts, identifies the ‘provision of adequate housing and health services for aboriginal women’ (Margaret Henderson and Shane Rowlands) as an important part of any feminist agenda in Australia. Importantly, these are the only letters to explicitly mention race and thus the normative whiteness at the debate’s heart remains, once again, largely unchallenged. For Moreton-Robinson, the subject position of ‘white middle-class woman’ is the norm and remains invisible, unnamed and unmarked within Australian feminist discourse (Moreton-Robinson, 2000: 95). Racialised difference in particular (as throughout the event) here represents a lacuna that should temper any claims regarding the democratic potential of the letters to the editor forum. That said, the letters to the editor forum also works an important space for a public defence of the young women who were so heavily scrutinised in Garner’s narrative.

**Reader-writer Defence of the Ormond Women**

As well as using this space to articulate alternative understandings of feminism, many letters problematise the way Garner called into question the legitimacy of the actions of the Ormond women, in her narrative and in the subsequent event. Like the young women in the following chapter, reader-writers do not seem to address Garner’s literary or technical strategies, only her claims to truth. In this sense, like the majority of the event’s other commentators, they continue to view the text as a work of non-fiction; for these critics, Garner’s realist narrative offers representations of feminism and its young representatives that require contestation. Further, some readers imply that TFS subjects the women to a form of textual harassment, thereby compounding the trauma they initially encountered. Some of these reader-writers engage with Garner’s ethics, through the insertion of her own critical counter-narrative, undermining the complainants’ attempts to make sense of their own experiences. These
reader-writers, then, highlight the symbolic violence of the elision of the Other’s voice in dominant constructions of feminism. Such defences of the Ormond women also reinforce those of other feminist commentators during the debate, as Chapter Six will show. These reader-writers, in defending sexual harassment legislation, force the debate back onto the terrain of sexual harassment from where it had been displaced.

By publicly expressing support for the Ormond women, reader-writers rejected the ‘archetypal narrative and its inflammatory code’ (Mead, 1997a: 22) which Garner had offered and replaced it with an oppositional discourse that reaffirmed women’s right to sexual harassment remedy. It was not only in the ‘Shockwaves’ letters that the women’s actions were supported. For one reader-writer, in a letter published following Garner’s speech to the Sydney Institute, Garner’s remembrance of her own sense of paralysis in the moment of harassment makes her critique of the Ormond women seem hypocritical:

The final irony is that Garner volunteers that she quite recently found herself, a mature, experienced woman, utterly incapable of dealing with an unwanted kiss from a masseur. Stunned, she said and did nothing. She just never went back. Yet, young, intelligent, privileged women (perhaps those are their crimes) should kick of slap those who assault them, no matter how powerful the attacker and his support system, because Garner preaches, but does not practise, these appropriate responses (Mark O’Neill, 11/8/95, SMH: 34).

Given her own inability to act, Garner’s response to the Ormond women is here further problematised. In Green Left Weekly, a reader-writer likewise defended the women, arguing that ‘to suggest that these situations arise from sexual urges, irrepressible or otherwise, is nonsense’ (Gerry Harant, GLW, 6/9/1995: 10). He continues to challenge Garner’s criticism that the young women positioned themselves as victims: ‘The answer lies in exposure of the harassers by any means available to those harassed, regardless of whether or not they see themselves as victims’ (Gerry Harant, GLW, 6/9/1995: 10).

Chris Puplick too wrote a letter to the editor of The Australian defending a woman’s right to lodge complaints against sexual harassment (Chris Puplick, 11/8/95, The Australian: 12). Rather than blaming the Ormond women for ‘going to the cops’, as Garner did, he argues that TFS fails to recognise that ‘things need never have degenerated to the level they did had the College in question effective antiharassment guidelines and grievance procedures …’ (Chris Puplick, 11/8/95, The Australian: 12). In signing his letter ‘President, NSW Antidiscrimination Board’, Puplick underscores his authority to speak about sexual harassment as a form of discrimination against women. In a letter accompanied by the caption ‘Crosses Generations’, Colleen Chesterman also expresses support for the women involved in the case. She suggests that ‘powerlessness against this sort of behaviour is nothing to do with a generation divide’ (Colleen Chesterman, 9/4/95, SMH: 12). She continues: ‘It seems to me nonsense to suggest
that trying to alter hostile conditions in Ormond and other places where we work, learn or live, is to be puritan and afraid of life’ (Colleen Chesterman, 9/4/95, SMH: 12). This reader-writer challenges both the rhetoric of generation and assertions of feminism’s puritanism.

Such letters suggest, as Tania Modleski observes, that ‘meaning and legitimation become loci of contestation, as various narratives which shape our understanding and experience of event circulate and get accredited or discredited in the process’ (Modleski, 1998: 17). Some reader-writers implicitly, or at times explicitly, question the accreditation of a narrative of feminist excess that sees sexual harassment policies and procedures as politicising supposedly apolitical behaviour. Reader-writers destabilise both what were increasingly coming to circulate as commonsense understandings of sexual interaction and the over-utilised trope of feminist excess itself. In this sense, they reflect upon the way the media has taken up this particular narrative and use this space to subject it to challenge. For example, the following reader-writer raises expresses concern about the consequences of privileging some voices, such as Leser and Summers, over others:

Knees to the groin and walking away and cheek may well work for the moment, but what happens after? ... The inference from Summer’s piece and David Leser’s piece is to me frightening, and I wonder how many woman now will come forward and lodge complaints knowing they may be dragged over the coals by those with more publicly acceptable voices (Foong Ling Kong).  

This letter stresses the level of risk involved in attempting to publicly give meaning to experiences of harassment through deploying a legal remedy. For this reader-writer, the discursive construction of the women in the Ormond case is symbolic of the continuing limitations and exclusions of the public sphere for women:

As the Ormond case demonstrated amply, on the occasions young women have come into the public arena they have been let down first by a college appeal system, then bits of their lives and bodies are picked over and all kinds of agendas mapped on (Foong Ling Kong).

For this woman, responding to harassment by taking legal action remains a fraught path that deserves public support.

One other important aspect of these letters is the degree to which Summers and Garner, presumably due to their generational co-location, and despite the way in which many of their comments in public discourse so obviously conflict, are conflated. In attempting to situate themselves generationally, reader-writers often seek to invoke a monolithic second-wave Other whom they can address. For example, the following reader-writer seeks to expose Summers’ privilege:

24 This reader-writer was a ‘professional’ one, in the sense that she also published an essay in Mead’s Bodyjamming (1997).
But Summers speaks from a position above the glass ceiling and thereby reveals her privilege and distance from the lives of many young women. How is it that Summers and Garner, as members of ‘second wave feminism’, fought for anti-discrimination legislation, including the sexual harassment provisions, but fail to understand why two women used these provisions (Marie Kaine and Lucy Schulz).

In many of these letters, while the feminism practised by young women is represented as in-process, the feminism of the dually-constituted Garner/Summers is frozen in a mythical second-wave moment. For some reader-writers, media discourse’s positioning of Garner and Summers as representatives of second-wave feminism remains unchallenged. The following reader-writer, for example, positions herself against ‘the feminists of Ms Garner’s generation’, and her letter reads as an unambiguous defence of the Ormond women’s actions:

As a twentysomething woman, I could not conceive the ideas behind Helen Garner’s thinking. I’m an ambitious woman who believes I have every right and capability to do anything I may wish or desire. But I take my views one step further than Ms Garner’s generation. My body is just that: mine (Kim Rosman).

This woman expresses an inability to fathom Garner’s criticism of the Ormond women and her challenge to the legitimacy of their actions; she attributes this incomprehension to generational differences. Through the suggestion that her own philosophy extends beyond the limits of Garner’s, she also seeks to debunk the prominent myth (which circulated throughout the event) that the previous generation of feminists was more radical than the younger generation.

Another reader-writer seeks to deflect attention away from the women as individuals to the systemic nature of discrimination and harassment:

These women were responding not simply to alleged actions of this one man but to the system that denied their right to have their complaints heard and attended to with due process. In challenging the college’s (and society’s) traditional resistance to criticising and disbelieving men of power, they embarked on a brave course of action (Kate Colvin and Bridget Crone).

Here, the college is a social microcosm, and the way in which men’s stories are granted a privileged relation to ‘truth’ not granted to women is problematised. As Modleski suggests, patriarchy survives through the way in which men’s stories are transformed into truth and law; with the act of telling one’s stories, ‘comes the possibility of generating feminist counterstories that legislate other truths, beyond the “already read” – truths that will not be dismissed as delusional ravings of hysterics’ (Modleski, 1998: 202). To challenge Garner’s suggestion that the Ormond women should not have made a fuss over the Master’s harassment, another reader-writer rhetorically asks: ‘What has being nice ever achieved for women, Helen?’ (Susan E. Street). This question, directly addressed to Garner, succinctly encompasses the objections of many reader-writers (and other commentators during the event) to TFS and its condemnation of the young
women’s actions. As the above defences of the Ormond women make explicit, the media event provided an opportunity for feminist voices to enter mainstream debate and expose the ideological, ethical, and rhetorical flaws in the arguments of the event’s other prominent commentators. Furthermore, the above section also emphasises that a number of reader-writers sought to shift the discursive parameters of the debate away from feminism and back onto the field of sexual harassment from where it had been displaced.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has provided an analysis of the particular ways in which feminism comes to signify within a specific set of media texts, while also suggesting that attempts to stabilise the meanings of feminisms are always potentially open to contestation. In this sense, many of these letters have acted as ‘counter-currents’ within the event. These letters, too, also move beyond the terms of debate set by Garner and Summers, often stretching the meanings of feminism far beyond those envisaged by these celebrity feminists. By prefacing my analysis of these letters with a discussion of recent work on the reconfiguration of politics and mediated citizenship, I have suggested that the letters to the editor forum works as a crucial site for the performance of feminist identities, and, at times, to question the very terms of such identity itself. These letters, however, should not be read as indicative of the unequivocal democratisation of discursive power, or as a gesture toward a ‘heteroglossic democracy’ (Luke and Freebody, 1997: 213). Despite celebrations of media culture’s ‘democratisation’ (Hartley: 1999, Lumby: 1999), the assumption that everyone has equal access to media, or that everyone has the same opportunity to speak therein (or indeed in any cultural location), is effectively ‘a fantasy of inclusion that conceals its own exclusions’ (Ahmed et al., 2000: 4). Furthermore, letters to the editor are in no sense representative of ‘the public as a whole, few of whom ever get around to expressing their anger or concern ... in print’ (McNair, 2000: 111).

In addition to requiring certain degrees of cultural and educational capital, not to mention that increasingly scarce commodity, time, assumptions about the democratic nature of such a forum efface ‘the arduous and frequently frustrated historical struggle that is required for the subordinate to articulate and assert the value of their “difference” in the face of dominant meanings’ (Bordo, 1993: 46). Furthermore, the position of one of the central culturally sanctioned voices as the literal editor of these letters (i.e., Anne Summers), renders such romanticism even more suspect. It is also important to remember that these letters represent only one instance of reader intervention into the stories that Australian print media constructs (or rather permits)
about feminism. The contribution of these letters to public opinion formation cannot be read off the page, and as Foucault suggests in ‘What is an author?’, writers of letters are not (even if published) – unlike Garner – discursively constituted ‘authors’ (Foucault, 1980: 108); the same status or cultural legitimacy is not afforded these texts.

Despite the opportunity afforded by these letters, it remains the case that in a heavily media-mediated world, authority is granted to some voices over others and that discursive resources, the means by which these stories get told, remain unevenly distributed. Ken Plummer’s following comments on the discursive limitations of these public forms of storytelling are particularly insightful here:

The storytelling process flows through social acts of domination, hierarchy, marginalisation, and inequality. Some voices – who claim to dominate, who top the hierarchy, who claim the centre, who possess the resources – are not only heard much more readily than others, but are also capable of framing the questions, setting the agendas, establishing the rhetorics much more readily than others (Plummer, 1995: 30).

In the next chapter I continue to demonstrate the discursive management of the event, specifically through generationalism and particular historical narratives. It has been clear throughout this thesis that generationalist tropes and familial metaphors were consistently deployed in this event, and that it was difficult – though certainly not impossible – for subsequent commentators to extricate themselves from the prevailing generationalist paradigm. It is to the familial ‘currents’ and ‘countercurrents’ governing TFS media event that the final chapter now turns.
Chapter Six
‘Mothers’ and ‘Daughters’: Mediated History, Familial Metaphors and Generational Tropes

To focus on the age gap as the main reason for the differences is to refuse the possibility of developing understanding of positions in a context of divergent interpretations of the same events. It also buys into various discussions about the end of feminism through an attempt to contain feminist ideas and analysis to a particular time or political style (Rebecca Albury, 1996: 8).

I would argue, too, that the alleged ‘generational feminism debate’ was – at least in Australia – mostly a beat-up; that much of the impetus for it came not from The First Stone but from journalists who thought the ‘generation gap’ was still a good story (Kerryn Goldsworthy, 1996: 69).

‘It’s not a dialogue, it’s a fucking war’ (Helen Garner, 1995: 106).

Introduction

The final constitutive element through which I refigure TFS media event is history, a preoccupation manifest through particular, and pervasive, narratives of generational conflict. In Chapters Three, Four and Five I emphasised how the celebrity feminism of Helen Garner and Anne Summers worked to foreground an Australian feminism rife with generational conflict and disunity. Within academic and media discourse, the TFS media event is most commonly figured as symptomatic of a generational rupture within Australian feminism. Despite Goldsworthy’s palpable outrage above at such ‘careless readings’ of Garner’s text (Goldsworthy, 1996: 69), there is no doubt that public dialogue was refracted through the prism of generationalism. In the terms of this dominant discourse, speakers were required to adopt an age-based subject position. However, this chapter focuses on both instances of its reinscription and its destabilisation. Rather than seeking to (dis)prove the ontological existence of an intergenerational dispute, I am concerned with TFS media event’s role in discursively constituting this generationally-based sense of feminist conflict, a conflict that came to sustain the media event. Such conflict is predicated on the allegedly inevitable incommensurability of two generations of feminists – of mothers and daughters.

In many respects, the overt generationality of both the book and the media event is its most discussed aspect. However, it is also the grounds on which the event has been most commonly dismissed. This chapter seeks to re-view this element, asking not
why there appears such deep investment in the narrative of generational conflict, but how it comes to shape, manage and authorise particular stories about feminism. As Jane Long argues, ‘where generational cleavage in the past or in the media are cited, it is imperative that we step beyond those cleavages to interrogate such representations, to delineate the purposes, effects, and exclusions entailed in such framing’ (Long, 2001: 5). Through exposing how generationalism was constituted and contested, reaffirmed and complicated, its power to authorise some speakers and de-authorise others is effectively uncovered. As well as briefly revisiting TFS and Summers’ Letter to the Next Generation’, this chapter analyses generational rhetoric in print media reviews, opinion pieces, features articles, and Virginia Trioli’s Generation F and Kathy Bail’s collection DIY Feminism. It will argue that these so-called ‘popular’ books respond in conflicting ways to TFS and the debate it provoked. This chapter emphasises how feminists from both sides of this purported generational divide were utilised as ‘expert’ commentators on feminism’s pasts, presents and futures in press coverage during 1995-1996. In this way, I further support my conviction that, despite the political and ethical limitations of Garner’s text, the media event represented a vigorous struggle over the meanings of feminism in which self-identified feminists and supporters of feminism were highly active. That said, through close textual analysis of another of Summers’ key contributions to the media event, the essay ‘DIY Generation’ (Summers, 21/9/95, Good Weekend: 25-31), I further underscore her efforts to manage and control the event’s direction, as she seeks to impossibly fix the ‘young feminist’. Although generationalism has been the focus of much critical attention on this media event, a detailed analysis of either how some Australian feminists functioned as news actors, or of these ‘popular’ feminist books, and their role in TFS media event has not yet been produced.

*TFS* media event represents a period of hyper-anxiety over young women and their performance of feminist identity. This is unsurprising given the risk that ‘girls’ are seen to embody in Western culture (Driscoll: 2002, Harris: 2004). The young feminist, dually threatening as both girl and feminist, provokes a particularly potent form of anxiety, and these attempts to define her are also attempts to contain her. During the years in which this thesis has been produced, the area of girls and young women, particularly their relationship to a feminism they are commonly seen to renounce, has developed substantially as a field of scholarship (Hopkins: 2002, Driscoll: 2002, Harris: 2001a, 2001b, 2001c and 2004). This development has been linked to girls’ heightened presence in media culture (Harris: 2004); *TFS* media event is part of the historical moment tracked by these critics. For Garner, the young feminist is too active, while for Summers she is not active enough. However, this fundamental difference is subsumed by a narrative of generational sameness. As Anita Harris argues, young
women are dichotomised into those who refuse to express support for feminism and ‘the wrong kind of feminist’ (Harris, 2001c: 131). Young women are thought to recoil from organised politics and feminism in particular (Summers), while those that do identify are thought adopt an inadequate, victim-focused feminism (Garner). Though the basis of their critique of young women differs considerably, the result remains the same: a homogenisation of, and expression of contempt towards, young women. As the coming sections will show, generational rhetoric is crucially invested in who is permitted to define feminism’s present – and its past.

**Feminism, History and Media Culture**

In terms of *TFS*, it is impossible to ignore the fact that ‘in some degree the book does function to exhale a very large and disappointed generational sigh about the ways in which the liberation fanfared in the 1970s had paled into priggishness’ (Long, 2001: 2). As the backcover blurb of *TFS* notes, Garner wanted to expose ‘what feminism was becoming in the hands of her daughter’s generation’ (Garner: 1995). Accordingly, as previous chapters have argued, *TFS* event worked as the stage upon which anxieties over who controlled the feminism of the popular memory could be played out. Public debates about generationalism represent cultural ‘flashpoints where contests about the meanings of feminism’s past and the directions of its future are briefly illuminated’ (Heller, 1997: 310). Concerned also, by necessity, with its present, *TFS* media event was heavily implicated in constituting (and fixing) feminism in all its temporalities. While the politics of feminist history writing have been the focus of many prominent theorists,¹ such a preoccupation has not often extended to analyses of popular feminist texts or mass-mediated accounts of feminist history.

As Deborah Siegel (1997a) has observed, the uses of history in popular feminist texts, such as those considered here by Kathy Bail and Virginia Trioli or even Anne Summers’ ‘Shockwaves’, have been given scant attention in feminist analysis (Siegel, 1997a: 59). Such an omission is remarkable, given that ‘historiographic discourse is used as a power play in current feminist debates’ (Siegel, 1997a: 58). More generally, the media’s role in historicising feminism has not been fully acknowledged. During the period of ‘maximum visibility’ for feminism upon which this thesis focuses, it is impossible to ignore the way feminist history and the politics of its telling functioned. In terms of texts marketed as representative of the next generation, the following questions need to be posed: ‘How is the second wave being historicized? How is that history being circulated (or perhaps not circulated?) What are the functions to which this history is being put?’ (Orr, 1997: 42). Of the uses of the past in media

representations, Amanda Evans similarly questions: ‘Is the past mobilised to credit or discredit a moment in the present?’ (Evans, 2000: 61). Through the contributions of TFS media event’s major celebrities, as previous chapters have shown, it appears to be mobilised for the latter. These attempts to ‘discredit a moment in the present’ operate as a form of nostalgia, an idea which I will shortly examine.\(^2\) In a metonymic slippage, as a part substituted for the whole, an activist, libertarian feminist second-wave is contrasted with a representation of an ‘anti-sex’ younger generation throughout the event.

The discursive construction of feminism through a generationalist paradigm relies on the mobilisation of particular narratives of the feminist past, and particular epistemological assumptions about the past itself. Such histories will always function as the point of departure for assertions about their generational supersession. The uses to which such historical narratives were put during TFS media event have not been significantly explored, nor has the historical specificity of this period. Such narratives shaped, and were shaped by, the media event. As Susan Friedman argues, because the heuristic activity of history writing ‘orders the past in relation to the needs of the present and future’ (Friedman, 1995: 13), contests over feminism’s past are effectively contests over its future. In this sense, ‘writing the history of feminism functions as an act in the present that can (depending on its influence) contribute to the shape of feminism’s future’ (Friedman, 1995: 13). In this debate, as my reading of ‘Shockwaves at the Revolution’ has shown, certain histories of second-wave feminism are used in particular ways, to control (or at least attempt to control) the present and future imaginings of feminism. The generationalist logic mobilised in this debate necessitates a fixing, not only of feminist presents, but also of the feminist pasts from which a homogenised group of younger feminists allegedly diverge. Historical narrative is, therefore, central to the realisation of this event, as it is to contemporary media culture in a wider sense (a point which has recently been contentious).

In contradiction to the argument of Frederic Jameson regarding the ‘waning of our historicity’ (Jameson, 1994: 564) or indeed the ‘death’ of history, many critics argue that the mass media actually expands and deepens historical perspective (Thompson:

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\(^2\) Australian feminism, and the ‘second-wave’ in particular, was afforded much journalistic attention in the year TFS was published. Most specifically, the event coincided with a number of anniversaries relating to the Australian second-wave (Ion: 1998). From the mid-1990s to late 1990s there is an increase in articles and mainstream books commemorating feminism which mirrors ‘increased feminist remembrance occurring in other forms’ (Henderson, 2002b: 4). For Henderson, it is possible to attribute the increased ‘feminist commemoration’ that occurs in 1995 to the publication of TFS and to the 25\(^\text{th}\) anniversary of one of the most prominent polemic in feminist history, Greer’s The Female Eunuch (Henderson, 2002b: 6).
Alejandro Bayer, for example, is critical of claims that historical depthlessness is a characteristic of postmodernity:

> It has become common in public discourse to regard contemporary western societies as having reached the end of history and to characterize them as amnesic cultures: societies beset by spectacle and immediacy but lacking any sense of history (Bayer, 2001: 491).

Against this postmodern grain, Bayer argues that ‘we are living through a moment characterized by an unprecedented presence of history and memory in the cultural sphere’ (Bayer, 2001: 492). In particular, Bayer conjectures that the interpretations of the past in media texts ‘might be creating a richer understanding of history and collective memory and a more reflective and self-conscious historical subject’ (Bayer, 2001: 499). Similarly, in the aptly titled *The Persistence of History* (1996), Vivian Sobchack argues that ‘we are in a moment marked by a peculiarly novel “readiness” for history among the general population’ (Sobchack, 1996: 4), a readiness both product and process of increased mediatisation.3

A number of feminist theorists have recently made similar assertions, calling for renewed intellectual commitment to the various types of feminist history circulating in public discourse (see Friedman: 1995, Morris: 1998, Deem: 1999). Feminist cultural critic, Rita Felski, writes that ‘the cultural explosion of women’s texts exploring issues of memory, time, tradition, and change seems at odds with the bland assertion that “we” live in a posthistorical era’ (Felski, 2000: 145). Likewise, in her recent work Margaret Henderson argues that there is a struggle occurring over the ‘meaning and memory’ of feminism’s past(s), a highly visible struggle staged in Australian print media and popular feminist narratives such as histories, autobiographies and newspaper articles (see Henderson: 2002b). *TFS* media event can undoubtedly be seen as such a site of struggle over feminism, social memory and the always interested processes of historicisation. However, as this media event shows, one of the most prominent ways in which feminist history is being ‘drafted’ in both media and academic contexts is through the frame of generational conflict (Looser, 1995: 1).

**Feminist Theory, Familial Metaphors and the Critique of Generation**

‘Generations’ and ‘waves’ are the two central metaphors through which feminist history has been figured, including in its ‘popular’ varieties. Like the waves metaphor and feminism itself, generation is a term without a fixed referent (Ferguson, 2004: 11); here I am concerned with the rhetorical processes via which commentators attempt to fix its meanings during the media event. To speak of feminism in terms of generations

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3 As Chapter Two has shown, such ‘readiness’ extends to consumer desire for individual life histories and autobiographies (see Curthoys and Docker: 1996).
inevitably leads to the use of familial metaphors (Henry, 2003: 211). Throughout TFS media event, pairs of women are homogenised and seen to embody conflicting positions on the continuum of feminist thought, the most obvious of which are the mother/daughter pairings of Garner-Summers and Bail-Trioli. While each woman in these pairs approaches feminism’s pasts, presents and futures differently, their position in a familial narrative as mother/daughter respectively is inscribed throughout the event; TFS event is replete with ‘bad daughters’ and ‘territorial mothers’ (Looser, 1995: 4).

Beyond the immediate context of this specific event, ‘it has become a commonplace of recent debate to cast the media as villain beating up generational conflict as an easy and effective selling point’ (Long, 2001: 4). In this scenario, generational conflict is magnified primarily because it sells (Long, 2001: 4). The construction of generational ruptures within feminism is seen to be dangerous to feminism yet desirable to media because it ‘prefigures the end of feminism’ (Bird, 1996: 50). However, generation did not become the primary means of conceptualising feminist conflict within TFS media event because of either capitalist commodification or media hostility. Rather, mother/daughter tropes have been deployed in much history and non-fiction, including in both its ‘popular’ and ‘academic’ varieties.\(^4\) Recent feminist academic collections (Looser and Kaplan: 1997, Heywood and Drake: 1997, Dicker and Piepmeir: 2003) unpack and, at times, reinscribe the rhetorics of generationalism and Oedipal metaphors. Infact, the use of familial metaphor has become so prevalent in feminist theory that one critic coined the term ‘matrophor’ to mark this figurative tendency (Quinn, 1997: 179).

The idea that feminism itself is recurrently figured as Mother has also been the subject of recent work by Astrid Henry (2004), who argues that the 1990s in particular ‘may well be defined by the notion of feminist generations’ (Henry, 2004: 3). However, though commonly identified as a peculiarly 1990s phenomenon, the prominence of generationalism within feminist discourse has a much longer history. For Louise d’Arcens, it is this history which secures interest, and investment, in Garner’s familial tale: ‘It is, I believe, because of its feminist pedigree, rather than its accuracy, that Garner’s mother-daughter paradigm has proven so compelling’ (d’Arcens, 1998: 108). Carole Ferrier too argues that for anyone with a knowledge of feminist history, the “generational” debates of the nineties’ were not original (Ferrier, 2003: 11, see also Bulbeck, 1999: 6). Australian feminist history is, then, no stranger to differences figured generationally. This is not to suggest, however, that the deployment of

\(^4\) As Jane Long asserts, this condemnation of media culture for its investment in ideas of generational conflict are unsustainable if we are not likewise prepared to condemn its deployment in academic feminist history writing (Long, 2001: 4).
generation and its reductive assumptions have gone unchallenged. In Australia, feminist critics took the opportunity provided by TFS media event to re-engage with the function, and expose the limitations, of generation as an overriding marker of difference (Bulbeck: 1997, Probyn: 1998a, Ion: 1998, Long: 2001). The homogenising tendencies of generation played out during TFS event are commonly seen to result in a simplified feminism, one that silences and erases the diversity within Australian feminism (Spongberg et al., 1997: 242, see also Van Acker: 1995, Henderson and Rowlands: 1996); this process was also critiqued in publications in response to the media event (Else-Mitchell and Flutter: 1998, Harris: 1998, d’Arcens: 1998).

Generationalism and its assumption of feminist conflict is the most limiting discourse mobilised in and through TFS media event. Many critics have expressed fears about the effects of generationalist discourse on feminism. For Diane Elam, in refiguring feminism in terms of the power structures of the patriarchal family, feminism risks becoming nothing ‘more than patriarchy with a face-lift’ (Elam, 1997: 64). In terms of how they fix feminists and their practices, generational debates are governed by ‘an extremely static sense of temporality’ (Probyn, 1998b: 135, see also Roof: 1997). Furthermore, generational conflict often becomes the channel through which anxieties over other issues, such as cultural and/or institutional legitimacy, sexuality, power, and money come to flow (Altman, 2003: 7). Ann Curthoys extends this point even further, suggesting that these concerns over generational difference may actually symbolise concerns over difference itself within feminism (Curthoys, 1997: 195). One of the consequences of fostering this constraining logic is that political differences become misconstrued as generational ones (Hogeland, 2001: 107). In a different vein, Lisa Adkins argues that debates which appear generational in nature actually mask a series of ‘hidden claims and assumptions regarding what the proper objects of feminism are, and should be, and the relationship of these objects to feminist subjectivity and feminist consciousness’ (Adkins, 2004: 431). This idea of the ‘proper’ objects of feminism is a central preoccupation in TFS. There is much more invested in these narratives, therefore, than the commonly foregrounded bitterness of a rejected mother; they involve deeper questions about feminist epistemologies and ontologies. In recognition of its profound limitations, some feminist critics have argued that the concept of generation as a means to understand change, difference and conflict is so marred by its exclusions and teleological assumptions (Ferguson, 2004: 11) that it should be discarded altogether (Maddison, 2002: 2, Siegel, 1997b: 66). In the next section, I briefly attend to one of the greatest problems with Oedipal models of relations between generation of feminists manifest in TFS media event: the accompanying logic of inheritance and debt.
Feminism as Property: The Anxiety Over Ownership

Generationalism commonly relies upon metaphors and tropes informed by Freudian psychoanalysis. The process for becoming a feminist is seen to mirror that of becoming a gendered subject; like that of the daughter, the individuation process for the feminist is seen to be particularly fraught (see Williams: 1992, Henry: 2004). However, the deployment of familial metaphors has significant restrictions. Judith Roof has exposed the limitations of generational logic, emphasising in particular that it relies upon a patriarchal conceptualisation of history, and a ‘linear, cause-effect narrative’ and also ‘imports ideologies of property’ (Roof, 1997: 71). In many senses, TFS media event represents a highly visible struggle over who owns Australian feminism (see d’Arcens, 1998: 104). The ways in which this ‘property’ comes to be treated by the next generation is often central in debates played out between different feminist cohorts. The scolding by second-wave feminists such as Garner and Summers is predicated upon an illusory, coherent and homogenised narrative of an Australian feminist past, which – consistent with this feminist past as property metaphor – is being abused by its new ‘owners’. Summers’ ‘Letter to the Next Generation’ (and its later iteration ‘Shockwaves at the Revolution’), and the accompanying assumptions about passing on the proverbial feminist baton, substantiates Roof’s point about the anxiety-provoking notions of ‘property’, ownership, and familial debt. Addressing the young feminist, Summers poses a series of questions relating to whether she would acknowledge her debt to the feminists who made a ‘great array of choices’ available to her: ‘Wouldn’t she feel something – gratitude? a debt? a responsibility to keep widening those choices for herself and her generation?’ (Summers, 1994: 506). Summers’ anxiety represents a fear of a ‘failed reproduction’, where the next generation refuses to allow this legacy, and a particular form of feminist consciousness, to be successfully passed on (Adkins, 2004: 429).

To further consider this idea of feminism as property, it is valuable to return briefly to the text which prompted this media event. In her narrative, Garner invokes the notion of property as she attempts to wrestle it back from young feminists charged with its mis-use:

Feminism is not the exclusive property of a priggish, literal-minded vengeance squad that gets Eros in its sights, gives him both barrels, and marches away in its Blundstones leaving the gods’ messenger sprawled in the mud with his wings all bloody and torn (Garner, 1995: 202).

Garner’s ‘fury’ stems from what young women do once this ‘gift’ of feminism has been received (Elam: 1997, Bulbeck: 2001). Here, she seeks to reclaim feminism from those who have inherited it. A number of Australian feminist critics have remarked upon
Garner’s over-dependence on the notion of feminism as property. For example, Ann Genovese’s comments suggest that ownership is the governing trope in mainstream discussions about contemporary feminism: ‘Garner’s question: ‘What kind of feminism?’ was softly echoed with another: ‘And to whom does it belong?’ (Genovese, 1996: 148). Feminism is commonly figured as both legacy and property during TFS media event, a torch to be handed down and preserved by its new owners (Curthoys, 1997: 205). In her ‘Letter to the Next Generation’, Summers, professing to offer the history of the Australian women’s movement asserts: ‘In hearing our story, I hope you will also learn something about yourselves, about where you stand in this great movement of change, and that is might just move some of you to reach out for the torch. It is time for it to be passed’ (Summers, 1994: 510). Theorising feminist identification and history in terms of such transmission positions the mother as the ‘authorised source’ and the daughter as the ‘passive recipient’ (Williams, 1992: 56). This transmission, and its assumptions of a linear movement, is doomed to fail (Looser, 1997: 34). Both Garner and Summers characterise younger women according to such a logic of passivity, particularly on the grounds of their failure to act decisively in the initial moment of sexual harassment.

The trope of ownership has also been criticised as a preoccupation of white, middle-class feminists (hooks, 1994: 103, Huggins, 1998: 35). It is argued that those who have not had the luxury of inclusion in feminism do not invest in the possessiveness implied by the property metaphor. According to this model, any attempts to alter feminism represent a form of abuse. Devooney Looser argues that, ‘passing on carries with it the idea of a linear movement, as well as suppression of the inevitability of difference’ (Looser, 1997: 34). Feminists need to be sceptical of the notion ‘handing down’, ‘as if it [feminism] exists in a pure form and may not be altered in any way but negatively’ (Looser, 1995: 7). Further, these notions of a proprietorial feminism make assumptions about feminist futures, or rather the endangering of such futures: ‘One of the things most at stake here is the future of the feminism developed by Garner’s own generation (and mine): she sees young women as destroying it’ (Curthoys, 1995: 206). This proprietorial discourse situates feminism as a fixed body of knowledge and practices (Roof, 1995: 268), and leads to an unproductive politics of contempt towards its unworthy or ungrateful inheritors (see Detloff: 1997). Finally, conceptualising feminism as an inheritance or legacy sees it not as a process, but as a product over which young women have little control (Henry, 2003: 219). Figured in such a way, second-wave feminists are the creators of contemporary feminism while inert younger feminists expect to ‘reap the benefits’ of their mothers’ activism (Henry, 2003: 220), benefits which include the type of legal action Garner and Summers
condemned the Ormond women for pursuing. In her recent work, Bonnie Dow argues that this move from the egalitarian metaphor of ‘sisterhood’ to the more hierarchal mother/daughter relationship in media culture is unsurprising (Dow, 2003: 145), as it temporarily satisfies media’s insatiable desire for conflict. In media and subsequent academic commentary, the event was seen as ‘a good bitch fight’ – something in which news discourse appears heavily invested.

‘A good bitch fight’: News, Feminist Conflict and the Media Event

During the course of the media event, inconsistencies and fissures between feminists were deployed in particular ways. From this early point in the debate, the generational ‘battle lines’ were firmly drawn in media discourse. Furthermore, ‘stones’ were rhetorically mobilised throughout, particularly in news headlines, to signify a feminist battle of biblical proportions. According to the binary logic characteristic of contemporary news media discourse, ‘not only are there two sides to every story, but there are usually only two’ (Dow, 2003: 144). Conflict is a central element of news discourse, helping to constitute notions of the newsworthy. In terms of media engagement with feminism, conflict is seen to be a popular frame for journalists, ‘which appeals to individuals as a way to simplify complex events’ (Costain et al., 1997: 207).

In the same way that the ‘war between the sexes’ was one of the ‘favourite frames’ of early press coverage of feminism (Costain et al., 1997: 207), contemporary news discourse commonly mobilises the trope of warring feminists. Furthermore, the event did not exist in a vacuum, and the newsworthiness of conflict between feminists is further evidenced by other high-profile battles concurrently occurring; for example, Germaine Greer’s public stoush with Suzanne Moore in the UK was also the subject of Australian print media attention in 1995, and resulted in a number of generalisations about global ruptures within feminism more broadly, as did the Beijing Women’s Conference.

In TFS media event, generational conflict between feminists provides the dramatic element upon which news discourse relies (Gitlin, 1980: 146). Maggie Wykes’
Some conflict news offers immediate resolution; other news runs as a serial – always deferring the happy ending to tomorrow’s edition, or next week’s or next year’s, but always hinting at and anticipating its arrival so we buy tomorrow’s paper (Wykes, 2001: 192).

The resolution of feminist conflict in TFS is likewise endlessly deferred. The commercial viability of the event must be seen, like conflict itself, to be an important part of its actualisation. To put it crudely, TFS media event sold both books and newspapers.

This conflict was central to the event’s sustenance. As Ann Genovese argued recently, “‘peace’” was actually difficult to identify in the public, media-mediated discourse of The First Stone event’ (Genovese, 2002: 150, see also D’Arcens, 1998: 110). Within the event, conflict between feminists was commonly viewed as inherently negative, and feminism is believed to be damaged by such publicly staged conflicts. In companion pieces following the publication of Garner’s speech to the Sydney Institute, Eva Cox and Morag Fraser argued that ‘it is time to end the ideological trench-warfare among feminists’ (Fraser, 10/8/95, SMH: 13). Dale Spender, too, is cited as saying “no good comes of this in-fighting” (Neill, 9/8/95, The Australian: 1). The language of division is consistently deployed to describe the effect of the book on a homogenous feminist interpretive community (see Clark, ‘Garner’s book slated in US’, 10/7/97, The Age: 3). Similarly, following the publication of Bodyjamming, another commentator argued that ‘Australian feminism has to move on from the Ormond College case and the row Helen Garner’s book triggered’ (Nolan, 7/11/97, The Australian: 17). Here, TFS is something from which a previously healthy Australian feminism needs to recover; conflict is a painful dis-ease threatening the debilitated body of feminism. This pain and discord is explicitly generational, as the title of Robert Manne’s opinion piece indicates: ‘The painful fallout when eras collide’ (Manne, 12/4/95, The Age: 13).

Moreover, journalistic commentators rather pruriently described the media event as: ‘purple jelly wrestling’ (Cox, SMH, 10/8/95: 13); ‘high culture’s answer to Gladiators’ (Neill, ‘War Between The Women’, 24-5/6/95, Weekend Australian, ‘Review’: 1); ‘a kind of high-minded Gladiators’ (Sinclair, 14/8/95, Financial Review: 19); ‘Australian feminism’s heavyweight title bout [between Mead and Garner]’ (Guilliat, 21/9/95, SMH: 7); the ‘high-cultural equivalent of mud-wrestling’ (Sorensen, 25/3/95, SMH, ‘Spectrum’: 9); and ‘literary tug-of-war’ (Daniel, 14/4/95, The Age, ‘Extra’: 8). As a way

\[\text{\textsuperscript{7} Significantly, during the course of the event feminism was not seen to have died, in the sense of the assertions of ‘postfeminism’ seen to mark the 1990s.}\]
of representing conflict, these ‘culturally familiar’ frames work as a means of ‘packaging’ news information for consumers (Wolfsfeld, 2004: 89).

In relation to TFS media event, critics have argued that the book’s representation of a ‘cat-fight’ among women, and mothers and daughters in particular, is the source of its media prominence (see Mead, 1997: 13, Henderson and Rowlands: 1996). The ‘catfight’ has not only been used as a metaphor for the struggle between feminism and anti-feminism (Douglas, 1994: 223, see also Rhode, 1995: 701), but – as this event suggests – is used to describe internal disagreement within the ranks of feminism: ‘Casting such disagreements as catfights minimises serious discussion of feminist concerns while also supporting the dualistic bias of media portrayals that has always highlights conflict’ (Baker-Beck, 1998: 145). For feminist critics, the centrality of conflict undermines the event’s possibilities, and is conceptualised as something the press voraciously ‘fed’ on (Genovese, 2002: 149). Furthermore, critics such as Genovese underscore the difficulty of staging a productive feminist dialogue in a news culture fixated on scandal and highly sexualised conflict between women (Genovese, 2002: 149).

As the above comments suggest, the potential negative effects of publicly staged disagreements between feminists historically have caused much anxiety. For example, Nancy Miller asks, ‘who benefits from the spectacle of our disarray?’ (Miller, 1997: 168). Those who view media culture as antifeminist also see its representation of conflict between women as further evidence of its ‘trivialisation’ of feminism. Other feminists, including from within the media event (Mitchell, 5/7/95, The Australian: 13, Lake, 4/4/1995, The Age: 15), have scrutinised the nostalgic idea of an earlier feminism free from disagreement and attempted to re-value conflicts within feminism (see Looser, 1995: 7). For Shelley Budgeon, ‘the continued project of feminism is to learn to practise conflict constructively’ (Budgeon, 2001: 25). Nevertheless, while conflict itself serves as a potentially regenerative form, obstinate assumptions that conflicting ideological positions manifest primarily along the generational axis render it less than productive. That is, TFS media event’s limiting generationalist paradigm makes it difficult (though not impossible) for feminists to ‘practise conflict constructively’. Rather than exploring the potential benefits of difference and anxieties that may cause conflict, the generational paradigm tends to absorb them (Roof, 1997: 73). Conflict within the event must be viewed ambivalently, for while it may have seemed that feminism was in disarray, its enduring news value and the need for news sources to tell the ‘other side’ of the story (thereby creating the sense of a ‘balanced’ news media) expanded the field in which feminists could appear and challenge the problematic assumptions of Garner, Summers, and other prominent commentators.
Contesting Generation: Feminists as News Sources and Commentators

As a discourse, generationalism offers only two subject positions: mother or daughter (see Henry, 2004: 181). However, TFS media event offers instances of their disruption from within generationalism’s own discursive parameters. One of the central tenets of this thesis has been that TFS media event acted as a site of conflicting narratives about feminism, including those which challenge generational confluence. Although Garner and Summers (who were themselves problematically conflated) assumed that young women’s feminism was inherently inferior to their own, in the space opened by their contributions to the event a number of conflicting stories also came into circulation. Given that the signifier ‘feminism’ was accredited with a form of heightened news value during this time, a number of high-profile feminist women and commentators sympathetic to feminism became active as ‘experts’ during this media event. These contributors offer a substantial challenge to the idea that feminists were written out of the event by a print media industry seeking to reinforce Garner’s (and that of conservative male commentators) problematic ideological frame.

Apart from the celebrities discussed in the previous chapter, other feminists during the event have been persistently overlooked in criticism reinforcing assumptions about media misrepresentation and hostility towards feminists. In this way, the interpretive, authoritative role for feminists engaged in public speech through news media has been markedly under-examined in previous studies of the event, as it has in feminist media criticism more broadly (see Barker-Plummer: 1998). Although the quality of newsworthiness is highly contingent and shifting, the event constitutes feminist voices newsworthy – particularly when speaking as/of generation. The presence of these voices also evidences a diverse feminist public which, as is the case with letters to the editor forums, was brought into being by the event. For feminist sources or commentators in disagreement with Garner, the press provided a platform for the circulation of alternative truth-claims, an extension of the debate beyond the parameters set by TFS, and for criticism of news discourse and its deployment of the trope of generation. While not romanticising these counter-discursive contributions, or extracting them from the wider context of the event, these voices are brought to the fore here to further suggest the feminist possibilities of the event.

Generationalism was a feature of the media event from its earliest moments. In the March 1995 women’s edition of the Good Weekend, David Leser (whose article featured in Chapter Four) discursively constituted the event’s conflict along generational lines, suggesting that ‘the battlelines are no longer between feminists and the rest, but now, perhaps most bitterly, between the so-called “old guard” feminists
and the new’ (Leser, 18-19/3/95, Good Weekend: 3). Garner is throughout the media event positioned as a ‘mother’ of Australian feminism. As one commentator observed: ‘Her book is suffused with bewilderment and hurt that the young women in the case refused to talk with her. It is the bewilderment and hurt of a mother, or perhaps any parent, with kids who won’t share their world, who want to make their own way’ (McCallum, 1/9/95, The Australian: 12). In the Herald Sun, implicitly linking Garner to Summers, one commentator argues that ‘The First Stone is a letter from an older feminist to a new generation of feminists – some of whom she sees as destroying themselves with vengefulness, turning away from life’ (Little, 1/4/95, Herald Sun: 13).

However, divisions during the event were not as unambiguous as these commentators confidently proclaim. In fact, a closer look at the media texts of the event debunks such clearly delineated generational cohesion.

As producers of the media event, feminists were most prominent as either opinion-piece writers or sources. Although media desire for a generational narrative (or for conflict) may have opened up the space in which they could speak, feminist commentators and sources challenged generationalism throughout the event. The model of generational conflict was destabilised in two central ways through feminist during the event: either through ‘second-wave’ sources or opinion-piece writers identifying with the Ormond women or through a more direct exposure of the fractures in generationalism’s logic. The news media were frequently taken to task over the directions in which the event was being steered, illustrating that the event also hosted a broader dialogue over the representational practices of contemporary news media (see Sinclair, Australian Financial Review, 14/8/95: 19). In her classic Marxist feminist style, Queensland academic Carole Ferrier sagaciously argued in the Courier Mail:

Narratives of unwanted sexual approaches, through the whole gamut from violent assault to harassment, are retold in various institutions that profit from the reproduction of such stories. The dominant ideology says that courts are there to produce justice and the media act as watchdogs to see that it has been done – but papers are run to make money and courts function primarily to protect a grossly unequal distribution of private property and wealth (Ferrier, 7/4/95, Courier Mail: 27).

This represents a remarkable piece of feminist analysis and media criticism, but of course Ferrier did not produce a weekly piece about the event as many conservative men did. Nonetheless, the articulation of such radical views within the context of the mainstream media should not go unrecognised. In this piece, Dr Ferrier is hardly the

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8 Generalisationism had already found presence in the Australian print media landscape before TFS was published. See Williams, ‘We are feminists but...’, 28/1/95, The Australian Weekend Magazine: 19-26, Kingston, SMH, 25/11/94: 11. Consequently, while TFS itself can be seen to circumscribe public discourse along generational lines, the framework through which TFS would be read was already established (in academic contexts as much as in ‘popular’) and commentators tapped into this pre-fabricated narrative.
orthodox, doctrinaire feminist invoked at other points in the event. Significantly, she
eschews generationalism to instead focus on the ‘institutional inequality’ that permits
harassment to occur. Furthermore, she was not alone in her scathing criticism of the
ways in which this event was playing out. For example, in a further instance of the type
of feminist criticism circulating through the event, Amanda Sinclair suggests:

Feminism has hit the headlines again. At one level, Helen Garner’s speech at the
Sydney Institute was compelling and elegant address, with all the depth and
clarity we have to expect from the author. At another level, however, that address
is vulnerable to becoming part of a broader and more worrying political process:
feminism as spectacle (Sinclair, 14/8/95, Financial Review: 19).

While Sinclair expresses concerns about the effects of this debate on feminism, that it is
becoming mere ‘spectacle’, others challenge the idea of generational alliance more
directly through defending the Ormond women’s right to take action against sexual
harassment.

As suggested in Chapter Two, much work has been produced on how claims to
sexual harassment (like feminism itself) come to be discredited in news coverage. While
Garner’s disavowal of feminism was primarily enacted through her rejection of the
personal as political, others sought to ensure that such a feminist dictum was sustained.
Although feminism remained the central preoccupation of the event, it was through
such news pieces that the issue of sexual harassment came to sporadically re-surface.
Prominent feminists in particular argued for a greater recognition of the enduring
structural power inequities that culminate in the violation of women’s bodily integrity.
Rather than nostalgically celebrate a libertarian past wherein women did not reply
upon the State, as Garner had done, a number of prominent feminist commentators
identifying with the ‘second-wave’ argue that such policies and legislative provisions
remain necessary. For example, Moira Raynor takes Garner to task as she defends the
Ormond women’s actions in ‘Law lends steel to the feminist fight’ (Raynor, 14/8/95,
The Age: 11). Although she explicitly identifies generationally with Garner (‘we of Helen
Garner’s generation’), she mounts a substantial challenge to her peer’s condemnation
of the young women:

She [Garner] believes that those feminists who use the structures of masculine
authority somehow institutionalise women’s powerlessness. In my experience, on
the other hand, to try to resolve issues about the misuse of authority from a
position of weakness without authority, a place to stand, is worse than useless
(Raynor, 14/8/95, The Age: 11).

For Raynor, it is Garner who seeks to entrench women’s powerlessness, not the women
involved in the Ormond case. Eva Cox, ‘the expert at the immediate, succinct, public
expression of feminist opinions’ (Curthoys, 1997: 199), is ambivalent about the book
but ultimately asserts: ‘I agree with Garner that playing the victim button is often a
false note but her ignoring structural power is as much an omission as her criticism of
ignoring personal power’ (Cox, 10/8/95, SMH: 11). These prominent feminists seek to destabilise Garner’s narrative of a hyper-sensitive younger generation of feminists that seeks institutional resolution to individual problems. Virginia Trioli quotes Renate Klein, who also emphasises how disturbing she finds the event:

‘I am so angry at the message this sends,’ says Dr Renate Klein, 50, Deputy Director of Deakin University’s Australian Women’s Research Centre. ‘Young women are being told that they should not use the legal avenues that many of us fought for so many years ago, they are being told it’s not the right way and it’s all too difficult, and that they should try to cope with it as best they can on their own. This takes us back to pre-feminist times’ (Trioli, 29/3/95, The Age: 13).

The presence of a number of academic feminists, like those quoted above, also substantiates Wicke’s point regarding the permeability of academic and ‘popular’ feminist boundaries (Wicke: 1998), as they cross over into the field of news media to circulate particular understandings of feminism and its history. Furthermore, the assertion that ‘Macarthyist’ feminists refused to read the book, an assertion made by Garner, is compromised by the active role of feminist critics in the event.

Given that Garner’s speech attempted to reduce her book’s central preoccupation to the issue of whether women could dress ‘provocatively’, following the speech defences of women’s rights against sexual harassment were more pronounced. In ‘Speech pours fat on feminist fires’ (Sculley and Freeman, 10/8/95, SMH: 6), a number of feminist academics, including Jenny Morgan, Marilyn Lake, and Lucy Frost, are sought for commentary on Garner’s speech to the Sydney Institute. While the title unproductively focuses on feminist conflict, the feminists quoted in this article all question Garner’s displacement of sexual harassment from the institution to the individual. These women articulate none of the anxiety about the future of feminism expressed by Garner and Summers, nor do they rely on a nostalgic feminism against which such young women are to be judged; they also disrupt the image of a monolithic second-wave unified against younger feminists. In particular, the generational model is also destabilised in the event as ‘intragenerational differences’ assert their presence throughout (Roof, 1997: 72). As d’Arcens notes, a closer look at the event highlights that ‘much of the acrimony that has passed between feminists has been between women of the same chronological generation’ (d’Arcens, 1998: 111). Moreover, given that action against sexual harassment became metonymic of feminism during the media event, these defences of the Ormond women represent defences of feminism itself.

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It was not only well-known Australian feminists or academics who used news discourse to call into question Garner’s key assumptions about both feminism and sexual harassment. Other opinion piece writers sympathetic to feminism likewise re-focus the debate to sexual harassment, arguing that the issue has been ‘trivialised’ within media culture since *TFS*’s publication (Horin, 11/8/95, *SMH*, ‘Spectrum’: 2, Loane, 5/5/95, *SMH*: 34). In addition to acting as news sources (Neill, 9/9/95, *The Australian*: 1 Jackman, 7/4/95, *Courier Mail*: 26), young feminists were also active journalistic commentators in their own right, and likewise used the space provided to defend the Ormond women and to question the ethics of Garner’s approach to her subject and media representation of feminists (Kenny, 17/5/95, *The Australian*: 11).

The language of generation was also directly criticised in the event. The following quotation from Trioli’s ‘The Second Stone’, where ‘young feminists hit back at Helen Garner’s new book *The First Stone*’, challenges familial metaphors as a mean to interpret feminist conflict:

Garner’s language in *The First Stone* is like a betrayed mother’s. She pits her rage against a generation of feminists she believes has betrayed her sisters’ cause; but angry resistance is emerging among many young women who refuse to be painted as if they were treacherous philosophical daughters (Trioli, 29/3/95, *The Age*: 13).

Like Trioli, other journalists supportive of feminism emphasised the problems inherent in constructing the event and conflict among feminists along generational lines. For example, in June 1995 Vivienne Porzsolt responded to Garner in the form of an open letter challenging Garner’s self-positioning as feminist ‘mother’:

You sound like a middle-aged mother infuriated at rejection by her adolescent daughters. But these are not your adolescent daughters – they are grown women, taking action on behalf of themselves and of all of us in a situation which is fundamentally political (Porsoltz, 29/6/95, *The Australian*: 11).

Apart from acting to rebut the idea that Garner was not heavily scrutinised during the event, this open letter challenges the dominant mother-daughter trope, strategically utilising ‘us’ to invoke a cross generational commonality between women. Porzsolt’s letter also works as a defence of the women at the centre of *TFS*, which was a relatively common occurrence in the media event. Pro-feminist commentators such as Don Edgar too supported women’s right to take action against harassment, while simultaneously contesting Garner’s homogenisation of young feminists:

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10 For example, in her review of *TFS*, Morag Fraser implies that such a battle works as a strategic marketing device: ‘Factions in feminism, polarisation, lines drawn between aggrieved groups, makes for a more saleable commodity’ (Fraser, 7/9/96, *The Age*, ‘Saturday Extra’: 7). Similarly, in ‘Academic lashes media book debate’, D.D. Nicholl cites the comment Professor Peter Singer, from his address to the NSW Premier’s Literary Awards: ‘[Professor Singer] said he doubted if *The First Stone* would have received half the coverage it did if the press had not been able “to present the debate as a contest between two generations of feminists”’ (Nicholl, 16-17/9/95, *The Age*: 9).
Garner’s main flaw is twofold. In her sympathy for a ‘victimised’ male, she downplays the institutional inertia of the male college establishment, whose failure to act pushed the harassed female students into taking legal action. And in her extended criticism of ‘young feminists’ as some uniform group, she denies how far feminism has come and the obvious diversity of the many individuals who are lumped together in this stereotype (Edgar, 10/8/95, *The Age*: 13).

For the above commentators, Garner’s critique of the Ormond women cannot be allowed to stand uncontested.

The limitations of the generationalist paradigm were further exposed in commentary following the publication of Trioli and Bail’s books. In October 1996, Rosemary Neill reviewed the books in ‘Dis-United We Stand’ and unpacked the alleged generation gap (Neill, 9/10/96, *The Australian*: 24). Neill argues against simplistic understandings of difference through generational metaphors:

As someone who (at 34) straddles the generational divide, the feminist generation gap strikes me as part fact, part fabrication and part marketing opportunity ... intergenerational friction seems rather academic when we consider feminism’s failure to expand its constituency beyond white, middle class feminism (Neill, 9/10/96, *The Australian*: 24).

Situting herself ‘between the waves’, Neill complicates generationalism, while also taking the opportunity to insert a counter-discourse regarding feminism’s inadequate response to difference, inadequacies reinscribed in this event. While not necessarily high-profile feminists, the role of sympathetic journalistic commentators such as Porzsolt, Neill, Sinclair, Elliott and Horin in circulating alternative understandings of feminism during the event should not be under-estimated. As the idea of a singular, ‘authentic’ feminist appropriately fades, the publication of news commentary operating broadly within a feminist discursive framework becomes even more important.  

Furthermore, these defences challenge the critical doxa that news discourse only allows space for negative representations of the feminist politicisation of ‘private’ behaviours.

In the past few decades, media culture and feminism have become mutually constitutive, with media being central in the construction of feminism’s public identity (see Van Zoonen: 1992). In her reconceptualisation of *TFS* event, Ann Curthoys suggests that ‘feminist spokeswomen are becoming ever more visible’ in media culture (Curthoys, 1997: 198, see also Bulbeck, 1997: 145). As this section has shown, feminists were not only objects in this media event but subjects. The self-representations by feminist opinion-piece writers, or feminist ‘experts’ cited in print media articles relating to *TFS*, often worked to undermine problematic representations of a singular,  

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11 That said, self-identified feminists commentators like Beatrice Faust also challenged media over-reliance on maternal metaphors through rejecting this ‘beatup about mothers and daughters’, instead recommending a return to the heavily utilised second-wave trope of sisterhood (Faust, 12-13/8/96, *The Australian*: 26). The problems of such a strategy, returning to an unproblematic notion of ‘sisterhood’, have been recently outlined by Henry, 2004: 182.
generationally-located, feminist. These articles represent a form of ‘countercurrent’, as feminists attempts to redirect the energies of the event away from generational models of conflict. Margaret Henderson’s recent work on Australian print media’s remembrance of feminism in the 1970s and 1980s similarly found that the telling of the feminist past in the press was far from monologic:

The articles are not purely a hegemonic version of feminism, but rather, the articles are dialogic in nature. That is, a significant proportion of the texts rely on direct feminist input (whether of the journalist, the interviewee, or the ‘expert’) for their narratives. The result of this dialogue is not always predictable or consistent ... (Henderson, 2002b: 2).

Rather than assuming that media representation is something ‘done’ to passive feminists who are either positively or negatively ‘reflected’ in media, Henderson recognises feminist agency and interactivity with print media – a point to which I have been attentive throughout. As Bernadette Barker-Plummer similarly argues, the media-feminism relationship is best seen as dialogical; that is, ‘as an interactive, reflexive relationship that takes place over time’ (Barker-Plummer, 1995: 310, see also Lumby: 1997a). She argues for a conceptual shift from ‘coverage’, wherein the news representation of feminism is compared to an ideal reality, to one where ‘two sets of actors are seen to be working within constraints to create and recreate different constructions of reality’ (Barker-Plummer, 1995: 310). This is indicative of a recent change in media source analysis, where ‘source strategies and political contingencies are found where once social dominance alone was assumed sufficient to guarantee successful news entry’ (Cottle, 2003: 14). Furthermore, the prevalence of feminist opinion piece writers also necessitates a more complex understanding of feminists as producers of news. In refiguring the event as a dialogical process between feminists, other journalistic sources, and media professionals, the limitations of previous ways of analysing media coverage of feminism (including during this event) are eschewed. The above examples, in emphasising how generationalism was problematised within newspapers, have underscored the possibilities of such a relationship.

This is not to imply that feminists at either end of this generational divide were granted the same amount of news-space (or received the same cultural authority) as the celebrities considered in the previous chapter or that they were able to set the news agenda; re-viewing the feminism-media relationship ‘as two way does not preclude an imbalanced interaction’ nor deny that one party can possess more power than the other (Barker-Plummer, 1998: 310). What it does suggest, however, is that a pronounced feminist presence can be found in the event and that such speakers were at times highly critical of the practices of the news media to which they were contributing and its overzealous use of generational tropes. The above section on feminist news sources and commentators has highlighted instances where the dominant generational narrative
was disrupted, and also emphasises that their ability to speak in the first instance was contingent upon this generational positioning. In contrast, the remainder of this chapter is devoted to attempts to fix the feminism of the younger generation in *Generation F* and *DIY Feminism* and media engagement with them, including in Summers’ lengthy response to the books in the *Good Weekend*. The publication of *DIY Feminism* and *Generation F* ensured that the remainder of the media event would be profoundly circumscribed by these insistent generational tropes and familial metaphors.

**The ‘Daughter’s Reply’: Publishing the ‘Young Feminist’**

Earlier in this chapter I made it clear that I am not concerned with locating or analysing an empirical ‘young feminist’ in contemporary Australia. However, my focus in the remaining sections are the self-representational practices of those marketed as part of the ‘hotly contested’ (Harris: 2001) next generation of feminists, and how they were popularised in the context of the event. In *Chapter Four* I analysed three celebrity feminists, none of whom represented the generation of which they primarily spoke; this role was subsequently fulfilled by two young journalists. The media attention to Kathy Bail’s *DIY Feminism* and Virginia Trioli’s *Generation F* reignited the debate, but in terms of volume or intensity, did not compare to that devoted to *TFS* the previous year. The media event, however, was noticeably perpetuated by these publications.

These two texts have been positioned as direct interventions into the ongoing media struggle over the meanings of feminism precipitated by Garner’s text; in spite of their divergences, they are seen to be the ‘daughter’s reply’ to *TFS* (Bird, 1996: 50). The way these books are ‘marketed and received as representations of an entire generation’ (Siegel, 1997a: 65) requires troubling, particularly given the authors’ abundant cultural and educational capital. As Sarah Maddison argues, they each used their ‘publishing connections to launch a more extensive response to Summers and Garner’ (Maddison, 2002: 16). Furthermore, as white middle-class journalists, these women had media access not permitted others. In this sense, they were hardly the representative young women that they were touted to be. Like celebrity feminism, the grounds on which popular feminism can be validly critiqued is the racial and class privilege of writers. It is undeniable that all the participants in *TFS* media event possessed similar degrees of

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12 In any case, critics such as Anita Harris (2004, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c) and Sarah Maddison (2002) have recently undertaken studies which focus on the praxis of young feminists in Australia.

13 See also their published speeches to the Sydney Institute, 22 October (Bail: 1997) and 10 December (Trioli: 1997). Trioli was also active following the publication of *Bodyjamming*, including with a frontpage of *The Age* (Trioli, ‘New book to rekindle college row’, 24/10/97: 1).
capital, conferred upon them by virtue of race, class, sexuality, and education. The published responses from so-called young feminists were no exception. As Chilla Bulbeck observes, such privilege crosses the problematic generational divide: ‘Class and ethnicity are flattened away and the media voices in the generation debate – younger and older – are those of middle-class articulate women’ (Bulbeck, 2001:3). While DIY Feminism, a multivocal text in contrast to Trioli’s, offered a diversity of perspectives, the DIY philosophy assumes a normative subject who mirrors its editor and her privilege. Generation F constructs a liberal feminism, reliant upon a normative white subject, which necessarily excludes Others. These limitations should always temper any claims about the possibilities of ‘popular’ feminism and the type of discourses they put into circulation.

Like TFS before them, Generation F (1996) and DIY Feminism (1996) made the list of top ten Australian non-fiction best-sellers in October 1996 (Bulbeck, 1997: 3). They have both been placed, along with Garner’s and Mead’s texts, on university courses relating to contemporary feminism or its history. These books, however, have not been subject to much close textual analysis. Generally, when they have been mentioned, it has been in passing reference in discussions about TFS or as signifying the limits of ‘popular feminism’ or as Australian ‘third-wave’ texts (see Bulbeck: 1999, Maddison: 2002). Therefore, it has been their politics over their poetics that have been the critical focus.

Bail and Trioli successfully inserted themselves into TFS media event without fundamentally altering its terms. However, it is important not to dismiss their contributions as the mere fulfilment of media desire for young feminist voices to sustain the event. As Maddison argues, in assuming that generationalism is only apportioned by others (the elder cultural elite), critics such as Mark Davis deny the agency exercised by young feminists, such as Bail and Trioli, in strategically positioning themselves along the axis of age (Maddison, 2002: 11): ‘Contemporary young feminists have been just as active as older feminists in constructing these debates within feminism along the axis of age’ (Maddison, 2002: 11). Limited though this axis is, Bail and Trioli’s (self)positioning along it secured their media presence and viability as young ‘celebrity feminists’.

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14 Their articulations were validated in ways not afforded to authors of other collections, such as Else-Mitchell and Flutter’s Talking Up, which was more critical of the stifling generational logic and of the event itself.
15 Like TFS, DIY Feminism and Generation F were seen as feminist publishing watermarks in Australia in Oxford Companion to Australian Feminism (Caine et al., 1998: 543-544).
16 In ‘Legends of the Fall’, Henderson’s analysis points to the necessity of analysing such ‘popular’ texts in terms of both politics and poetics (2002c).
Like the space opened for reader-writers by Summers in the Good Weekend, these books were made possible – and publishable – by the generational narrative in which they were located. In this sense, these two writers inserted themselves into a ‘pre-existing publishing space’ (Gilmore, 2001: 216). As argued in Chapters One and Two, ‘popular’ feminist writing is a viable commodity and the event itself fulfils a significant promotional function. Some stories of feminism are definitely more saleable than others, and TFS event guaranteed a readership for these two very different publications; their profile would have been much slimmer had these books not been positioned as part of a broader dialogue between (artificially fixed) generations. Summers’ and Garner’s attempts to discredit young feminists provided these two privileged young women with the space in which to speak, further demonstrating the power of celebrity feminists in helping to circumscribe the public discourse on feminism. The place from which Trioli and Bail spoke was therefore a generational one, a location that saw them granted a form of ‘daughterly authority’ (Henry, 2003: 211) within the event. Bail and Trioli’s literary contributions to the event are seen as acts of daughterly individuation, the need for which TFS had brought into sharp relief.

In media responses, the two books were commonly represented as discursive forms of ‘matricide’ emergent from what Adrienne Rich (1977) calls ‘matrophobia’, fear of becoming like one’s mother (see Henry, 2003: 10). In this sense, each work possesses a polemical function, with Bail and Trioli working to refute the argument of, and distance themselves from, their interlocutor/s (see Pearce, 2003: 42). Here, as throughout the event, Garner-Summers become dually constituted, representing disaffected, maternal second-wave feminists. That said, Generation F and DIY Feminism are ideologically and structurally very different textual products. Generation F seeks to justify young women’s use of second-wave reforms and identify current forms of activism among young feminists. Conversely, DIY – an edited collection of essays – assumes a postfeminist climate where savvy young women do not need to rely upon such measures. However, as suggested, in media discourse the divergent ideological stances of these writers are – much like Garner, Summers and the homogenised ‘second-wave’ – seen as synonymous. Despite their disparities, Jane Long observes: ‘While the books are quite different in many respects, both are based on a similar premise: that the castigation of young women in the press and in books is unwarranted’ (Long, 2001: 3).

This tendency to conflate their contributions is also evident in feminist academic assessments of these books. For example, Marilyn Lake’s history of Australian feminism, Getting Equal, concludes with a discussion of Bail’s book which homogenises the younger generation: ‘There is a defensive tone in Bail’s writing that
can’t help but draw attention to her generation’s ambivalence towards organised feminism. They are the daughters who must make it on their own’ (Lake, 1999: 282). Here, Bail becomes a synecdoche for all young feminists, a rhetorical move which characterises TFS media event. In addition, Pauline Johnson argues that a younger generation of Australian feminists have recently identified an ‘intolerable prescriptivism’ in modern Australian feminism (Johnson, 1998: 213). She authoritatively asserts that the ‘new’ generation of Australian feminists ‘remain deeply alienated from what they see as the essentially authoritarian temper of Australian feminism’ (Johnson, 1998: 213): ‘The ‘do it yourself’ generation of feminists insists on putting the individual woman and her own, self-described rights and needs in charge of the ‘toolbox’ of feminist perspectives bequeathed to them’ (Johnson, 1998: 207). Lake and Johnson also fail to conceive of these ‘popular’ feminist writings as representations (Bailey, 1997: 21); instead, they are imbued with a mimetic capacity to enable the writers of feminist history to use them for particular purposes.

Media attention to Bail and Trioli’s texts largely linked the two texts as representative of young women’s feminism, which had come under such scrutiny in the preceding year. In contrast to Mark Davis’ argument regarding Australian media’s apparent contempt for, or even symbolic erasure of, the ‘younger generation’ (Davis: 1997), press coverage of the books was generally positive. These books are also overwhelmingly seen as retorts to Summers, Garner and other media commentators, a tendency encapsulated in the following comment: ‘Two recent books allow younger women to put their own cases’ (Wark, The Australian, 25/9/96: 32). Reviews published at this time also regarded these texts as part of the ongoing debate about how young women practiced feminism. In the objectivist language of news discourse, they were ‘setting the record straight’; both explicitly suggested that their texts were a reaction against the representations of the ‘young feminist’ circulating in the mid-nineties.

In ‘Feminism…do it yourself’, Louise Martin suggests that DIY Feminism is a ‘scrapbook of young feminists’ ideas in which they articulate their different experiences and priorities, partly in relation to their feminist mothers’ (Martin, 8-9/10/96, The Age, ‘Metro’: 1). For Martin, DIY Feminism is seen to offer ‘third wave feminist reflections’ from women who are unified through their narratives of ‘how they developed their own brand of feminism’ (Martin, 8-9/10/96, The Age, ‘Metro’: 1). One commentator argued that, as Trioli’s argument developed, ‘the more convincing Generation F becomes as a record of the state and initiatives of contemporary feminism’ (Fraser, 7/9/96, The Age, ‘Extra’: 9). For Mackenzie Wark, these two books represent the possibilities of ‘popular feminism’: ‘These books represent a fresh perspective on what an intelligent, popular way of speaking about the issues concerning
women might be like’ (Wark, *The Australian*, 25/9/96: 32). The contributions of Bail and Trioli also focus the debate more firmly on the territory of what constitutes contemporary feminist practice. In addition to these reviews, the media profiles of the two authors were further heightened by their characterisation in Summer’s ‘DIY Generation’. Prior to the textual analysis of each book, the next section reads Summers’ article as a further attempt to delimit the meanings of young women’s feminism (a process she began with the publication of ‘Shockwaves’).

**Constructing the ‘DIY Generation’ (September 16 1996, Good Weekend)**

Although some reviewers (Lumby, 4/10/96, SMH, ‘Spectrum’: 12, Neill, 9/10/96, *The Australian*: 24) emphasised the limitations of the conflation of Bail and Trioli’s texts, Anne Summers sought to position them as the unified articulation of younger women’s feminism. In September 1996, the *Good Weekend* magazine (Summers, 21/9/96, *Good Weekend*: 25-31) extended its engagement with questions of what constituted feminism in Australia. As the previous two chapters have shown, Summers’ ‘celebrity feminism’ was central to the media event’s maintenance. The publication of these two texts provided the opportunity for Summers to (re)assess her earlier pronouncements about the state of Australian feminism. In ‘DIY Generation’, Virginia Trioli’s *Generation F* and Cathy Bail’s *DIY Feminism* were cast as responses from the ‘young feminists’, whom Summers had chastised for their silence in ‘Shockwaves’. In this article, she continues her efforts to delimit the type of feminist stories circulating in the print media. Like ‘Shockwaves at the Revolution’, this article has not yet been subject to the type of detailed rhetorical analysis offered here nor analysed for its role in sustaining the event.17

The title of the article invokes both texts, with a neologism that combines the two titles: ‘DIY Generation’. This is an important rhetorical gesture indicative of the conflation of the (at times quite disparate) texts. The article consists of interviews with the two exemplary ‘young feminists’, extracts from both their texts, and Summers’ own maternal response to their attempts, as she suggests, to ‘prove’ the existence of feminism amongst young women in Australia. This piece functions as an authorial (and promotional) profile of Bail and Trioli, a review (accompanied by extracts), and a polemical feature article from one of the event’s key celebrities. This process of constructing Bail and Trioli as a unified representation of an entire generation begins with the *Good Weekend’s* cover.

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17 Goldsworthy: 1996 and Ling Kong: 1998 both briefly engage with the article, but do not produce detailed readings.
Reading the Cover

The cover of *The Good Weekend* in which ‘DIY Generation’ appears is an important text to read semiotically, particularly as it redirects the audience from the Ormond women as representative young feminists to Bail and Trioli. As Wahneema Lubiano argues: ‘Cover stories cover or mask what they make invisible with an alternative presence, a presence that redirects our attention’ (Lubiano, 1993: 324). It consists of a photo of the two young authors, Kathy Bail and Virginia Trioli. Apart from the signifiers surrounding the image, such as the written text, the photograph’s framing and layout, this photograph could be made to mean at the connotative level by readers through their intertextual knowledge of the heightened generational debate of the preceding year (see Barthes, 1977: 20). In keeping with this view of the interdependence of image and language, this photograph reinforces the narrative of Summers’ following article, a means through which to reify – in providing its visual exemplification – the unity of a young feminist generation. This photograph represents the initial site wherein the conflation of the two women’s texts, characterising the entire article, can be identified.

The frontal shot of their faces makes them appear literally joined, as their faces touch the bodily boundaries between them visually blur. This image works to visually reinforce Summers’ assumptions about the interchangability of their written expressions which is sustained throughout the article.\(^\text{18}\) As they look straight out at the reader, unafraid to return the gaze, they seem quite powerful. However, the obvious use of a soft-focus lens can also be seen as indicative of the ultimately non-threatening ‘DIY feminism’ attributed to them both in the article. Moreover, the passive nature of this photo (i.e., the head shot precludes any suggestion of activity) is also consistent with the political passivity, particularly in regard to political activism, attributed to this ‘generation’ in both ‘Shockwaves’ and in this article. Kristyn Gorton’s comments, made in relation to a similar photograph on the cover of *Time*’s infamous ‘Is Feminism Dead?’ edition (June 1998), seem appropriate here:

> Whether the cover’s designer intends to comment on the lack of authority these women have by cutting off their bodies and leaving their heads ..., the cover reveals the media’s continuing role in reducing a complex movement like feminism into a simplistic array of names and faces (Gorton, 2003: 2).

The cover of ‘DIY Generation’ holds much of the same symbolic impact, with Bail and Trioli signifying the united face of young Australian feminism. As Barthes notes, in press photography pose plays an important part in print media’s connotative processes, a point substantiated by this cover (Barthes, 1977: 22).

\(^{18}\) Likewise, in another photo set into the body of the article, their facial expressions – serious, intense, confrontational – are practically identical.
The contents page describes the subject matter of the article: ‘Young feminists are doing it for themselves – according to the sassy new books’. Therefore, in another rhetorical slippage, the individualistic discourse of Bail’s *DIY Feminism* comes be seen as representative of this ‘new’ form of feminism (a strategy common in other reviews). A text box inset labelled ‘The First Stone Revisited’ seeks to provide readers with the necessary information to intertextually read both her article and the extracts of the two texts provided. Summers reads the two texts together as a ‘confronting assertion of generational licence’ (Summers, 1996: 26), consistently mobilising the trope of generation to temporally situate the articulations of these ‘DIY generation’ authors against the previous generation of feminists. In her efforts to place these two books as direct responses to herself, Summers constructs these political daughters – despite their linguistic activism – as ‘passive respondents to these maternal machinations’, a gesture identified by Walters in her study on mothers and daughters in popular culture (Walters, 1992: 161). A photograph of Garner accompanies the article, with the caption: ‘No stone unturned: Bail and Trioli take on the issues raised in Helen Garner’s book’ (Summers, 1996: 29). Critics writing about this moment later also situated these texts as direct responses, not to Garner as might be expected, but to Summers (see Brabazon, 2001: 6).

The text box accompanying the front-page photograph, situated on its left hand side, is also important. This text box suggests many things about the tenor of the article and its underpinning assumptions. In Barthes’ terms, such text works to ‘anchor’ the photograph’s meaning: ‘the text constitutes a parasitic message designed to connote the images, to “quicken it” with one or more second order signifieds’ (Barthes, 1977: 204). The accompanying text reads: ‘WRITING ABOUT THEIR GENERATION, GIRLS OF THE FEMME GEN STRIKE BACK’. Of particular note are the font size and colour of the word ‘Generation’; it appears in red print and is twice the size of the rest of the text, thus locating the subsequent article firmly within the Oedipal metaphors which came to prominence following the entrance of *TFS* into the mediasphere. The reference to Bail and Trioli as ‘girls’ is a significant rhetorical gesture used throughout the article by Summers as she seeks to secure her own discursive location as a ‘second-waver’.

Several times in the article Summers refers to Trioli and Bail through the epithet ‘girls’. While such appellation may not necessarily be construed as patronising, although it certainly can be, it serves as a rhetorical device through which Summers can generationally distinguish herself from young feminists about whom she writes.

The notion of ‘striking back’ implies an Other against whom the strike is launched, and is therefore the initial strategy for establishing a generational battle which the article claims to catalogue, and from which these two distinct textual
products emerge. Summers perpetuates the militaristic metaphors featured so prominently in both self-representations and representations of Garner and *TFS*. The notion that these texts represent an entire generation of feminists, or indeed women, is implicit in the suggestion that Bail and Trioli write about ‘their generation’. Furthermore, the deployment of the signifier ‘femme’ too is important, signalling the self-consciousness apparently exhibited by this generation in relation to the performative nature of femininity. This generation is characterised, for Summers, by an attitude about the performance of ‘femininity’ which conflicts with the second-wave notion of artificial femininity masking an authentic, womanly self (see Tseelon: 1998).

Summers elevates her own role in these textual ‘responses’, suggesting that it was her ‘Shockwaves at the Revolution’ that ‘contributed to the writing of two important new books’ (Summers, 1996: 26). As the article’s by-line remarks: ‘90s feminists are thriving despite the scepticism of their predecessors. And they’re going into print to prove it.’ Initially, then, the metaphorical ‘daughters’ appear dutiful:

What is so welcome about these two books is that the rebuttal of Garner, which was constructed with such scorn and anger and mostly in private last year, is now firmly in the public domain and accessible to anyone who wants to revisit the debate (Summers, 1996: 29).

It is important here also that it is Summers, as a ‘mother’ of Australian feminism, who maps her own interpretive framework onto the ‘DIY generation’. She therefore both sanctions and constructs the discourse of the next generation. In addition, Summers’ assertions about ‘young feminism/feminists’ are textually-mediated in a way they were not in ‘Shockwaves at the Revolution’. In this case, Summers discursively constructs this ‘DIY generation’ from the recently produced texts which challenge her earlier allegations of silence. However, she does not foreground these constructions of feminism as textual representations, assuming instead that they unproblematically refer to an extra-textual practicing of feminist identities in contemporary Australia. She does not concede that other representations may conflict with those offered by Bail and Trioli, or indeed that her own reading of these texts and their authors is governed by her own specific (ideological) assumptions and discursive positioning as a ‘second-waver’. Further, nowhere in the article does Summers interrogate or address the privileging of these particular women, and the narratives they offer about the state of contemporary Australian feminism. Indeed, as I have suggested, the first page of the article is exemplary in this regard – a large photograph of Bail and Trioli’s faces is accompanied by the small caption: ‘Telling it like it is’. Trioli and Bail are thereby attributed with articulating the ‘truth’ of feminism among young women which their texts are seen, not to actively construct, but to reflect. Summers must elide the substantial differences between the two texts, and the kind of feminist discourse they
work to construct, in order to ultimately position this (unified) generation against her own, equally homogenised, generation. In this sense, Trioli and Bail stand in for the media event’s two absent protagonists: the women involved in the Ormond case.

*Replacement Feminists?*

In ‘Missing Bodies: Young Women and the Media,’ Jenna Mead critically engages with the ‘discursive regimes’ which produced the Ormond women as particular subjects – and bodies: ‘it was the bodies of two young women – who came to stand for a generation of young feminists – which moved in and out of the focus on newspaper reports’ (Mead, 1997b: 245). The women, in their persistent refusal to identify themselves, were frustratingly elusive (Mead, 1997b: 245). Some critics expressed outrage at the young women’s ability to remain anonymous while the man at the centre of the allegations was identified within media (see McGuinness, *SMH*, 1/8/95: 40).

Like Mead, Foong Ling Kong argues that Bail and Trioli became the young feminists over whom there had been so much debate following the publication of Garner’s text; the media is finally provided with its sought after young feminist bodies. In relation to ‘DIY Generation’, Ling Kong argues that ‘on the cover of a weekend supplement we find two women who have written about what these “Ormond women” stand for and what the case might mean for “young feminists”’ (Ling Kong, 1997: 68). However, for Ling Kong, this substitution forecloses any meaningful response to Bail and Trioli’s texts as forms of popular feminist discourse.

At the start of ‘DIY Generation’, Summers devotes much space to the missing Ormond bodies. Media preoccupation with these bodies is evidenced through the article’s initial paragraph – a quotation from Trioli’s account of one of the Ormond women performing in a band. Bail too textually provides this body, by also narrating her own furtive spectatorship of the young woman’s musical performance. Both recount their guilty, voyeuristic pleasure in subjecting this woman to a kind of ethnographic gaze. Trioli observes:

‘Why was I there? I did feel like a spy. I knew the woman did not want to speak to me but I also knew that this was the only portrait I was going to get, and the only evidence of life after Ormond that I would possibly find’ (cited in Summers, 1996: 25).

Bail, however, uses this vision to exemplify the DIY ontological model promoted in her text also cited by Summers: ‘“She’s no victim... DIY from top to toe, she seems more likely to want her feminism in a fun and feisty package”’ (cited in Summers, 1996: 26). Both these renderings, though Bail’s more so, resemble Garner’s own reading of a

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19 Interestingly though, one of them – as Garner notes – was audible through the women’s magazine *Vogue* in 1993 shortly after the incidents at Ormond.
photograph, where a corporeally signified power is used to cast doubt on Elizabeth Rosen’s claim to the subject position of ‘victim’. Therefore, while her actions were seen and criticised as those of a ‘victim’, she was a submissive, powerless, passive feminine subject, and readings of her body were used to suggest disingenuousness on her part. That is, by the virtue of her embodied power, she was thought unable to legitimately claim the mantel of ‘victim’. In ‘anthropologising their subjects’, Davis argues that Bail and Trioli reinscribe Garner’s unethical representational strategies (Davis, 1999: 27).

The considerable attention that Summers devotes to the absent young woman, and to Trioli and Bail’s attempts to seek her out in the introduction to ‘DIY Generation’, suggest that the unavailability of this body remained a vexed issue in public discourse. Jenna Mead observes that Trioli’s desire to pin down this elusive body is consistent with mass-mediated discourses of sexed crime, where ‘provocative clothing’, a woman’s presence in a bar, her ‘voluptuousness ... all contribute to a narrative in which, whatever happened, it was the fault of the young woman’s body’ (Mead, 1997b: 251-252). In the context of Trioli’s proclamation that she wanted to ‘redraw the caricature of the young feminist’, Mead asks ‘why is this description here at all?’ (Mead, 1997b: 252). The same rhetorical question can be asked of Summers’ article: Why commence with the provision of this body, seen throughout as recalcitrant for its reclusivity? In the following quotation, Summers constructs the women as ‘objects of curiosity’, implying an abnormality which renders them curious:

Throughout the media storm, two voices were glaringly absent. The two young women whose story it really was chose not to speak to Helen Garner and resisted all subsequent overtures to give their account of why they did what they did. Yet they have remained objects of curiosity (Summers, 1996: 26).

In Chapter Three, I emphasised that the act of refusing to tell one’s story is a profound political act of agency, particularly in relation to the ‘telling of sexual stories’ (Plummer: 1995). Similarly, Mead argues that the young women’s refusal to appear in print media was a powerful device for exposing the fissures in the dominant discourses of sexed crime. Print media representations of sexed crime require a body, a body that was withheld in the Ormond case (Mead, 1997b: 245). The cover of September 1996 the Good Weekend featured two identifiable (feminist) bodies, and Summers’ strategy of commencing her article with Trioli and Bail’s own attempts to locate these bodies emphasises their strategic substitution.

‘Appearing’ Feminist: Second-Wave (depth) versus Third-Wave (surface)
In articulating the agenda of ‘young feminists’, Summers participates in a homogenising gesture, stabilising both her generation and the subsequent one. Generations, in this article, as in many feminist histories, are seen as spaces with fixed
temporal limits, not as discursive constructs. It is on the readable body that Summers locates the differences in the ideologies of these two, apparently distinct, feminist generations. According to Summers’ reading of the next generation, the territory for the exercise of (feminist) agency becomes appearance, and part of feminism’s agenda becomes the ‘entitlement to dress to please oneself’ (Summers, 1996: 30). However, dressing for oneself is constructed as illegitimate, given that the gaze of the (male) Other will always appropriate these signifiers. For Summers, this bodily autonomy and construction of a particular appearance are incompatible with a phallic signifying economy: ‘If there is a single issue on which the girls of Generation F seem to be in total agreement it is their right to wear whatever they like and not have to worry about sexual predators’ (Summers, 1996: 30). Bail and Trioli’s responses when such rights are violated are diametrically opposed, a point obscured by Summers in her desire for a homogenous younger generation.

As a mark of this youthful naiveté, Summers suggests that this amorphous ‘DIY generation’ are obsessed with clothes and appearance, a characterisation to which Bail’s book in particular readily lends itself. Furthermore, this focus on ‘style’ (Summers, 1996: 29), on surface, also lends itself to an interpretation of the ‘DIY generation’ as postmodern. As Foong Ling Kong argues: ‘Summers seems interested in what Gen-fers read, wear, do in their spare time and what music they listen to because these women do feminism so differently, so strangely’ (Ling Kong, 1997: 68). As in Garner’s speech to the Sydney Institute, Summers observes:

These young women want to dress sexily but they are outraged at any suggestion that such attire could make them vulnerable to sexual assault. They want their choice of clothing not to be important, not to be used as an excuse by men to maul or attack them (Summers, 1996: 30).

According to Summers, for these ‘young feminists’ at least, the female body as a sign has been denuded of meaning. Summers assumes that these ‘sexy’ bodies will be read in a phallocentric interpretive framework, one in which the (heterosexually) desirable body is as an available body.20 Likewise, Garner argues: ‘It’s an article of faith among some young feminists that a woman “has the right” to go about the world dressed any way she pleases’ (Garner, 9/8/95, SMH: 11). While Summers suggests that such assumptions are ‘quite right’, the comments immediately preceding such an assertion call it into question. Summers, in femocrat style, invokes the language of pragmatism: ‘Is it too pragmatic, too prudent (rather than prudish) to warn that not all men share these values. Does it boil down to pleasing oneself versus self-preservation?’ (Summers, 1996: 30). The similarities between this observation about young women’s lack of

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20 As previously remarked, Mead (1997b) and others have shown how such a notion is integral to the media discourse of sex crime.
prudence and Garner’s are obvious. Here, the stories of these two celebrity feminists intersect and are mutually reinforcing.

The pleasure of these young women in self-‘fashioning’ their identities, in Summers’ account, can lead to the annihilation of this self. Summers here effectively reduces the agency of young women, as she – like Garner – asks that they be held responsible for the effects of their bodies in the public sphere. Garner’s central truth-claims, which themselves became more extreme in her speech to the Sydney Institute, were thereby reiterated by one of the event’s central figures during the latter stages of the event, where opportunities for contestation were more limited than during the peak period of media attention. As Garner provocatively asserted in her didactic address to young women:

Know what you are doing. Know what the likely effect is. Decide if that is what you want. Sexy clothes are part of the wonderful game of life, but to dress to display your body, and then project all the sexuality of the situation onto men and then blame them for it just so you can continue to be innocent and put upon, is not at all responsible, and what is more it is a relinquishing of power (Garner, 9/8/95, SMH: 9).

Like Summers, she infantilises these young women, taking up a maternalistic position as she urges them to ‘get real, grow up, get conscious’ (Garner, 9/8/95, SMH: 9). As Carole Ferrier argues, ‘a key nexus of the supposed conflict between the baby-boomers and generation X is the policing of sexualities’; ‘libertarian feminists’ such as Garner (Ferrier, 2004:14) lament the policing upon which young women are believed to rely. Summers’ comments, along with Garner’s, further substantiate Ferrier’s point. Summers herself suggests that it is diverging positions on the relationship between physical appearance and sexual harassment which profoundly differentiate the two generations:

The generational divide on this issue could hardly be wider. There is a strong sense of entitlement to dress to please oneself. You could almost call it ‘frock feminism’. And what makes it so tantalising is that the other, equally fervent issue for Generation F is sexual harassment (Summers, 1996: 31).

The body for which Summers had been fervently searching is found, yet is subsequently symbolically erased through the assumption that her presence in the public sphere remains a problem for which she must be primarily held responsible. While earlier in this chapter I emphasised points where such a narrative was disrupted, Summers’ article represents its reinscription.

In conclusion, she invokes a nostalgia for second-wave activist performances that also assumes young women’s lack of interest in formal politics. Anita Harris argues that ‘young people themselves are under more scrutiny than ever before for apparently not articulating these kinds of recognisable political narratives’ (Harris, 2004: 134). This notion of incommensurability between earlier and current feminist articulations is
central to the generational model of feminist conflict. This generation, according to Summers, wants ‘the right to forge the kind of feminism that suits them, which may or may not be what their mothers had in mind. Or can even understand’ (Summers, 1996: 29). In the article, Kathy Bail outlines the fundamental individualist ethos underpinning DIY, which seeks to ‘emphasise individual efforts, which is what feminism today is about’ (Summers, 1996: 26). Thus, one of the primary devices for defining the ‘DIY generation’ against the ‘second-wave’ is through emphasising the individualism of the former as a rejection of the collectivism of the latter. In this way, Summers silences Trioli, whose text seeks to prove the existence of young feminist activists and whose concept of feminism in many ways contradicts Bail’s explicit disassociation from feminism. In the attempt to conflate the two texts characteristic of the entire article, she constructs the ‘DIY generation’ as unified and stable while contradictory stressing its constitutive dis-unity. In the remainder of this chapter, the conflation of these two texts by Summers and other feminist critics is profoundly destabilised by textual analysis of each book.

**Seeking Young Feminists: Virginia Trioli’s Generation F**

Virginia Trioli’s 1995 article mentioned earlier, ‘The Second Stone’ (29/3/95, The Age: 13), appears to be the prototype for her later book, *Generation F: Sex, Power and the Young Feminist*. As a bestselling work of feminist non-fiction, Trioli’s contestation of Garner’s text and her conservative supporters should not be dismissed as a form of politically dubious ‘popular feminism’. On the contrary, its author’s affective investment in (a certain type of) feminism is evident throughout. Not surprisingly, the characterisation of the young feminist of Trioli’s text is defined against the Other of second-wave feminism. Her introduction suggests that the rhetorical deployment of a generational divide is unsustainable or, as she writes, ‘shallow’ (Trioli, 1996: 9). She alludes to the media’s role in the manufacture of this alleged generational rupture: ‘the knowing, mature, libertarian feminists on the one side; the cringing, punishing, young things on the other. It makes for good copy’ (Trioli, 1996: 9). Despite Trioli’s acknowledgement of the limitations of such a paradigm, her book nonetheless remains constrained by the generationalism it rhetorically disavows. Her title ‘appeals to a myth of generational unity’ (Siegel, 1997b: 59), and thereby assumes that which she claims to contest.

Trioli’s inability to move beyond the generational tropes and metaphors she critiques is most explicitly demonstrated by the title of her final chapter: ‘The Jealous Mother’. This is unsurprising, for as Jane Long observes, ‘once the generational cleavage is invoked, it is a difficult discourse to step outside in order to counter its easy
assumptions’ (Long, 2001: 3). This irreconcilable tension between defending her generation and calling into question the very concept of feminist generations is at the centre of Generation F (d’Arcens, 1998: 110). Trioli’s deployment of a generational frame is itself a strategic gesture necessitated by the media event, which her book both sustains and problematises. The book intervenes in the ‘why did they go to the cops’ debate, in particular she challenges the central aspect of Garner’s thesis: that legal remedies for sexual harassment have made life more complicated for women and men (Trioli, 1996: 12). In this sense, like some of the reader-writers in the previous chapter, she attempts to force the media event back into issues relating to sexual harassment. Her book also works as a form of critical meta-commentary on the event as she devotes an entire chapter to a critique of media responses and throughout draws upon the texts of the media event to inform her own analysis.

As a sign of the way the book was marketed, its backcover blurb attempts to position Trioli’s text as ‘redrawing’ what has become the caricature of the ‘new feminist’.21 In response to Garner and Summers, Trioli aims to locate the ‘highly practical breed of feminism that is the practice of young women’s lives’ (Trioli, 1996: 11). For Trioli, the feminism of these women has been written out of dominant narratives about feminist inaction. Like many of the letters to the editor examined in the previous chapter, the tone of the book is defensive, particularly as she mounts a justification of the Ormond women and their course of action. She suggests:

Placed in the context of the debate stirred up by Helen Garner’s The First Stone, this book argues in defence of a generation of women who are now prepared to speak out about the culture of harassment and assault that still persists in many areas of Australian life (Trioli, 1996: 11).

Here, the experiences of the Ormond women come to represent those of an entire generation of women. Like Bail’s, Trioli’s text is not only marketed as a direct intervention into the debate engendered by Garner’s text, but is explicitly situated as an attempt to extend the debate in productive directions.

As a contribution to the event, the book’s title also represents a rhetorical play on Douglas Copeland’s novel Generation X, which identifies – or rather discursively constitutes – a phenomenon that has taken on mythical proportions.22 The book’s subtitle links it to Garner’s; TFS is subtitled ‘Some questions about sex and power’ while Trioli’s text is subtitled ‘Sex, Power and The Young Feminist’. Here, the sub-title works to lead the reader towards a specific set of intertexts (MacLachlan and Reid,

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22 Helene Shugart analyses the discursive continuities between ‘generation x’ and ‘third-wave’ feminism: ‘Significant overlap exists between the rhetorical constructions of the women of generation X and third wave feminists, respectively, with regard to the following qualities: consciousness of gender/sexism; individualism, especially articulated through confrontation, and inconsistency’ (Shugart, 2001: 142).
1994: 101), including TFS and the media texts of the event. Furthermore, the text’s cover – a photograph of stones – is certainly not subtle in the way it intertextually situates the book in relation to Garner’s. Trioli’s title too signals an ironic allusion to Summers’ assumption that young women refuse to utter the ‘f’ word; for Trioli, feminism is not an utterable expletive, but a socially relevant body of ideas and practices whose adoption she fervently advocates. In the following quotation, Trioli explicitly situates her book in TFS media event, charging Garner with ‘misrepresentation’:

I felt strongly that Garner’s book had derailed and misrepresented an important debate. I want to revisit this debate, and the context of the Ormond college case itself, to tease out the important issues about sex, sexual harassment, power (all kinds) and the law that the bloodrush of argument has obscured (Trioli, 1996: 16).

She seeks to identify, and subsequently counteract, Garner’s textual and ideological deficiencies. Like many critics of the case, for Trioli the mainstream media has inevitably simplified the issues, a simplification she purports to rectify through Generation F. However, Trioli – like the reader-writers in the previous chapter – also aims to use the discursive space opened up by the event to expose the inequities which young women in Australia continue to face.

Generation F is explicitly non-fictional in a way that TFS is not. Trioli’s journalistic sources are an odd mixture of friends, acquaintances, other journalists and those deemed qualified to speak by virtue of their institutional position. For example, ‘corporate’ women who have ‘made it’ and whose experiences are therefore seen as valid: lawyers; femocrats; high profile second-wave feminists; journalists; counsellors. Her account is textually-mediated by the very texts of the media event to which she contributes, and is also constituted by a multitude of micro-narratives, either of incidents she has observed or those recounted by sources. Such personalised stories help form the basis of her argument against Garner, antifeminist commentators, and even against those women who fail to concede the validity of feminism as a way of being in the world. While predominantly informed by liberal feminism, Trioli’s contribution to the highly visible struggle over the meanings of feminism occurring at this time should not be under-estimated.

Along with identifying the valued forms of activism in which young women are involved, one of the central premises of Generation F is that young women should be supported should they chose to access the relevant legal avenues to contest sexual harassment; Trioli uses the Ormond case as the basis for a critique of the legal system, as she highlights in particular the engendering practices of legal discourse and its assumption of the ‘reasonable man’. As Trioli makes explicit, TFS media event demonstrates Nancy Fraser’s suggestion that the public vocabularies relating to sexual
harassment had not necessarily shifted with legislative change (Fraser, 1997: 116-117). After a discussion of Bettina Arndt’s (anti-feminist) media commentary, Trioli observes:

After twelve years of sexual harassment laws in this country, after countless reports – private or public, well-known or obscure – testifying to the rampant discrimination against women practised in workplaces for generations, you’d think we’d have all finally understood what is and what isn’t welcome behaviour. Apparently not (Trioli, 1996: 77).

Unlike Arndt and Garner, Trioli fails to conceive of women’s bodies as a problem to the public sphere. In this sense, her text represents an important feminist contribution to this media event. For Trioli, the State must continue to play a role in the elimination of discrimination against women.

Trioli begins her book by reading TFS autobiographically, a practice in which many of the reader-writers in the previous chapter engage. Through a personal anecdote regarding sexual harassment in the workplace, the writing subject thus locates herself in a position of epistemic privilege:

One evening at work, a male colleague I knew, but not well, came up to me to show me a piece of work for the paper. Clapping eyes on me, his body loosened, his face widened in a grin, and he moved quickly towards. It was one of those horrible moments, you realise with sinking heart, that you can do little to avoid. Even then, he greeted me with an enthusiasm I hadn’t expected. With a great how-ya-going he pulled me into a crushing embrace, jamming my body up against his (Trioli, 1996: 1-2).

While Trioli implies that deployment of legal remedies may not be relevant or appropriate in all cases, such as her own, her conviction that the Ormond women’s actions were justified drives her argument. In commencing her work with a personal anecdote, Trioli claims an authoritative position from which to speak, one which extends beyond that of her role as a so-called objective and detached journalistic chronicler. For Lynne Pearce, such ‘authenticating anecdotes’ are a common narratorial strategy in popular feminist writing (Pearce, 2003: 41).

Trioli carefully recounts the affect of this incident, and how it – unlike the Ormond case – was resolved at the individual, not the structural, level. Nonetheless, this vignette is not deployed to simply advocate resolution of harassment at the local level. Rhetorically it serves a much wider purpose; in ‘popular’ feminist writing, the author must ‘conscript the reader as her “ally” in her assault upon her “object of utterance”’ (Pearce, 2003: 42) and such personalised anecdotes can be seen as one in a network of rhetorical practices to help engender sympathy for Trioli’s challenge to Garner’s discursive construction of the ‘young feminist’. It is clear that this incident framed her own response to TFS: ‘This bizarre little incident took place in early in 1995, just as the novelist, Helen Garner, published her explosive book about sexual harassment, The First Stone’ (Trioli, 1996: 6). This ‘turn to the personal’ has been the
subject of much commentary in feminist and cultural theory (Miller: 1991), but has been largely neglected in commentary on ‘popular feminism’. Pearce, however, has recently argued that the use of stories or events in author’s lives as the basis for discursive practice has also become prominent in popular feminism and journalism (Pearce, 2003: 47). This so-called ‘sentimentalisation of culture’ (Pearce, 2003: 48) remains the subject of intense debate, and is commonly seen as an attack on the traditional journalistic ideals of objectivity and rationality. For feminists though, the use of a first person pronoun has always represented a means through which women’s experiences can be authorised and their voices empowered (see Pearce: 2003).

**Performing Generation F**

As a response to assertions of young women’s apathy towards both feminist politics and organised politics in general, Trioli is at pains to demonstrate that the opposite is true. Throughout *Generation F*, she emphasises that there are many different ways of being feminist and sites of feminist identification, particularly as she suggests that many women who do identify as feminist often have little in common (Trioli, 1996: 9). This point is particularly significant in light of theoretical complications regarding the constituency that feminism has claimed to represent (Spelman: 1988, Butler: 1990, Ang: 1995). As observed earlier, it is now commonly recognised that other modalities of difference intersect, compete, or exist in tension with sexual difference, and that the privileging of this one form of ontological difference is an act of exclusion constituting symbolic violence (see Ahmed: 1999). Therefore, Trioli’s comment that there is ‘no young feminist. There is no one movement’ (Trioli, 1996: 9) can be read as an acknowledgement that there no longer exists a stable, coherent universal feminist movement or subject position with women can chose to identify. Trioli strategically emphasises both the continuities and disjunctures between contemporary forms of feminist practice with those of the second-wave, a gesture which requires her to fix both.

For Trioli, feminism is still being practiced in Australia, but the notion of the unified, shared feminist identity is no longer viable: ‘There are young women in Australia who call themselves feminists but who have almost nothing in common – politically, ideologically – with each other’ (Trioli, 1996: 9). Thus, feminism for young women in Australia is characterised as post-identity politics (Siegel, 1997b: 54). Having said that, part of Trioli’s project is to locate ‘young feminists’, and identify the sites of their activism, in an effort to contradict the representations of passive, politically apathetic, young women offered during the event. Furthermore, though not entirely

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23 The importance of the feminist ‘I’ is also reinforced through media preoccupation with celebrity feminism.
advocating a return to a feminism based in collectivist practices, Trioli challenges the individualism constitutive of her peer’s DIY discourse. She identifies a broader tendency towards ‘rampant individualism’ which makes identification with feminism seem unnecessary (Trioli, 1996: 61). She argues that ‘the mainstream argument is to trust that individual power is enough. Young women are being encouraged to go it alone – and without ideology’ (Trioli, 1996: 69). For Trioli, young women may not need to be collective actors, but the ideological framework and commitment of feminism is yet required to counteract neo-individualism and its regressive implications for women.

In spite of her attempts to identify young feminists, Trioli also argues that feminism has been so pervasive in Australian culture that it no longer can (or needs to be) defined: ‘Contemporary feminism has become a philosophical and political ethos so accepted by a younger generation of Australian women that they don’t even bother to explain it’ (1996: 9). Such ‘rhetoric of naturalisation’ is a common technique in writings of young feminists (Siegel, 1997b: 49). Here, in conceptualising feminism as a ‘birthright’, active identification with it is deemed redundant (Henry, 2004: 40). Feminist critics have emphasised the saturation of feminism in the lives of young women:

Feminism in late modernity is not a marginalised discourse but has become a basic part of the context in which young women are making sense of their lives. It is part of the interpretative framework employed in the various ways they practise their own identities (Budgeon, 2001: 25).

The notion that feminism has become the preferred interpretive framework for Australian women simplifies the complexities of institutional and structural factors which often (still) exist in tension with such a pervasive ‘ethos’. That said, Trioli also emphasises that the rhetoric of feminist success, telling young women ‘that your gender should not matter anymore’, has resulted in a series of insidious myths about the lack of barriers to women’s participation in a masculine public sphere (Trioli, 1996: 61 and 67). In this sense, she attempts to explain why some young women chose not to identify with feminism. Furthermore, she argues that the women who do identify with feminism are often not visible to the previous generation due to their particular form of feminist activism: ‘Once you start looking the young feminists are everywhere. It is their strategies that initially make them so hard to find’ (Trioli, 1996: 110).

Throughout the text, Trioli draws upon reformist shifts as proof of feminism’s success which belies her indebtedness to a liberalist framework. Contemporary feminist activism, for Trioli, is manifest in the many sites to which liberal feminism has permitted women access:

But where are they, goes the cry – they infrequently march in the streets, they have no single figurehead and not much of a public profile. They are redrafting sexual assault legislation; educating Australia’s judiciary in gender awareness;
representing women in the courts; negotiating with the police to encourage them to take women’s charges of domestic assault more seriously; reforming the way hospitals provide health services to women; agitating for women’s working rights in a deregulated workplace (Trioli, 1996: 10).

Trioli’s identification of such women is strategic and central to her argument; young women do identify with feminism. Here, she responds to Summers’ assertion that young women not only fail to practice feminism, but recoil from it as an identity. As in the above quotation, the idea that the terrain of feminist activism and practice has shifted recurs throughout the event, with feminist success being measured in levels of women’s appropriation of institutional space. In this sense, Trioli marks the break between the two generations which she sets out to destabilise. As the above quotations suggest, the young feminist of Trioli’s sub-title is therefore a young liberal feminist, involved in policy formation, legislative amendment, and efforts to secure women’s equality within the context of the State. While Trioli’s introduction articulates her recognition of the heterogeneity of ‘young feminists’, her subsequent focus on sites of reformist struggle implies that liberal feminism is the most commonly practised form by young women. Most problematic is the exclusion of Indigenous women from Trioli’s narrative of contemporary feminist practices; the feminism catalogued in the above quotation does not explicitly address race and her feminism appears to be the province of privileged white women. One of the text’s other significant limitations is its reinscription of an insurmountable generational divide.

**Generation F’s Mothers and Daughters**

Like those of Garner and Summers, Trioli’s argument is housed in a mother/daughter framework. As one commentator observed, despite her desire to move beyond the limitations of generationalism: ‘as her argument unfolds, her account of contemporary feminist debate hardens into two poles: older, libertarian feminists at a loss to understand their feminist offspring, and younger women who are capable of separating sex from sexism’ (Lumby, 4/10/96, *SMH*, ‘Spectrum’: 12). Throughout the chapter ‘The Jealous Mother’ she defers to the authority of a number of feminist experts on the perceived generational disjuncture exposed by the event. For example, Trioli narrativises a personal incident which serves to reinscribe the polarisations established by Garner and maintained by some other commentators regarding the radically divergent libertarian second-waver and the puritanical younger feminist. She remarks that following a discussion on *TFS* with a fifty-something feminist: ‘One afternoon late last year the generation gap opened under my feet and I fell into it’ (Trioli, 1996: 137). Here, Trioli recounts her personal experience of the ‘gap’ that she has explicitly set out to destabilise:
My friend and I had come to a miserable halt. She said she could never, ever understand going to court over an alleged touch on the breast. I had said I could see exactly why a woman would, and should, be able to do so. Silence. The libertarian and the young feminist staring angrily at each other (Trioli, 1996: 138).

In the following quotation, both in terms of form and content, Trioli further mirrors Garner:

As feminists we had rarely disagreed with each other, but something was different this time. There was something about this cool-minded application of the law that chilled my friend. She spoke about all the stuff she had gone through when she was young – the usual harassment, all the groping and grabbing – but she dealt with it. And never would she have gone to the cops (Trioli, 1996: 138).

The issues raised by *TFS* surrounding personal responsibility and women’s agency are thought to have destabilised a unity upon which her feminist friendship was based. Through voices such as this, the incommensurability between generations upon which Garner and Summers had relied reappears in Trioli’s text. The woman she quotes concurs with Garner; in light of her libertarian suspicion of the State, she wouldn’t have dreamt of ‘going to the cops’ either. Due to the ‘failed experiment’ of sexual libertarianism that their ‘daughters’ have ‘rejected’ (Trioli, 1996: 140), older women such as this one are disconcerted with feminism and its contemporary representatives. Like Garner, Trioli’s source argues that she had to personally defend herself against harassment, an experience that sees her unable to comprehend the actions of the Ormond women.

While Trioli here offers a deconstruction of Oedipal metaphors and the tendency to view generational disagreements as an ineluctable part of the ‘daughter’s’ individuation, the chapter as a whole is trapped within the logic it critiques:

The disappointment has been played out in the archetypal language of a jealous mother: the mother resentful at her daughter’s rejection of her ways and jealous of a new culture that aims to protect, in law and in community awareness, control over her own body. The mother now at a stage in her life where she is prepared to forgive the blunderings of men, watching in awe of her daughter’s cool ability to distinguish between a nerdy pass and something more troubling. The mother, while overjoyed at her daughter’s success, unwilling to let her assume authority for fear that it extinguishes the mother’s own (Trioli, 1996: 141)

Here, as in *TFS*, the idea of second-wave feminist resentment towards younger women on which I commented earlier is evident. She continues: ‘How is a mother to feel when a daughter snatches greedily at treasure nurtured for her and then runs with it?’ (Trioli, 1996: 151). In emphasising that older feminists are ‘deliberately repelling’ those of the younger generation, Trioli demonstrates her indebtedness to generational tropes and maternal metaphors. The older feminist (Mother) is seen to be profoundly troubled by the daughter’s individuation, and the process of becoming a feminist is equated with that of becoming a subject (see Henry: 2004).
Despite the limitations of Trioli’s text and its fundamentally liberal politics, in emphasising both young women’s feminist activism and through mounting a defence of the Ormond women, she provides a discourse on young women, feminism and sexual harassment which runs counter to that of the event’s most prominent speakers. Her text contradicts the young feminist invoked at various points in the event. Though concerned predominantly with the thematic over the formal workings of the text, Sarah Maddison suggests: ‘Trioli’s contribution to new discussions of the role of young women in the Australian women’s movement was strategic and effective as it delivered a fairly straightforward presentation of the work young women were doing’ (Maddison, 2002: 16, see also Else-Mitchell and Flutter, 1998: xiv). While Maddison here values the text for its mimetic accuracy, being more cautious of its truth-claims I assume that Trioli makes an important contribution to the representations of the ‘young (white) feminist’ which were circulating in journalism and the mainstream publishing scape in mid-nineties Australia. One contribution to TFS media event by another younger feminist was, unfortunately, marred by less transcendable limitations.

Young Women Doing it Themselves: Kathy Bail’s DIY Feminism (1996)

Kathy Bail’s edited collection, DIY Feminism, like Generation F, explicitly positions itself as a contribution to TFS event. As an intervention into such a highly visible debate, the text’s title foregrounds Bail’s assumption that the Ormond women should have done it themselves. In the book’s acknowledgements, despite her disassociation from the second-wave and formal feminist politics, Bail offers a ‘huge thanks’ to a number of people, including ‘Anne Summers for leading the way and for her encouragement over the years; Helen Garner for provoking a fascinating debate’ (Bail, 1996: v). Here, she declares the type of daughterly gratitude Summers had earlier accused young women of failing to express. In contradistinction to Trioli’s pointed defence of the Ormond women, Bail situates her text as an attempt to correct the misrepresentation of the Ormond women as representative of all young feminists. She concurs with Garner that the young women were manipulated, taken advantage of by poor feminist advisors who urged them to take up the subject position of ‘victim’:

In The First Stone, the voices of the two women who made the allegations of sexual harassment (and by implication the voices of their generation) were frustratingly absent. Like many, I tried to contact them. Because of the tremendous impact of The First Stone, I felt they wrongly came to represent young Australian women. But we only know them (and the women who advised them) as characters in a book. Their actions fuelled the debate and left many wondering whether these women’s actions were typical. Were young women victims who’d run to the cops for protection at the slightest encouragement? (Bail, 1996: 9).
It is clear that Bail wishes to disassociate herself and the book from the actions of the young Ormond women. For Bail, these women had imbibed too much second-wave feminist ideology, and the Other against whom the DIY feminist is defined shifts between the feminism of the Ormond women and that of second-wave feminism.

Like Trioli, Bail critiques the media debate over TFS. Despite the presence of her own voice during the event, she argues that DIY’s heterogeneity and basis in sub-cultural practices precluded its articulation in the ‘mainstream’ media, which she argues promotes only a simplified feminism:

a younger generation of women felt removed from the discussion. Their voices weren’t heard in the mainstream media ... From their fringe or counter-cultural positions, they couldn’t identify with feminists who now publicly comment about these matters (Bail, 1996: 8-9).

Bail here taps into ideas of voicelessness and young women’s lack of access to public space (see Harris: 2004), positioning her own text as an attempt to rectify the silence of her own generation.

As Bail came to be seen as a (young) celebrity feminist it was the assumptions of her introduction that subsequent media commentary foregrounded. That said, a few articles in the collection effectively contradict Bail’s introductory assertions (see Lewis: 1996, Kenny: 1996). As Wynter notes: ‘While a couple of the chapters in DIY advocate feminist agitation and strategy, the overall tone of the book suggests we should “groove up”’ (Wynter, 1998: 203). Similarly, Sarah Maddison argues that Bail’s DIY discourse ‘almost entirely depoliticises the actions of the young women who contribute to her book’ (Maddison, 2002: 16). It is the notion of Do It Yourself, to describe the performance of subjectivity, explicated in the introduction that comes to frame these articles when the text enters the public discursive arena. Thus, in media discourse on the text it appears that the conflicting voices present in Bail’s text were themselves effectively silenced through their subordination to her overarching DIY narrative. As this section will show, the most problematic element of Bail’s DIY rhetoric is the specific idea of self it invokes, a self for whom gender, race, class or any other modalities of difference seem inconsequential. DIY, as a discourse, produces a certain type of subject.

*The Subject of DIY*

As a discourse, DIY is contingent upon a number of assumptions consistent with liberalism, particularly its stress on autonomy and personal self-realisation. However, as Jay Lemke suggests, such a discourse of radical individualism is predicated upon middle-class ideology and supportive of particular interests and modes of domination (Lemke, 1995: 80). DIY discourse is predicated on the kind of bourgeois, masculine
subject which feminism, amongst other bodies of thought, has sought to displace. The subject who ‘does it herself’ chooses not to choose a feminist identity, but instead adopts an individualism underpinned by a reluctance to identify with victim-centric ideology. In the sub-section ‘I’m not a feminist but…’, an utterance thought to be popular among young women, Bail asserts: ‘When it comes to using the word “feminism” there’s extreme caution. Young women are nervous about associating themselves with feminism…’ (Bail, 1996: 4). This simultaneous embrace and disavowal marks an ambivalence towards feminism (Douglas, 1994: 270) that has been common in media discourse (see Williams, The Australian, 28/1/95: 19-25). The idea that feminism is a signifier charged with negative connotations that prevents young women’s self-identification is mobilised elsewhere in the event. Christine Jackman says that ‘thousands of young women [are] rejecting the feminist tag outright’ (Jackman, 31/3/95, Courier Mail: 18). Into this space are inserted notions of the need for feminism’s redefinition and differentiation from its earlier forms. Bail here wrongly assumes that it is only in the 1990s that women are able to embark on their own interpretation and negotiation of feminism (O’Brien, 1997: 27). Such a position fails to recognise that considerable disagreements over how feminism is practiced have occurred at various points in Australian feminism’s history (O’Brien, 1997: 27). As Carol Smart observes, ‘feminism has always been fragmented, even if the fragments were organised differently’ (Smart, 1995: 203); this is a point which Bail overlooks in attempting to establish the ‘new-ness’ of ‘diy feminism’.

According to Bail, young women are seeking to reconstitute feminism, to make it over in their own – as opposed to their mothers’ – image. Here again Bail fixes the meanings of the second-wave, assuming that its submersion of the individual by the collective represents the constraint of individual freedom. In the following quotation, Bail’s anti-victim rhetoric aligns her with American celebrity feminists such as Katie Roiphe and Naomi Wolf:

Younger women assume their rights to the resulting opportunities [of the second wave] yet they regard feminism as a prescriptive way of thinking that discourages exploration on the individual level. The word ‘feminism’ suggests a rigidity of style and behaviour and is still generally associated with a culture of complaint. Young women don’t want to identify with something that sounds dowdy, asexual or shows them to be at a disadvantage. They don’t want to be seen as victims (Bail, 1996: 5).

Feminism here, unlike that of the former generation, is pro-sex and anti-victim. Furthermore, the word ‘dowdy’ suggests that the earlier feminism is both ‘unsexy’ and unfashionable (Henry, 2004: 124). This representation of the previous generation as ‘dowdy’ or ‘frumpy’, reinforcing the enduring opposition between the maternal and the sexual, is an inevitable consequence of figuring the previous form of feminism as
‘Mother’ (Henry, 2004: 126). In order to embrace (hetero)sexuality, the ‘feminist mother’ must be repudiated (Henry, 2004: 126).

Although I have cautioned against unproblematically conflating Australian and American ‘third-wave’ texts, Bail’s assumption that feminism requires ‘rehabilitation’ (Henry, 2004: 36) rhetorically and ideologically aligns her with writers such as Denfeld, Roiphe, and Wolf. Like these writers, for Bail the unimpeded self is free – not from patriarchy – but from organised feminism. To enable this focus on the alleged un-subjected individual to come into play, Bail assumes a pervasive feminist presence in Australian women’s lives. Though Trioli makes the same assumption, her account contains little of Bail’s negativity towards, and desire for dis-identification from, feminism. Like Garner, Bail’s ethic of DIY relies upon a particular discursive constitution of feminism, one which is seen to constrain, as opposed to facilitate, women’s exercise of agency. Such feminism, Bail argues, has been rejected due to its reliance upon ‘constricting dogma’ (Bail, 1996: 5). She invokes a homogenised feminist orthodoxy – much like those feminist puppeteers controlling the Ormond women – against which her own allegedly more fragmented, fluid feminist ontology can be positioned. Rhetorically, Bail’s book occupies similar ground to Garner’s, as each invokes a ‘monolithic, irrelevant, and misguided feminism’ against which their own brand of feminism is positioned (Henry, 2004: 30). In this sense, Bail’s alignment with Garner’s position further complicates arguments about generational cohesion within the media event. DIY is the feminist model which Garner criticises the Ormond women for not taking up, a model predicated on individualism.

**DIY as Individualism**

In earlier chapters I have shown that Garner’s construction and subsequent critique of contemporary feminism posited that ‘going to the cops’ represented a relinquishing, as opposed to an exercise, of agency on the part of the young women; this use of systemic or structural remedies is seen as a failure at the level of self. For Garner, the Ormond women failed to ‘do it themselves’. DIY feminism can be seen as the attempt to shift this perceived mis-direction in feminism back to the individual. Although DIY is profoundly informed by liberalism, it rejects liberal feminism and its advocacy of shifts, albeit reformist ones, at the structural level.

‘Popular’ feminism is unsurprisingly often criticised for its individualism. In emphasising ‘self transformation’ over ‘social transformation’ it:

encourages individuals to believe that they can meet all challenges individually – by choosing the right accessories, the right degree of assertiveness, the right time – management, skills and so forth. In this journalistic universe, feminism’s aspirations to equality are widely shared, but its call for collective action is widely ignored (Rhode, 1997: 20).
In ‘DIY’ logic, individualism represents more than the romanticisation of the sovereign individual. The individual foregrounded in this discourse is a symbol of the repudiation of the ‘mother feminism; that is, of a second-wave feminism contrastingly based in collectivism’ (Henry, 2003: 220). For Bail, feminism ‘operates as a form of decentralised resistance at the level of the everyday contributing to the transformation of social relations as well as feminism itself’ (Budgeon, 2001: 26). DIY stresses the limitations of a stable feminist identity, and instead emphasises partial identification at particular junctures. For Bail, feminism is clearly performative, an idea which in itself is neither problematic nor original (see Butler: 1990). This stress on the fluidity of feminist identification, or the notion that mobilisation as women is strategic, contingent, or that feminism is a temporarily fixed subject position as opposed to continuous identity, suggests a rhetorical and conceptual convergence with critiques of identity politics and reconceptualisations of subjectivity. The recognition that power that does not emanate from a centralised, monolithic patriarchy has led to a recognition of the micro-level, the everyday, as being the site where relations of domination and subordination are replicated, renegotiated and contested (see Mann: 1998). However, in its assumptions about the individual’s self-presence it can be seen to reinscribe a liberal humanist notion of self. Further, its rhetoric of self-construction links it to discourses of consumption.

The DIY philosophy is symbiotic, both temporally and ideologically, with the ‘girlpower’ phenomenon, a rhetoric of empowerment mobilised by and around young women. For Susan Hopkins, whose celebratory style of cultural studies is deeply problematic, this shift towards a pro-girl stance in media culture is explicitly generational: ‘The Girl Power of the 1990s and beyond marks a generational shift in feminist-inspired thinking towards more optimistic but individualistic positions and perspectives’ (Hopkins, 2002: 2). This shift came in the form of a consumer-based discourse about which many feminists, including myself, remain deeply conflicted (see Whelehan: 2000, Taylor: 2003). As Anita Harris recently observed, ‘girlpower constructs the current generation of young women as a unique category of girls who are self-assured, living lives lightly inflected by but no means driven by feminism, influenced by the philosophy of DIY, and assuming they can have (or at least buy) it all’ (Harris, 2004: 17). It is also important to be conscious of the broader political shifts, which formed the context from which DIY, and its counterpart, girlpower, emerged. In the year DIY Feminism was published, 1996, the Keating Labor Federal Government was replaced by the Liberal-National Coalition, led by John Howard. The conservative government’s regressive emphasis on personal responsibility and individualism is echoed in Bail’s ‘do it yourself’ feminism.
The notion of doing it yourself, while foregrounding the performative aspect of identity or the subject’s role in the doing, feeds into what Anna Cronin has referred to as ‘compulsory individualism’ mobilised in Nike’s ‘Just Do It’ advertising campaigns and other sites of ‘popular’ culture (Cronin: 2000). In DIY, feminism becomes reduced to individual life choices, a critique often made of what has become known as ‘commodity feminism’ (Goldman: 1992). Astrid Henry (2003) remarks upon the problem of such individualism for feminism: ‘Individualism as a shared ideology makes for a political paradox, of course, since historically women’s liberation movements, like other civil rights movements, have required some sense of collectivity to pursue political goals’ (Henry, 2003: 71). For Bail, it is this rejection of organised feminism that distinguishes DIY from previous, supposedly outmoded, forms of feminism. She contrasts the multiplicity of DIY feminist identities with an assumed singularity of the second-wave:

This debate is about the eternal struggle for identity. The femme gen wants to define a place that is not smothered by either patriarchy or a new feminist elite. They pursue activities that don’t always fit the feminist mould. Even the way they present what they do feels different. Seventies-style separatist rhetoric has been abandoned; there’s more interest in how gender identities blur and in adopting different sexual roles (Bail, 1996: 5).

Bail seeks to universalise the struggle for individualisation – here both Father (patriarchy) and Mother (feminist elite) must be rejected, as Bail claims an alternative way of performing both feminism and femininity. She also romanticises the identity play which is a mainstay of DIY, particularly the supposedly unconstrained resignification of gender. For Bail, DIY is represented as simultaneously on the cultural fringe and articulated in/through popular culture. But despite Bail’s assertions, the oppositionality of DIY cannot be automatically assumed. As Bulbeck puts it: ‘One can easily overdraw the “new” cultural politics of young women’s feminism’ (Bulbeck, 2001: 4).

Dismissing campus based feminist activity, Bail firmly locates the DIY philosophy as co-terminous with feminist youth sub-cultures of geek grrl and riot girl (Bail, 1996: 7). Bail invokes a problematic binary, as she suggests that older feminists are focused on organised politics while her own ‘DIY’ is preoccupied with cultural politics.24 For Bail, feminism’s subjects and objects have altered considerably since the second-wave (see Adkins, 2004: 441). In Bail’s purportedly sub-cultural DIY, the preferred sites for the articulation for feminist identities is zines and the ‘alternative’ music scene and other sub-cultural sites. The irony of Bail celebrating such ‘sub-cultural’ practices of production within a ‘mainstream’ publication such as DIY Feminism is obvious (Allen and Unwin was its publisher). She stresses that choosing

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24 The concept of DIY has been considered to be a form of ‘cultural citizenship’ by a number of Australian critics (Hartley: 1999, Murdock: 1999).
not to identify with feminism is an expression of young women’s agency, and therefore can be constituted as something for which feminism has fought. In DIY, activism is primarily performed in the field of cultural politics not in the realm of organised or institutional politics. For Bail, such a distinction is indelibly generational, and positions DIY on a hierarchy above the collective action of the second-wave.

**DIY’s Hierarchy of Feminisms**

In *DIY Feminism*, Bail exhibits hostility towards what she argues to be the hegemonic feminism in Australia – a type of repressive orthodoxy against which Garner also positioned herself. In the following quotation, she invokes the older/younger binary to define the identity of the young ‘do it yourselfer’:

> This generational shift stems from younger women’s inability to find models of personal identity within the broader and seemingly institutionalised feminism established by older women. This change is allied with a do-it-yourself style and philosophy characteristic of youth culture (Bail, 1996: i).

Bail here dichotomises feminism into ‘the good and the bad’ (Sheridan et al., 2000: 335); in order to position DIY as a new form of feminism, such an inscription is crucial. Her assertions of DIY’s heterogeneity are contingent upon the homogenisation of an inadequate second-wave. While it has been suggested that writers of ‘third-wave’ texts long for an ‘uncomplicated identification with a mythical feminist past’ (Siegel, 1997b: 59), DIY by comparison seeks disassociation from such a mythologised moment through its advocacy of ‘disorganised feminism’ (Bail, 1996: 15).

In Bail’s framework, young women’s feminism is being performed outside the institutions and groups featured so prominently in Trioli’s text, a fundamental difference often strategically elided in press reports of a unified generation. For Bail, the ‘spectacle of mass activism’ associated with the second-wave is the Other of the micro-politics of a purportedly more sophisticated contemporary feminism (Orr, 1997: 42). Like the previously mentioned ‘girlpower’, which is constituted by discourses of feminine self-empowerment, DIY works to fix its subject – and the older feminist from whom she differs – in her generational location. While Bail seeks to position her text within notions of instability and flux and as antithetical to conventional ideals of emancipatory movements and social change, her narrativisation of DIY culture relies upon a conventional perspective of progress. She assumes that DIY transcends the limitations of feminism in its previous forms. Here, the liberated daughter is juxtaposed with the unfulfilled, oppressed mother (Walters, 1992: 156).

One of the most problematic aspects of such an opposition is that ‘it posits an overly simplistic and coherent view of women’s history as progressive and linear movement from ignorance and oppression to enlightenment and liberation’ (Walters,
Megan Jones’ following comments, while made in relation to feminist historiography, appropriately describe the rhetorical strategy used by Bail to position DIY feminism against a unitary feminism of the second-wave:

The feminisms of 1970s Australia are often perceived as a unitary, simplistic and predominantly uncomplicated whole. This reification of a feminist moment is repeatedly propagated in a history of Australian feminism that constructs an unsophisticated feminism at its beginnings in the 1970s and progresses to the supposedly sophisticated feminisms of the 1990s – feminisms of plurality, multiplicities of meanings and complex specificities (Jones, 1998: 117).

For Bail, the feminism of the second-wave has been replaced by something much more nuanced and advanced. DIY feminism ‘seeks to legitimise its epistemological foundations through the negation of a feminist (m)Other, in order to confirm its own sense of self, and to produce a ‘good’ feminist subject as opposed to the ‘bad’ feminism of the 1960s and 1970s’ (Nurka, 2002: 178). Bail defines her feminism against a theory-based Other, particularly as she is at pains to dissociate her collection and the DIY philosophy from women’s studies. Bail speaks disparagingly of ‘fashionable jargon’ (Bail, 1996: 12), as she suggests:

There is a common perception now that feminism is something you have to learn; you do a course at university; it has its own section in bookshops; it has become a predominantly intellectual pursuit removed from daily, grassroots activity (Bail, 1996: 7).

While disdainful of the activist second wave, she uses the rhetoric of ‘grassroots activity’ to reclaim feminism from its elite position within the academy. However, despite Bail’s inclusive rhetoric, the option of ‘doing it yourself’ is not open to all women.

The Exclusions of DIY

Despite her acknowledgement of the exclusionary potential of any fixed definition of feminism, both the self and the notions of progress that underpin Bail’s DIY narrative erase certain subjects from view. In relation to feminism’s achievements, the assumption of teleology implies an incontestability dangerous to feminism as an emancipatory discourse (see Ferrell, 1997: 195), as a number of reader-writers analysed in the previous chapter noted. In a different context, Mary Vavrus invokes the Althusserian notion of interpellation to highlight the exclusions of such ‘popular’ discourses: ‘The women who are not hailed by this class-specific discourse continue to suffer economically, physically, psychologically and socially from a range of power abuses’ (Vavrus, 2002: 29). The young woman envisaged by Bail is the ‘can do girl’ (Harris, 2004: 13), relatively unhindered by her difference. Although the contributors to DIY Feminism appear culturally diverse, and some use their pieces to trouble the whiteness and class biases of Australian feminism, the DIY narrative offered by its editor subsumes their differences.
**DIY Feminism**, in Bail’s ‘Introduction’ in particular, is characterised by neo-individualism. In further disassociating from the collectivism of the second-wave, Bail argues: ‘Now feminism is largely about individual practice and taking on personal challenges rather than group identification’ (Bail, 1996: 16). The limitations of such an individualistic discourse are succinctly articulated in *Talking Up: Young Women’s Take on Feminism* (1998). In its introduction, the editors suggest that their concern with the constitutive exclusions of the DIY philosophy articulated by Bail prompted their publication: ‘Much of the do-it-yourself feminism just didn’t wash with the women in this book. What if we can’t do it ourselves? What if I can’t? What if you can’t?’ (Else-Mitchell and Flutter, 1998: xvi). As I have argued, the exclusions of hegemonic feminism in Australia have been highlighted by a number of indigenous critics, and the type of subject upon whom DIY is predicated further substantiates Aileen Moreton-Robinson’s claims regarding the whiteness and class privilege of Australian feminism (Moreton-Robinson: 2000). For Wendy Parkins, the focus on individualism within ‘popular’ feminist texts such as *DIY Feminism*, has significant ethical implications; the privileging of individualism represents a failure to acknowledge one’s ethical relation to the Other:

> These popular texts share a suspicion of previous forms of organised feminism and advocate a libertarian form of ‘feminism’ in which female autonomy becomes synonymous with individualism. What is strikingly absent from these books is a feminist ethic in which claims to autonomy are considered alongside the claims of the other (Parkins, 1999: 378).

In this sense, DIY is also ‘do-it-for-yourself’, as in alone and not for others (Mitchell, 2000: 72). In thereby promoting a self who is able to ‘do it’, Bail elides obdurate forms of oppression and discrimination encountered by subjects who are not only gendered but raced, classed and sexed.

As my foregoing analyses of these two disparate texts suggests, the attempt to conflate the positions of Trioli and Bail to manufacture a unified younger generation is unsustainable. The resistances that these texts have made to such ideological attempts to conflate them further suggest that the ‘identification of a single, young Australian feminist voice is impossible’ (Mitchell, 1998: 185-186, see also Maddison, 2002: 23). Trioli’s text has emphasised identification with feminism, while Bail’s is based in dis-identification. The need for two young feminists to function as replacements for the voiceless Ormond women (see Ling Kong: 1997) created a discursive space wherein Bail and Trioli were authorised to circulate their own conflicting versions of feminism and young Australian women. While Bail and Trioli in no respect represent the full

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25 In *Feminist Poetics*, Terry Threadgold argues that it is important to always be attuned to the ‘materiality of texts’, that is, to the ‘resistances they offer to the meanings we want to make’ (Threadgold, 1997: 56).
spectrum of young Australian feminists, their substantial differences – as demonstrated in the foregoing analysis – signals a little conceded diversity in the way feminism is conceptualised and represented in mainstream discourse. As Kate McDonnell argues, ‘the interests and values of young women are too heterogenous to be categorised in the offensively limited way that they were by both Garner’s *The First Stone* and the many columnists who have written, in one way or another, about the Ormond case’ (McDonnell, 1998: 13). That said, Bail and Trioli’s willingness to position themselves as feminist ‘daughters’ – itself a condition of their texts’ possibility – also considerably limited their divergent contributions to public discourse.

**Conclusion**

Throughout this chapter, in analysing the rhetorical strategies of both media texts and ‘popular’ feminist books, I have further buttressed my assertion that this event is constituted by an intense struggle over the meanings of feminism. The inseparable elements of history and conflict play a pivotal role in raising *TFS* to the point of ‘maximum visibility’ and ‘maximum turbulence’ characteristic of media events (Fiske: 1996). In terms of Fiske’s ‘river’ metaphor, both ‘currents’ and ‘countercurrents’ (and their points of intersection) have been analysed in this chapter. Furthermore, this chapter has also emphasised that the entire event is marked by an anxiety over what constitutes feminist practice in the 1990s, a preoccupation which dogs *TFS*. As part of this thesis’ project to refigure the event, this chapter has demonstrated the unsustainability of the notion that the media event did not provide a space in which to challenge or critically reflect upon the logic of generationalism. Furthermore, my textual analysis of *Generation F* and *DIY Feminism* has shown that the homogenisation of their contributions in order to construct a univocal young women’s feminism is also untenable. Despite its not insubstantial limitations, generationalism opened up a discursive space for otherwise unheard feminists to speak in media, and – at times – to disrupt both the familial narratives of feminism being offered by its most high profile celebrities and the discursive practices of the news to which they were contributing. Finally, as an explanatory frame for *TFS* media event, generationalism does an injustice to the event’s complexities and to the politics of its (feminist) participants.
Conclusion

The Event Refigured

Based on the theory that one measure of the strength of a movement is the zeal with which it is attacked, it even could be argued that all the negative attention feminist dissenters have been creating attests to the strength of the feminist presence in the 1990s (Catherine Orr, 1997: 41).

Public debate has always been essential to the health of feminism as to any movement for equitable, empowering social change (Elizabeth Minnich, 1998: 174).

I doubt that Helen Garner has turned feminism into a dirty word. Feminism has always provoked controversy, disagreement, and debate (Jenna Mead, 21/9/95, SMH: 13).

As each of these epigraphs suggest, the assumption that Australian feminisms were irrevocably damaged by The First Stone media event is, due to the complexities of communication and feminism itself, unsustainable. Rather, TFS media event represents a period of intense discursive struggle over the meanings of feminism. Through its quadripartite frame, building on John Fiske’s work (1996), this thesis has refigured TFS media event. It has viewed this event, a period of ‘maximum visibility’ and ‘maximum turbulence’ for feminism (Fiske: 1996), as indicative of the simultaneous limitations and opportunities of the feminism-print media relationship. Throughout this thesis, I have reassessed the media event’s contribution to public discourse on Australian feminism, while eschewing the antinomies that resulted in either its condemnation or celebration. In arguing that TFS media event did not reach ‘maximum visibility’ simply because it either attacked feminism or facilitated the circulation of a number of conservative discourses, I have moved beyond the central feminist interpretive framework for the event. While there are considerable limitations with this media event, an over-emphasis on this aspect has precluded acknowledgement of the opportunities with which it provided feminism. Likewise, I have contested the assumption of conservative critics who have argued that the voices of Garner and her supporters were repressed by a powerful, irrational feminist orthodoxy. Moreover, I also refused to interpret the event as an Australian
manifestation of vitriolic debates over feminism staged predominantly in the American context; such a reading would have merely resulted in the type of condemnation and simplification of the event beyond which I have sought to move. In refiguring TFS media event, and the wider relationship between feminism and media culture, this thesis has outlined the importance of the journalistic field as a key site of feminist representations and self-representations, not simply as a space of inherent hostility towards feminism. Through detailed analysis of the media event’s central discursive frames, I have here provided a much more complex account of its operations than previous critics.

A number of conflicting interpretations of the book circulated in Australian print media during the mid-1990s. Moreover, struggles over the meanings of the book were effectively struggles over the meanings of feminism – past, present and future. Through this thesis, I have attempted to find a way of speaking about the event that accounted for its complexities and contradictions, its possibilities and opportunities. Fiske’s notion of media events as making visible the ‘currents’ and ‘countercurrents’ in culture’s ‘river of discourses’ has been invaluable in this process. In demonstrating the ways in which TFS’s truth-claims were simultaneously reaffirmed, extended, reconfigured and contested, I have painted a new picture of TFS media event. That interpretations of the book and subsequent dialogue became so contested suggests that the media event, like news media itself, is not as homogenous as many previous critics have implied. This is not to suggest that attempts to delimit the text’s meaning did not feature prominently: ‘A society so heavily dependent on mediated information invites attempts to control that mediation’ (Gamson, 1994: 191). However, I have argued that feminist critics invoking the event often focus on its ‘currents’ at the expense of its ‘countercurrents’, thereby downplaying its opportunities for Australian feminism.

In this thesis, I have also not been concerned with whether the public conversation over TFS staged in Australia’s print media can be constituted ‘genuine’ public debate in the Habermasian sense, a position problematised in Chapter One. I rejected such a masculinist framework, and the equally inadequate theories of the ‘postmodern public sphere’ (Hartley: 1996), favouring instead a notion of the ‘media event’ to frame my analysis of the event (Fiske: 1996). Rather than suggesting that print media culture no longer measures up to an ideal of communicative reason and disembodied rationality (a deeply problematic notion for feminism), I have examined the media event’s conditions of possibility and re-engaged with the often contradictory ways in which feminism came to signify in this specific cultural moment.

As this media event attests, though it has become diffuse and often eludes attempts at definition, feminism continues to foster news interest. This thesis has
shown how feminism became newsworthy in the mid-1990s, making a vital contribution to an area that has not received adequate critical attention in Australia. Publicly staged debates such as that following the publication of *TFS*, ‘keep feminism alive in the popular imagination and are a testament to its continued relevance’ (Whelehan, 2000: 93). Perhaps given the lack of a readily identifiable women’s movement, opportunities such as those provided by *TFS* for highly visible discursive struggle over the meanings of feminism become even more significant. Some critics, however, have failed to recognise the significance of these increasingly prevalent public debates over how contemporary feminisms are constituted. As Simone Murray argues, feminist criticism has failed to adequately address the productive role of media culture in constructing and circulating particular feminisms. Following her analysis of the ‘feminist bestseller’ as an ambivalent publishing phenomenon for feminism, Murray concludes that, in order to remain relevant and politically credible, feminism ‘urgently needs to mount more rigorous analysis of its own construction through the lens of the twenty-first century’s dominant ideological force – the mainstream media’ (Murray, 2004: 204, original emphasis). The preceding analysis, I hope, is the type of project to which Murray refers. Like Murray, I have revisited debates over the politics of ‘popular’ feminism, including books and debates within the news, to ultimately reaffirm the need for further critical attention to this area. However, I have also argued that feminist cultural criticism needs to actively resist either extreme of the condemnation/celebration binary, a critical gesture which has been a feature of my analysis.

After establishing *TFS* media event’s institutionalisation as a crucial moment in recent Australian feminist history, and the history of media engagement with feminism, I argued that its positioning within critical discourses on feminism, media, and literary culture as a ‘cultural flashpoint’ necessitated its critical re-evaluation. This analysis has demonstrated, not only the importance of contemporary media culture in the construction and circulation of feminist stories, but also that the feminism-media relationship is an ambivalent one, necessitating a shifting or perpetually mobile critical position for feminists. This ambivalence has guided me to highlight instances of closure, while also underscoring the openings where problematic texts can be made to mean otherwise.¹ Furthermore, while for my own strategic purposes I have read the book and the media event through particular interpretive lenses, it is important to foreground that my own readings may conflict with those who consumed it while it preoccupied the national imaginary. Different readers would have ‘lived’ the event differently (Kellner, 2003: 103), making it difficult to fix the uses to which the text was

¹ This strategy is outlined by Helen Pleasance, 1991: 70.
put and the meanings it generated. Moreover, I have shown that the event itself has been reinvigorated at various points in the past decade, with *TFS* being invoked in media hosted dialogues over sexual politics, feminism, and Garner’s subsequent work.

As emphasised throughout, focusing on self-identified feminist actors in the event, as well as others who were authorised to speak on its behalf, has been central to this project to refigure the media event. In this way, I have argued that print media did not assert a negative power over a helpless feminism, but that a number of speakers (with varying degrees of authority) intervened and contested the narratives being offered by Garner, Summers, and commentators who were not sympathetic to feminism. Feminists were key producers of this event. Focusing on modes of self-representation, and the types of feminism circulated through them, this thesis has argued for greater critical awareness of how feminism is helping to shape the media environment upon which it is becoming increasingly dependent. Feminists may not control this media event; however, given the complexities of the signifying process itself, nor can the producers of any message exercise such impossible control. Media desire for feminist conflict, as *Chapter Six* has shown, produced unforeseen opportunities for feminists to circulate counter-discourses within the event. In addition, demonstrating the media event’s self-consciousness and reflexivity, its texts commonly engaged in a form of meta-commentary, where the limitations of either individual commentators or newspapers were illuminated. While I have chosen not to focus on conservative commentators’ roles in the event, whose voices were not as deafening as has been assumed, the question of who was authorised to speak during the media event has guided this thesis.

This thesis has functioned, in part, as a ‘valuational history’ (Templin, 1995: 13), illustrating the role of so-called ‘mainstream’ print media culture in circulating particular interpretations and assumptions about both Garner’s text (and Garner herself) and Australian feminism. *TFS* was not simply received by media commentators, and nor did readers passively imbibe her truths as being the most legitimate truths about Australian feminism in its past or present. This is not to suggest that common ways of speaking about it did not emerge or that its author did not repeatedly attempt to legislate against particular readings of the text bearing her signature. By focusing on how the text came to signify in public discourse, I have argued that ‘to discern a book’s meaning and effect, we need to read the readers as well as the book’ (Julius Mathews, 2000: 143). In recognition of the impossibility of pre-empting the meanings with which texts circulating in media culture will be invested, the majority of the preceding work can be seen as a study of *TFS*’s readers; those who, in possession of varying degrees of cultural capital, themselves became writers.
Subsequent to my analysis of Garner’s book, I underscored the diverse reading positions adopted by the event’s contributors. In this way, I moved from the ways various commentators and Garner attempted to delimit the meanings of the book and feminism itself (Chapters Two and Four), to an active, more general readership which includes those from feminist interpretive communities (Chapter Five), and young women and ‘second-wave’ feminist sources and columnists writing in response (Chapter Six). While it may be tempting to suggest that Garner’s text became the ‘master narrative’ into which all others were subsumed, as discourse is ‘ever on the move’ (Fiske: 1996: 5), my readings of the four constitutive elements show that we can by no means view Garner and those legitimising her truth-claims to preclude the entrance of non-hegemonic stories into the mediasphere. This is not to elide the differing degrees of authority possessed by different contributors at various points in this media event. On the contrary, the chapters analysing the text’s operation in public discourse were unified in their dual focus on the event’s limitations (including the asymmetric power of its participants) and possibilities.

To recap, this thesis has been ordered according to what I have identified as the four most significant factors constituting this media event: narrative, celebrity, audience, and history and conflict. My typology could also be easily extended to other controversial books that have been highly visible in the mediasphere, and could also be used to read other high profile media controversies and political scandals. Moreover, these four constitutive elements are integral to contemporary media culture in a broader sense and are therefore consistently present to a greater or lesser degree. During media events such as that enveloping TFS, these four elements and the cultural work they do become more pronounced and they become even more obvious sites of semiotic struggle.

Throughout this work, it has also been clear that such unambiguous divisions between these four elements are themselves artificial, as they overlap and are, at times, mutually constitutive. Not surprisingly, this is particularly the case with the first element considered in this thesis: narrative. The media event’s catalyst was the publication of a particular narrative: *The First Stone*. News media therefore circulated stories about this particular story. Narrative is, in this dual sense, literally at the centre of this event (as it is to all news media). In Chapter Three I argued that TFS – as a self-reflexive work offering a particular construction of Australian feminism – is marred by a series of tropes and ways of conceptualising masculinity/femininity which feminism has problematised. Despite the narrator’s expressions of uncertainty in relation to the

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2 For example, the public debates following Salman Rushdie’s *The Satanic Verses*, Helen Darville Demidenko’s *The Hand that Signed the Paper*, and Norma Khouri’s *Forbidden Love* would lend themselves to a reading in these terms.
questions posed by the text, I identified points of ideological stability that undercut this professed ambiguity. The remaining chapters demonstrated how TFS was a narrative both contested and supported during the course of the media event. The power to circulate particular stories about feminism – such as that granted Garner – is unevenly distributed, as my chapter on celebrity has argued.

In Chapter Four, I used the frame of celebrity to consider three of the media event’s dominant voices. Celebrities are a crucial part of media events (as they increasingly are to journalism more broadly), particularly in the sense that they are seen to manage the type of social change and transformation that the media event itself seeks to order. In this chapter I argued that some cultural actors are granted the authority to speak about feminism, and to have these utterances validated, in ways not permitted others. Garner, as literary and feminist celebrity, helped to raise feminism to ‘maximum visibility’, while also attempting to delimit its meanings through authorial ‘epitexts’ (Genette: 1997) such as interviews and public speeches. This chapter emphasised how literary reputation now is formed largely, not in the academy, but in the promotional discourses of media culture. Rather than taking Garner’s authority for granted (as is common), this chapter emphasised the discursive processes of her celebritification. However, as part of my effort to underscore that Garner was not the event’s only significant presence, this chapter also dealt with two of the event’s other authorities on feminism whose roles in the event not previously been comprehensively analysed. As I emphasised, the celebrity of one of these women, Anne Summers, predates this event, while the other, Jenna Mead, is much more reliant upon this event for the establishment of her more transient feminist celebrity. While the former adds her voice to Garner’s limited generationalism, the latter – through strategically mobilising the discourse of ‘misrepresentation’ – substantially disrupts Garner’s authority as a feminist speaker. In addition, in this chapter I concluded that these women opened up a discursive space for others to circulate particular stories about feminism in newspapers, including writers of letters to the editor.

In Chapter Five, I argued that media events are unsustainable without audience involvement and investment. As I have suggested, the letters to the editor forum is one of the most vibrant and polyvalent textual sites of the media event. Although focusing predominately on the ‘Shockwaves’ series of letters, I drew upon letters published throughout this media event to substantiate my claim that this forum acted as a central point of contestation over feminism. This chapter clearly undercuts both the idea that the event was monologic (dominated either by conservative or progressive voices) and that it failed to provide adequate space for a sustained struggle over the meanings of Australian feminism in all its temporalities. It demonstrated too, the way readers, in a
very literal sense through the production of their own texts, actively interpret and interact with news discourses and practices. It also placed readerly intervention into the event in wider debates about the relationship between media producers and consumers, a relationship that is often seen to be imploding. Publics were brought into being through the letters to the editor forum, which acted as an important site of reader criticism on feminism, the book, and the rhetorical strategies and authorising practices of media culture. In addition to mapping TFS media event’s overlooked possibilities, this chapter emphasised the importance of the letters forum in the performance of a citizenship that is increasingly mediated. That said, I also argued that this space should not be romanticised in a media environment that remains hierarchised.

In Chapter Six, I analysed generationalism as the media event’s structuring discourse. In a climate where some demonise media culture for its role in the ‘death of history’, TFS event relies heavily upon processes of historicisation. Like news discourse, popular feminist writing works to construct a particular feminist history against which its vision of the feminist present (and future) is defined. This chapter suggested that contestations over the meanings of ‘the young feminist’ and the manner in which feminism was contemporaneously performed in Australia were consistently at the centre of this media event, and secured a news value to (some) women’s voices that has been little conceded. In analysing DIY Feminism and Generation F, I emphasised that Bail and Trioli – despite the limitations of their texts – were active agents in the construction of the ‘young feminist’. As this chapter has demonstrated, familial tropes and maternal metaphors were simultaneously reaffirmed and destabilised by women on both sides of the symbolic generational divide. In this way, the space opened by newspaper desire for the sensationalist narrative of generational conflict was occupied by feminist sources, journalists and opinion piece writers, who commonly (re)introduced, and offered support to those who challenge, sexual harassment. Nonetheless, I concluded that generationalism functioned as the event’s overarching discursive frame and represented a significant limitation on the way feminism came to signify during this moment.

As I have suggested, ‘popular feminism’ (a term inclusive of print media and books) is often seen to be unworthy of critical engagement, with criticism being underpinned by assumptions about its inferiority as a form of communication about (or for) feminism. Similarly, the conversations over feminism in which media engage are often seen to misrepresent and distort a ‘feminism which is elsewhere’ (Brunsdon, 1998: 101). Rather than reinscribing such assumptions, I have approached the event as a vibrant discursive struggle – with commentators situated in asymmetrical power relations which themselves shift – over the meanings of feminism. However, the
preceding chapters have not simply represented a close ‘reading’ of TFS media event or its themes. Through this thesis’ quadripartite structure, I have used the intertextual network of the event to ask broader questions about the functions and processes of contemporary print media culture in relation to feminism. In so doing, I have been able to move beyond the question of whether or not the event signalled the inherently ‘anti-feminist’ nature of print media culture, to consider the event as providing insights into the operations of the media-feminism engagement.

While this culturally specific moment is an important historical marker, in terms of the media stories told about feminism and the feminist stories told about the media, the texts of the event can at times be seen to exemplify some changes in news discourse; this is the case particularly with celebrity, the turn to the personal, and mediated citizenship. Many of these changes remain the subject of intense debate. As Chapter One has suggested, it is common to suggest that news media is becoming increasingly anti-democratic, superficial, ethically void, and fixated on the trivialities of celebrity, scandal and sensationalism. In this climate, the prospects for oppositional discourses such as feminism are believed to be grim. Australians critics such as Graeme Turner have called for the (re)introduction of ethics into discussions of these commercial and political changes (Turner: 2003). Likewise, at the ‘(Other) Feminisms’ AWSA conference in July 2003 Susan Sheridan queried whether such a transformed sphere and its purported ‘democratisation’ does in fact offer anything ‘new’ in terms of media engagement with feminism.3 Although I have here pointed towards some ways in which the relationship between feminism and media is being reconfigured in such a changing media environment, cultural studies (including its feminist varieties) will benefit from a more concentrated attention to such developments and their politics.

The immense media visibility of feminism during TFS media event suggests that the feminism-media nexus is vital in the process of contemporary feminism’s circulation, accreditation, and negotiation. As I have argued elsewhere, the feminisms offered in this space may be (though not inevitably) limited (Taylor: 2003). However, it is nonetheless the site where contemporary conversations – and contestations – over feminism’s meanings, its pasts, presents and futures, are taking place; sometimes with great rigour, at others less so. That said, there is also the potential – most recently tracked by Angela McRobbie in her analysis of ‘postfeminism and popular culture’ – that the deeply ideological ‘work of undoing feminism’ will occur within and through such sites (McRobbie, 2004: 7). The increased importance of media culture in feminism’s construction requires new strategies for practical and theoretical

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3 These comments represent my recollection of Professor Sheridan’s presentation, entitled ‘Feminism and the News: Some Theoretical Issues’.
engagements. For example, while I only pursued the question of how feminist publics come into being through discursive intervention into media culture in one chapter (Chapter Five), further work on the formation of feminist publics and counter-publics would also help to reconceptualise the feminism and news media relationship as an interactive and dynamic one.

Although this thesis has interrogated a culturally and historically specific instance of print media’s explicit engagement with feminism (albeit a protracted one), I would like to end by noting that such engagements are best seen along a continuum. This continuum spans the visible struggle over feminism in news discourse to the ways in which feminism has been ‘otherwise grafted onto’ (Mayne, 1994: 273) cultural forms such as women’s magazines, lifestyle supplements, popular fiction and non-fiction, television and film. As I have shown, a comprehensive analysis of how feminism has been taken up across Australian media culture has not yet been produced. In particular, Australian feminist studies would benefit from research concurrently analysing these diverse forms, emphasising how the stories of feminism are being taken up, negotiated, rewritten or, perhaps, resisted. In the meantime, The First Stone media event offers a reminder that it is incumbent upon feminist cultural critics to acknowledge the possibilities of these stories, the cultural work they do, their polysemy and the sophistication of diverse readers, while always attending to their representational politics.


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Genovese, A. (2002) ‘Madonna and/or Whore?: Feminism(s) and Public Sphere(s)’, pp.147-164 in Thornton, M. ed. Romancing the Tome: Popular Culture, Law and Feminism, Cavendish: Sydney


Harris, A (2001c) ‘Revisiting Bedroom Culture: New Spaces for Young Women’s Politics, pp. 128-38, Hecate, Vol 27, No. 1


Appendix
Primary newspaper texts

Athersmith, F. (1992) ‘Court told of uni head’s indecent fantasies’, The Age, 31 August, p.4
Duffy, M. (1997) ‘Stones from the other side of the fence’, The Australian, 8 November, p.34
Johnson, R. (1995) 'Foray into feminism', *Courier-Mail*, 5 April, p.20
Kissane, K. (2000) 'The last stone – what the judge said this week', *The Age*, 3 June, p.2
Lake, M. (1995) 'Feminism and the generation gap: where from here?', *The Age*, 4 April, p.15
Lyall, K. (1997) 'Medieval academic walks into a thoroughly modern feminist furore', *The Australian*, 13 November, p.15
Manne, R. (1996) 'This Helen's for Real', *The Australian*, 'Review', 6 April, p.9
Martin, L. (1996) 'Feminism...do it yourself', *The Age*, 'Metro', 8 October, p.1
Mead, J. (1995) 'A player in the Ormond case defends her cause', *The Age*, 16 August, p.17
Mead, J. (1995) 'When it comes to sex and power, Garner just doesn’t get it', *The Australian*, 21 September, p.11
McGuinness, P.P. (1995) 'Right of Anonymity', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 August,
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Reed, D. (1995) ‘A chance to see and learn’, Herald Sun, 1 April, p.13


‘The feminist agenda is on the line’, (1995), The Advertiser, 12 August, p.20