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Starkey, Guy and Crisell, Andrew, *Radio Journalism*, SAGE, London, 2009. ISBN

9781412930154. 173pp. AU\$49.95. Distributor: Footprint Books

On page one of *Radio Journalism* the authors state they are "going to be making some rather large claims for the importance of radio journalism". They're not kidding! Within a few pages they make claims about the extraordinary skills of radio journalists, that radio is inherently a better medium for news than television, and that the BBC comes closest to performing a public service through provision of radio news and current affairs. Starkey and Crisell might wish to counter any sense of "radio's inferiority", but their provocative stance, clearly suggested in the subheading *How radio's news coverage is better than television's*, the scramble to make some rather tenuous arguments about the visual distraction of TV, and snide references to the televisual medium, that yes, has a 'briefer history' than radio, suggest nothing other than a case of 'TV envy'.

The book, centred on the UK, provides a useful overview of the structure of the broadcasting system and the machinations of powerful public sector broadcaster, the BBC. It deals with regulatory issues and the complications posed by media convergence. The authors initiate a range of interesting discussions on how news works in a medium that allows distracted engagement yet whose ephemeral nature demands focussed attention. They highlight how plurality of station ownership obscures the issue of news plurality since there are few news services to which stations might subscribe. They ask us to consider whether the BBC should be obliged, as with other elements of television and radio, to commission news output from minority providers.

Particularly engaging is the description of how stations might assemble and utilise limited news gathering resources; for example, using local reporters, pared down TV news, and engaging 'stringers' (freelancers) in the process of initiating and following a story. The book is most compelling when the voices and practices of journalists are present. Two short case studies are the highlight. The first neatly captures the way in which news of a major UK security alert is broken by a freelance journalist while at the airport on the way to covering Fidel Castro's 80th birthday celebrations. The second, a comparison of BBC's *Today* programme and Channel 4 Radio's *Morning Report*, is introduced with some lively banter between staff of the rival programs.

Despite these highlights the book lacks a sense of purpose. It doesn't contain enough technical information to be an instructional text and lacks the depth and argumentation of an academic resource. It is also missing a narrative hook that would appeal to more general readers, although these seem to be the courted audience. Indeed, the book is hampered by stylistic and structural ploys that attempt to appeal to this readership. The chapter on theoretical approaches may be unthreateningly buried near the end of the book, but it contains perspectives useful for reading earlier chapters. Subsections within chapters are supposed to make the material easier to comprehend, but the sheer number of them are distracting at best and at worst misleading - discussion of the Australian and New Zealand broadcasting systems even makes an appearance in the section *Overseas Contexts: North America!*