

Probing the Media 7

We are all guilty

Among the range of splendid characters in the gallery of Peter Simple of the *Daily Telegraph* was the bleeding-heart sociologist Dr Heinz Kiosk, whose refrain was We are all guilty. There is nowadays much sloppy journalism around, which Peter Simple would have disdained. This is true even of the once respected London *Times*. One aspect of this sloppiness is the habit of attacking some regrettable feature of modern life on the basis that every reader is guilty of it. This is obviously false, and calculated to infuriate the innocent. Here are some examples.

On 3 August 2005 a sentence on the *Times* front page read: "The increase in drinking is such that every adult in the country drinks more than a third of a pint of pure alcohol a week." It is obviously untrue that every adult in the country drinks more than a third of a pint of pure alcohol a week. My wife and I are adults in this country and neither of us drinks any alcohol at all in any week, pure or impure. The same is true of many other adults.

The *Times* has a Saturday Supplement called *body&soul* (note the smart absence of spaces and capitals). On 13 August 2005 an item on page 2 of this said-

'But what is it about summer holidays that makes us behave as if there wasn't a risk in the world? . . . The trick is to do new things while being aware of how bad we are at assessing risk and making sure that we take all necessary preparations and precautions'.

My wife and I fancy we are rather good at assessing risk – we've had enough practice at it in our combined 160 years.

The *Times* has a daily Supplement called T2. On 16 August 2005 this had an item saying about a 15-year-old girl giving a 13-year-old boy what used to be known as fellatio, but is nowadays vulgarly called a blow job-

"You did it, I did it. It is what thousands of teenagers have done, and always will do. It happens every night."

Actually, neither my wife (she assures me) nor I did it. The latter item also transgressed by being based on a serious mistake of law, which I described in Probing the Media 6.