

13 —

14 Nov
2014

RMIT Lecture Theatre,
Building 9, Level 1,
Room 24.

SYM POS IUM

JOURNALISM AND DEMOCRACY Abundance and Decadence

ORGANIZED BY:

Communication, Politics & Culture Research Centre (CPC)
in association with the Non-Fiction Lab Research Group
and Journalism @ RMIT

SYM POS IUM

JOURNALISM AND DEMOCRACY Abundance and Decadence

WE ARE ENMESHED IN A COMMUNICATIVE ABUNDANCE.

THIS COMMUNICATIVE ABUNDANCE HAS FUNDAMENTALLY
CHANGED THE LANDSCAPE OF EVERYDAY LIFE, AND
POLITICAL PRACTICE, FUELLING A NEW GROWTH OF
MONITORY DEMOCRACY.

HOWEVER, THIS COMMUNICATIVE ABUNDANCE HAS ITS
COUNTER IN COMMUNICATIVE DECADENCE THAT WEAKENS
THE SPIRIT AND SUBSTANCE OF DEMOCRACY.

Keynote speakers

PROFESSOR JOHN KEANE

Professor Keane is Professor of Politics at the University of Sydney and at the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin (WZB). He is the co-founder of the Sydney Democracy Network. During his many years living in Europe, *The Times* ranked him one of Britain's leading political thinkers and writers whose work has "world-wide importance" and The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) has described him as "one of Australia's great intellectual exports". Renowned globally for his creative thinking about democracy, John Keane is the author of several books including *Democracy and media decadence* (Cambridge, 2013), *The Life and Death of Democracy* (W.W Norton & Company, 2009).

ANTONY LOEWENSTEIN

Antony is an independent Australian journalist, author, blogger and documentarian. He is the author of three bestselling books, *My Israel Question*, *The Blogging Revolution* and *Profits of Doom: How Vulture Capitalism is Swallowing the World*. He's a weekly columnist for *The Guardian* and has written for *The Nation*, *Huffington Post*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *New Matilda*, *Haaretz* and other prominent publications. He is a Research Associate at the University of Technology's Australian Centre for Independent Journalism.

DR SUELETTE DREYFUS

Dr Dreyfus is an Australian-American technology journalist and researcher, and author of the 1997 cult classic *Underground: Hacking, Madness and Obsession on the Electronic Frontier*. The book describes the exploits of a group of Australian, American, and British hackers during the late 1980s and early 1990s, among them Julian Assange, who is credited as researcher for the book. In 2011, a new edition of the book was published, with updated chapters. *Underground* has been translated into seven other languages. Dr Dreyfus was also associate producer for the documentary *In the Realm of the Hackers*, inspired by *Underground*, in 2003.

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JOURNALISM AND DEMOCRACY
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NOV 13
Thursday

5:30 – 6:30pm

Symposium Launch & keynote address by Professor John Keane

6:30 – 7:30pm

Panel Discussion with Antony Loewenstein, Dr Suelette Dreyfus, & Professor John Keane. This panel will be moderated by Associate Professor Chris Hudson, Co-Director of RMIT Communication, Politics & Culture Research Centre (CPC).

NOV 14
Friday

9:00 – 9:30am

Welcome day 2 and breakfast, Building 9, Level 4.

9:30 – 10:30am

"Media decadence and The Australian's postmodern mid-life crisis" by Associate Professor Martin Hirst, Deakin University; talk moderated by Associate Professor Cathy Greenfield, Co-Director of RMIT Communication, Politics & Culture Research Centre (CPC)

Summary talk

Rupert Murdoch's national broadsheet *The Australian* has always reflected key facets of its owner's larger-than-life personality. Like Murdoch, the newspaper claims to be iconoclastic an enemy of hypocrisy and cant and a challenger of establishment orthodoxy. Over the first 50 years of its life, *The Australian* has championed both Labor and Liberal-National Party governments and,

at times, it has supported unpopular causes. However, as Rupert Murdoch has aged and his wealth grown, on the fat profits of taken from a global media empire, his views have also shifted decidedly to the far right of the political spectrum.

Biography speaker

A former journalist, Dr Martin Hirst is the author of *News 2.0: Can journalism survive the Internet* and the co-author of *Journalism Ethics: Arguments & Cases and Communication & New Media: From broadcast to narrowcast*. He is co-editor of *Scooped: The politics and power of journalism in Aotearoa New Zealand*. He is co-convenor of the Governance, Media & Democracy research group, in the Centre for Citizenship & Globalization

10.30 – 11.00am
Morning tea in building 9, level 4

11:00 – 12:00pm

"Representations of media 'abundance' in the early 20th century: an analysis of Napier Waller's Newspaper House Mosaic" by Dr Josie Vine, Lecturer (Journalism), RMIT University; talk moderated by Gordon Farrer, Lecturer (Journalism) RMIT University

Summary talk

Professor John Keane has told us in his keynote address that we are living in an age of media "abundance", where advances in digital technology have allowed unprecedented levels of participatory – or in Keane's words, "monitory" – democracy. And yet, Keane foresees how we, in our self-indulgence, could be allowing this new abundance of media technology to mask a much more insidious reality, in which communications promote intolerance of opinion, restriction of public scrutiny of power and we – like the Marxist concept of the "passive dupe" – are blindly folding to the way things are heading.

Biography speaker

Dr Vine's research interests are in Journalism history and culture. She is currently working on a joint project with Dr Carole O'Reilly from Salford University, looking at the urban semiotics of newsrooms before the digital era.

12:00 – 1:00pm

"A tale of two laws" by Matthew Ricketson, Professor of Journalism at the University of Canberra; talk moderated by Peter Clarke, Lecturer (Journalism) RMIT University

Summary talk

In 2014 the federal Coalition government, with the support of the Labor opposition, succeeded in getting legislation passed about national security that prohibits media coverage of designated special intelligence operations. Breaking this law could result in a gaol sentence up to 10 years. Since the legislation was passed it has been criticised by several journalists and editorialised against by some newspapers. Before the legislation was passed however, there had been little coverage of the bill or its implications.

Biography speaker

Matthew Ricketson is an academic and journalist. Appointed in 2009 as the inaugural professor of journalism at the University of Canberra, he was Media and Communications editor for *The Age* before that, from mid-2006 to early 2009. He ran the Journalism program at RMIT for 11 years and has worked on staff at *The Australian*, *Time Australia* magazine and *The Sunday Herald*, among other publications. He is the author of *Telling True Stories: Navigating the challenges of writing narrative non-fiction*, *Australian Journalism Today*, *The Best Australian Profiles*, and *Writing Feature Stories*

1:00 – 2:00pm
Lunch in building 9, level 4

1:15pm Screening documentary *'Breaking the News'* (53 min, 2011) Building 9, Level 1, Room 24

2:00 – 3: 00pm

"Managing political discourse in Singapore through legislative instruments and action in Singapore from 1965 to 2011" by Terry Johal, RMIT University; talk moderated by Associate Professor Chris Hudson – Co-Director of RMIT Communication, Politics & Culture Research Centre (CPC)

Summary talk

This talk examines how the state in Singapore has managed political discourse through its use of legislative instruments and actions since independence in 1965 to the most recent General Election in 2011. This allows the examination of the state's strategies of the management of the political discourse starting from a non-networked, localized, and institutional mass media environment, to a highly networked, globalized and user-generated digital media environment. This talk posits that while early uses of legislative instruments and actions tended to be blunt and dramatic, the recent uses are both sophisticated and bureaucracy driven.

Biography speaker

Terry Johal is a Lecturer in the School of Media and Communication at RMIT University, Melbourne. His research interests include digital communication technologies and their use in political and cultural practices. He is a PhD candidate.

3:00 – 4:00pm

"The Arab media in an era of news decadence"
By Dr Saba Bebawi; talk moderated by Antony Lowestein, journalist, author, blogger and documentarian

This talk will question the theme of the symposium 'media abundance and media decadence' in light of the growth of investigative journalism in the Arab world. Specific to my area of research, I will discuss whether in fact there is an media abundance, and in turn media decadence in this region,

specifically post 'Arab Spring' uprisings. Prior to the Arab Spring, the media were mainly state-controlled and the practice of investigative reporting, which aims to 'dig deeper' and uncover facts on various issues of concern, was regarded as taboo. Commercial media enterprises sought to steer away from social and political issues and focus more on entertainment as a safer option, since it was also an area that yielded larger financial return.

Biography speaker

Dr Bebawi is a journalism and media researcher who has published on the role of media in democracy building, and media power. She holds a PhD on the topic of international news and alternative representation from the University of Melbourne, an MA research on media policy for community radio from Queensland University of Technology (QUT), and an MA in Communications from Monash University. Saba has practical experience as both a broadcast and print journalist within Australia and internationally since 1995. She is co-editor of the book *Social Media and the Politics of Reportage: The Arab Spring*.

4:00 – 4:30pm
Afternoon tea

4:30 – 5:30pm

"In Conversation with the media in the era of media decadence." Conversation moderated by John Keane, Professor of Politics at the University of Sydney, and with the participation of Erik Jensen, Editor of *The Saturday Newspaper*; Misha Ketchell Managing editor, *The Conversation* and Asher Wolf, journalist, internaut, information activist and gonzo political theorist

5:30–7:00pm

"The politics of literary journalism in an era of media abundance and decadence" panel moderated by Sian Prior, RMIT Non-Fiction Lab, writer, broadcaster and author of *Shy: a memoir*.

Biography panelists

Dr Matthew Thompson

Dr Thompson is the best-known "gonzo" journalist in Australia. Matthew is the author of *Running with the Blood God* and *My Colombian Death* (2013 and 2008 from Picador). A University Medallist in English accidentally turned Sydney Morning Herald reporter, Dr Thompson grew dissatisfied with the predominantly formulaic and constrained nature of conventional journalism. He took to in-depth reportage, at first as a freelancer in his spare time, exploring the Muslim insurgencies of the southern Philippines, and then resigning from the newspaper in order to spend several months in Colombia, where – as recounted in his first book – he explored the volatile street life of a substantially paramilitarised society while grappling with the relationship between risk and authenticity. Inspired by Sigmund Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents* and Friedrich's Nietzsche's concept of the free spirit, Dr Thompson's second book is an immersive, gritty, multi-country exploration of people who shove back against society's limits.

Kevin Childs

Kevin is the author of eight books, been an editor, screenwriter, media consultant, taught media law and now lectures in literary journalism at RMIT University. He has been in and around journalism all his life writing for 13 newspapers, including the New York Times and the London Guardian. He was media adviser to the Victorian Law Institute where he wrote speeches of welcome and farewell for judges and until recently edited the high standard quarterly, the Australian Rationalist. For many years Kevin was a senior writer with The Age where he created and wrote the daily News Diary column after which he became editor of the Sunday Observer, then owned by the late eccentric millionaire Gordon Barton.

Dr Christopher Kremmer

Dr Kremmer is an author, journalist, novelist, broadcaster, teacher and communications and publishing consultant. He has served as ABC South Asia Correspondent, ABC Vietnam Correspondent and as South Asia Correspondent for The Sydney Morning Herald and The Age. A three-time finalist at the Walkley Awards for Australian journalism, he was elected president of the Foreign Correspondents' Association of South Asia, and is the author of four non-fiction books on the history, politics and culture of Asian nations including India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Laos. He later served as a member of the lead editorial writing team at The Sydney Morning Herald, as Communications Manager at the Australia India Institute, and as an editorial advisory board member of the Melbourne University Magazine. His doctoral thesis explored truth claims in historical fiction.

Dr Antonio Castillo

Dr Castillo is a Latin American journalist and he is the Director of Journalism at RMIT University. As a journalist he has worked in news wire services, magazines, newspapers and radio. In Australia Antonio has worked for SBS and ABC. He has written for a number of publications including *The Guardian*, *New Matilda*, *Eureka Street* and *The Diplomat*. Antonio is the author of Journalism in the *Chilean Transition to Democracy: The last Decade* and He is the co-author of *Cosmopolitan Sydney and Looking both Ways – Western Sydney and the Media*. In his previous life he wrote *Undesirable Witnesses*, an account of young journalists working under the military regime of General Pinochet in Chile. He is currently researching a book on journalism, exile and memory. Antonio is a founding editor of Global Media Journal.

7:00pm

Close symposium

Soirée at Captain Melville.
34 Franklin Street - Ph: (03) 9663 6855
<http://www.captainmelville.com.au/>

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Thank you to those who have helped us bring you this symposium.