Keynote

Peter Thompson,
School of Communication, Unitec

Last Chance to See? Public Broadcasting Policy and the Public Sphere in New Zealand

Peter Thompson, the keynote speaker at this year’s JMAD conference, is a senior lecturer at Unitec’s School of Communication, and a leading commentator on broadcasting policy. Peter has been closely following television policy developments since Labour was elected in 1999, with a particular interest in how TVNZ balances its public service and commercial responsibilities. One of the major policy challenges that he identified, even before the charter was finalised, was the tension between TVNZ’s need to fulfil public charter requirements and avoiding any significant risk to audience share and profitability.

Ian Goodwin
Senior Lecturer School of English and Media Studies, Massey University

Social Networking Sites, Civic Engagement and the Public Sphere: A Critical Appraisal

Use of Social Networking Sites (SNS), and in particular Facebook, has grown rapidly in the past few years. While young people were prominent and enthusiastic early adopters, SNS use has recently become more of a ‘mainstream’ activity involving a large proportion and broad range of New Zealanders. As SNS use has grown, an increasing amount of attention is being paid to the democratic potential of online social networking. SNS offer unique technological affordances in terms of freedoms of content creation, group formation, and social assembly that lead to the creation of complex ‘networked publics’. These affordances are highly valued by users and thus SNS are ‘sticky’ technologies, being visited frequently, and are on the whole thoroughly integrated into users offline lives.

In this paper I critically appraise the democratic potential of the online practices and spaces involved. I argue that these practices and spaces are often thoroughly commodified by corporate actors and remain open to wide ranging processes of surveillance: key threats to civic processes and public sphere principles. I conclude that the emerging research agenda on SNS needs to engage more thoroughly with these issues in order for the democratic potential of online social networking to be vigorously interrogated.
Illusions of Freedom – the Mirage of the Public Sphere
This paper argues that the traditional view of the public sphere as a facilitator of democratic freedoms is largely illusory, being at best a purely theoretical construct with little practical relevance to at worst a construct that provides an idealistic and redundant Weltanschauung for contemporary society. Although contemporary technologies and associated processes as manifested by the new media have brought about a fundamental paradigm shift as regards public discourse and participation in political and social processes this has not necessarily translated into an increase of the quality of such participation.

While there are those who genuinely believe that they have a contribution to make and have a ‘voice’ in the public opinion process, there are also those who have a more Machiavellian agenda in manipulating such ‘voices’ via means both ‘fair and foul’ and have the aforementioned commensurate knowledge, resources and expertise to do so. The primary focus of this particular paper will reside within this particular context with consideration being given to the impact of state directed propaganda on the public sphere.

The Indigenous Voice and the Public Sphere
This paper argues that the absence of Māori voices from the mainstream news media in New Zealand has implications for Māori and for democracy. It argues that a Māori voice is missing on four levels. The first is the dearth of stories about the Māori world in “mainstream” news – stories which are presented as an intrinsic part of New Zealand and therefore of interest to all New Zealanders.

The second level is the use of Māori as sources. Research shows that even in what might be called “Māori stories”, Pākehā are used as sources at least as often as Māori. At a third level, when Māori do speak as sources, they do not necessarily get the chance to articulate a distinctively indigenous worldview based on Māori knowledge and cultural values. Finally, a Māori voice which speaks from the experience of colonisation is marginalised, demonised or altogether absent. Such absences mean that the public sphere in New Zealand is, whether intentionally or not, overwhelmingly a white public sphere.
Dr Gareth Schott  
Department of Screen and Media Studies  
University of Waikato  

Putting Public Attitudes To The Test: What happened when parents were asked to play Grand Theft Auto IV (R18)  
This paper presents research that examined how parents (of game players) evaluated pre-conceptions of the game Grand Theft Auto IV against experience of, reactions to playing the game. Despite persistent warnings of the ‘holding power’ games have over children (Turkle, 1984, p.66) it is not necessarily children that determine that they are ‘bowling alone’ (Putnam, 2000) but to a certain degree parents’ insufficient understanding of, and unwillingness to engage with game cultures (Green et al., 1998). This research employed qualitative methods to address, in depth, the degree of game literacy expressed by a sample of parents.

While observation of game-play made it possible to ensure that post-play interview discussions were based upon witnessed ‘performative involvement’ with a game, it also permitted an examination of the degree to which player’s semiotic work on the text (when reading and interpreting it) is taken directly from the resources that are put to use and made available by the text itself. In doing so, the level of communicative competency and moving image literacy exhibited by parents that in turn, determine the degree of tolerance they possessed or pleasure they were able to gain from the game, was assessed (Burn & Parker, 2001).

Tessa J. Houghton  
Postgraduate student, University of Canterbury

Online protest as viral counterpublicity: A neo-Habermasian interpretation of the 2009 New Zealand Internet Blackout  
This paper argues for a ‘neo-Habermasian' understanding of the public sphere, assembled in response to both the Habermasian ideal and the raft of criticisms levelled at it. It retains the Habermasian public sphere as its core, but expands and sensitizes it, moving away from normative preoccupations with decision-making in order to effectively comprehend issues of power and difference, and to allow publicness “to navigate through wider and wilder territory” (Ryan, 1992: 286).

This theoretical lens is then applied to the 2009 New Zealand Internet Blackout campaign, organised by the Creative Freedom Foundation in response to proposed amendments to national Internet copyright legislation which would have rendered it “arguably the world’s harshest copyright enforcement law” (Saarinen 2009). It explores the way in which the campaign generated a highly effective form of viral or self-replicating protest counterpublicity through the creative use of web technologies to mobilise their intellectual ideology (Billig et al 1988), thus functioning as a discursively-constructed counterhegemonic project.
“It’s not seen as cultural so how can it be inter-cultural?”
Analyses of mass media products regularly comment on the producers’ lack of awareness of the culture that structures their work. Despite this, relatively few researchers have identified aspects of the relevant, dominant culture. In New Zealand Pakeha cultural values and practices dominate everyday life but, in part because they are omnipresent, those values and practices are rarely recognised as cultural. In our “Media health and wellbeing in Aotearoa” project, Kupu Taea collected a representative sample of three weeks’ television news that included both mass bulletins; One News, 3News, Prime News, Tonight, Nightline, and Maori-language bulletins Te Kaea and Te Karere.

The sample includes several items reporting the death of poet, Hone Tuwhare and comparing these enabled us to distinguish the cultural elements shaping individual items. In this presentation we focus on the 3News item, identifying the underlying culture, explaining how that culture is expressed, contrasting the item with coverage on Te Kaea. This detailed analysis encourages us to ask; “what are the implications for the public sphere if mass media contributions have no sense of their own cultural character.”

Rufus McEwan
School of Communication Studies, AUT

Radio on the Internet: Opportunities for new public spheres?
This paper investigates the potential for radio on the Internet to enhance processes of communication and media practice in the context of public sphere principles. Exploring the unique qualities of both radio and the Internet as mediums, I argue that radio, “remediated” on the Internet, can draw from the perceived technological benefits of associated mediums. Liberal and oppositional conceptions of the public sphere provide a set of principles for three case studies. These are Unwelcome Guests, an anticorporate radio programme produced “off the grid” in upstate New York, SW Radio Africa, “the independent voice of Zimbabwe” broadcast from London, and NH Making Waves, the radio arm of a community peace activist group based in New Hampshire in the United States.

Each case study examined the interplay between Internet and radio practices. I conclude that although such interplay was limited placing radio content on the Internet presents new opportunities to diversify content and audiences. This can be accomplished through collaborative production and improved distribution. In each of the case studies the potential for fully realised public spheres were not met mainly because the traditional conventions of radio broadcasting prevailed.
Sarah Baker  
School of Communication Studies, AUT

**Changing Journalism in Current Affairs programmes: the impact of broadcasting deregulation and commercialism.**

Current affairs programmes have traditionally been the cornerstone of public service broadcasting. As such they have exemplified the principles of the public sphere. Over the last two decades the impact of neo-liberal deregulation and digital media proliferation has diminished the role of public broadcasting and current affairs television. Arguably this general tendency has affected most western countries and New Zealand in particular. In this paper I examine changes to current affairs television in New Zealand.

I compare the current affairs programme *Sunday* from 1984 (prior to deregulation) with the *Sunday* programme of 2004 (post deregulation). Specific areas examined areas are alterations of current affairs subject matter, issues of current affairs story framing and the question of background context in relation to the material being discussed. I will also consider how programme format changes have influenced the presentation of current affairs material.

Donald Matheson  
Media, Communication & Journalism,  
Canterbury University

**People like us: The cultural geography of New Zealand’s international news**

The world imagined in Aotearoa New Zealand news media is a constricted one, focused on the United States, Britain and Australia and concerned with the rest of the world largely as places of disaster, underdevelopment and peculiar individuals. Using data from a recent content analysis of newspaper and television news reports from this country, this paper describes a highly skewed media geography.

The paper explores some possible explanations for the numbers, including dependence on international news agencies and megamedia, the global economic and political power of a few western countries, a perceived lack of interest among New Zealanders, the weakening of public responsibility ideals and the end of the Cold War. However, it places strongest emphasis on cultural factors, particularly a heavy reliance upon British and US worldviews and neocolonial assumptions about this country’s make-up and position in the world. The world is divided ideologically into people ‘like us’ and those who are not. The paper suggests that this imagined geography is becoming more entrenched as ‘softer’ news values predominate.

Chris Harris
The Myth of Abundance: Transport Technology and Spatial Political Economy in New Zealand—From Public Networks to Private Tools

A widespread myth of abundant space and resources in Anglophone New World societies has tended to favour individualistic, even atomistic, perspectives in economics. On the other hand, closer spatial settlement in Europe has tended to favour a plan-coordination image of the economy, in which there is a more subtle dialectic of individual freedom and social predictability. Because the underlying image of the economy is fundamentally mixed and dialectical in this system, stressing both freedom and predictability, plan-coordination protects state railway enterprise from charges of excessive rigidity and crowding out of private enterprise in road haulage and land speculation. Ironically, the actually settled parts of the New World resemble Europe more than they do their own ‘back blocks’. But the myth of abundance persists, because it serves the purpose of disguising growing spatial rents due to the closure of the frontier.

In the long run it is likely that Anglophone economic discourse will evolve in a plan-coordination direction, at the expense of speculative interests. This may come about in the context of forthcoming oil crisis, which the myth of abundance currently serves to deny. Ironically, an important base of the latest, longest and largest land boom of all time is the recycling of petrodollars printed to pay for oil imports to the United States, where domestic production has been in decline since 1970. When the global peak arrives, it may not be possible to revive the myth of abundance any further, with the result that the plan-coordination paradigm does finally succeed in the Anglo-World. These issues are illustrated by a detailed historical account of the politics of urban transport and suburban development in twentieth-century New Zealand.

Dr Ruth Zanker
The New Zealand Broadcasting School, Christchurch Polytechnic Institute of Technology

Producing civic media spaces for New Zealand children: the good and bad news

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child grants children media rights, both in terms of culturally appropriate and diverse media reception, and in terms of active media agency. When New Zealand signed the convention it was obligated to provide children and young people with access to range and diversity of media content as well as, equally importantly, to provide a place for children to be heard on matters of concern to them.

The Convention is also an ambiguous document. Article 12 treats children as citizens, thus admitting them into ‘the public sphere’. It also extends the sphere of children’s welfare into the media. But Article 13 which states ‘freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers…through any media of the child’s choice’ and has been used to argue that children are empowered agents, especially in terms of their preferences within consumer culture. These contradictions are central to debates over children’s media provision in New Zealand.
What happens then to the culturally specific and geographically specific public spheres for children? This question has urgency in New Zealand where public television broadcasting and funding models are in crisis. The paper uses production case studies to explore national children’s producers as critical cultural agents and who amplify children’s voices and concerns in New Zealand. It also asserts that current broadcasting policy may put children’s production in jeopardy.

Andrew Chrystall  
School of Communication, Journalism and Marketing at Massey University

Deleting Common Sense
Astronauts of the 1960s survived by insulating themselves against the cold, silent, vacuum of outer space and taking their environment with them. Today, portable and programmable sensory environments—mobile media—analogous to those of the astronaut, are cheap and ubiquitous consumer goods. Mobile media afford their users freedom from the constraints and restrictions of enclosed space(s), desk-top computing, and enable them to roam nomadically. Mobile media can, however, also insulate just as effectively as an astronaut’s suit.

The spaces between iPod peoples, for example, is as silent as outer space and there is, frequently, only tangential overlap between one individual’s lattice of sensory experience and another. This paper uses idea of the public sphere, as an anti-environment, to shed light on this situation. It suggests that one of the disservices of mobile media is they are deleting the “common” from common sense, community, and communication.

Michael Galvin  
University of South Australia

Christine Lim  
Auckland University of Technology

The role of “non-political” entities in the democratic processes of the civil sphere: an investigative case study
On 20th July 2010, the New Zealand government backed down on its plans to mine conservation land in the face of widespread public protest. In a news item on national television later that night, Dennis Tegg, spokesperson for a group called the Coromandel Watchdog, described the event as ‘democracy in action’. In a keynote address at the 2010 ANZCA Conference, John Keane observed that the spirit, language and mechanism of monitoring power are penetrating non-governmental domains. The term ‘monitory democracy’ is introduced in Keane’s 2009 book, The Life and Death of Democracy.
This paper combines Keane’s notion of monitory democracy with Jeffrey Alexander’s (2006) concept of civil society as a civil sphere, with the latter concept defined as ‘a world of values and institutions that generates the capacity for social criticism and democratic integration at the same time’ (Alexander, 2006, p.40). The New Zealand government’s decision to mine land that belongs in dedicated conservation zones quickly became a major issue in the civil sphere. This paper examines three such civil society organisations, namely, Greenpeace New Zealand, Forest and Bird, and Coromandel Watchdog and the role they played as active platforms for protest and political expression of the anti-mining issue in New Zealand. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) will be used to analyse how these organizations used the new media and the internet to create public awareness and to mobilize public support that culminated in one of the largest protest marches in New Zealand’s history, and the subsequent back down from the government.

Mike Grimshaw
School of Social & Political Sciences
University of Canterbury

“On canaries, icebergs and the public sphere. Towards a rethought “realistic cosmopolitanism”

The return of religion in western society has resulted in the expression of what is often termed post-secular socio-politics, closely linked to increasingly pluralistic societies that result from globalization. While the public sphere has, in the West, tended to follow a ‘WASP’- derived model of post-Westphalian secular public sphere and the privatization of religion, this model is increasingly under critique and complaint. How might pluralism and the expression of religion be re-thought and re-encountered?

This paper, engaging with the work of Ulrich Beck (2004) on “realistic cosmopolitanism” argues for a more localised, urbanised approach and understanding. The public sphere is actually a series of everyday pragmatic engagements and experiences that require a more nuanced evaluation. Critiquing the utopian agendas of much cosmopolitan theory, this paper ask two questions: Firstly, what can the return of religion tell us about late modern society? Secondly, what changes may be necessary to re-engage (with) pluralistic public spheres – and societies?

Steve Edwards
School of Communication Studies, Auckland University of Technology

Casino Capitalism: The Global Gambling Game for the Greedy, the Guileless, and the Grandiose!

The current Global Financial Crisis has revealed deep contradictions about capitalism. The narrative that became entrenched in the elite news media was that the world faced a “global financial meltdown.” Yet, did government authorities really rescue the financial system or did bailing out “too big to fail” banks simply delay a “day of reckoning”? This
paper explores financial capitalism, which heightens the allocative power of finance to transform the existing capitalist market system upon which it is based. I employ oligarchy theory, which is the study of super-rich people who use their economic power to influence political processes.

The paper therefore argues that the financial crisis is an episode in economic warfare, in which global-scale banks use the new purchasing power of the bailout monies to buy up the fallen cheaply. Meanwhile, debt-entrapped households had their purchasing power further stripped by a hidden tax – inflation – because the money supply expanded again.

Pip Mules
School of Communication Studies,
Auckland University of Technology

Prejudice, Public Relations and Social Media: the Cadbury New Zealand palm oil debate.
Social media is frequently proclaimed as an exemplar of democratic communication. From this perspective a growing array of interpersonal feedback loops serve to counterbalance top down, asymmetric communication practices. In my view such proclamations exude extreme and unfounded digital optimism. Instead of reasoned dialogue where communicators work towards a shared understanding, online fora foreground shrill self-confessed ranters who air their prejudices and attack opponents. This paper considers this proposition in the context of the communication that occurred on social media sites when Cadbury New Zealand attempted to introduce palm oil into their dairy milk chocolate in 2009.

Ruth Irwin
AUT university

Pessimistic Realism and Optimistic Skepticism
Bad news sells newspapers – but not if its toooo bad. Climate change has been remarkably slow to come to the public attention. Once it did, the popular media tended to remain half hearted about whether it was ‘true’ or not for a very long time. They did this by ‘fair’ reporting, which showed ‘both sides’ of the debate; pessimistic realism and optimistic climate skeptics. In this paper I want to show how this bifurcated view of the debate is far too simplistic. It is my analysis that despite the attempt to show ‘opposite views’ the science and the sceptics of climate change actually both reside within just one school of thought.

Part of the problem is the lack of time for reporters to actually understand and research climate change with any depth. And part of the problem is that the news is too disturbing
for absorption by reporters and public alike. The paper looks at the role of the public media, and how present ownership regime limits its potential.

Saing Te
Postgraduate student,
School of Communication Studies,
AUT University

Establishing the frame: Solid Energy and the battle for Happy Valley
This paper explores the ways in which Solid Energy has constructed and positioned the Cypress Mine project. It aims to mark where the social order was at the time and how it arrived there. Using public sphere critique and critical discourse analysis it spotlights Solid Energy’s domination of the social and political spheres.

Many will have heard that coal mining today has nothing in common with its dark and exploitative past. Some like Solid Energy would argue that coal today is “clean” and that it is the future of energy. In a marginalised region like the West Coast the locals would tend to agree. They believe mining will lead to the reduction of unemployment figures and restore some of the commercial activity lost in the region. While environmentalists would agree that mining can be beneficial to the local economy and that mining operations today are vastly different from those of a century ago, they argue that the cost of mining to the environment is still too high. In this context, I will examine each side of the debate and consider how it was been represented to the public.

Some may view the battle over the Cypress Mine project as a tale of David and Goliath, or Big Business versus tree hugging hippies, or a classic example of urban greenies versus local communities. However, you choose to view it, almost everyone can agree that there are situations in which economic development and environmental protection are incompatible and a choice will have to be made.

Rosser Johnson
Head of Postgraduate Studies, School of Communication Studies, AUT University

Hypercommercial speech on New Zealand Free to Air Television: mapping the field
As a result of the neo-liberal “reforms” of the 1980s, free-to-air television in New Zealand was reconstituted along market lines: the state broadcaster was reconstituted as a state owned enterprise; New Zealand on Air entrenched Peacock’s funder / provider split; and audiences encountered ever-increasing levels of commercial speech. This paper focuses on the ways in which broadcasters increased advertising, sponsored programming and infomercials on New Zealand screens during the key decade 1994-2003. It argues that the demarcation between “advertising” and “editorial” content became blurred to the point where commercial speech and paid programming became the norm within particular genres. Further, it will map the extent of such forms of broadcasting and quantify their presence on mainstream television. Finally, it will
discuss the implications for these developments have for viewer’s lived experiences within the public sphere.

Matt Mollgaard  
Curriculum Leader, Radio, School of Communication Studies, AUT University

The case of Kiwi FM: International capital and New Zealand radio
Australian private equity investor Ironbridge Capital owns New Zealand’s largest broadcasting operation, Mediaworks. The company produces four commercial television channels and nine commercial radio networks nationwide, including a radio network, Kiwi FM, that only plays New Zealand music in the three main centres (Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch) on extremely valuable radio frequencies that have been gifted to Mediaworks by the New Zealand government in order to promote New Zealand music.

Kiwi FM is a commercial failure with a tiny audience and very little appeal for advertisers. In fact, the network survives mostly by generating government grants for New Zealand music promotion and by giving away advertising as part of packages of radio networks sold to advertisers.

The broader issues of media ownership and the deregulation and privatisation of national media systems as well as the impact of private equity on open media markets can be extrapolated from a relatively innocuous example such as the Kiwi FM case. This paper argues that disinterested international equity is not able to protect and enhance unique national media systems and that the ownership conundrum that New Zealand media is mired in is a critical lesson for other national media economies.

Olivier Jutel

Barack Obama’s Civil Society Politics and the Populist Resistance
The election of Barack Obama corresponding with the implosion of the neo-liberal world order of finance represented a dramatic return of history as attempts are made to forge the new consensus of global capitalism. The financial crisis has come to represent the culmination of Third Way neo-liberalism with Obama’s campaign rhetoric embodying the redemptive promise of a civil society movement. Obama’s biography and online apparatus offered all the utopian discourse of a new media, wiki-inspired, grass-roots democratic logic that comprehensively eclipsed the anti-capitalist left. Resistance to Obama’s vision of a reconciled America, leading the moral correction of capitalism, has come in the form of a right wing populist campaign of delegitimization. Openly embracing antagonism and feasting on the contradictions of Obama, the Randian free market populists have counterposed the voluntarist, privatized approach to politics while presenting themselves as the only working class alternative to actually existing neo-liberalism.