Editorial: In Transition

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Volume 45 of Communication, Politics & Culture marks a significant transition, for two reasons: a change in editorial leadership, and a change in our mode of publishing.

Cathy Greenfield has stepped aside from the role of General Editor, which she has held since the mid-1990s, to pursue other goals. Her tireless work has been instrumental in transforming the role and profile of Communication, Politics & Culture, from a literary journal—although one which was always steadfastly interdisciplinary—to one which now engages specifically with genealogical and governmental approaches to communication and politics, with a focus on the role of media and other communication technologies in the broad and formative government of specific populations.

Cathy’s generous intellect, her determined work ethic, and her keen sense of the craft of publishing have been to the advantage of everyone involved in Communication, Politics & Culture. Fortunately for me, she is now a member of the Advisory Board.

At the same time, a number of long-standing members of the Editorial Committee—Julian Thomas, Denise Meredyth, Peter Williams and Mary Griffiths—have also stepped sideways to the Advisory Board. Their efforts over many years as strong supporters of the aims and aspirations of the journal, and also as guest theme editors, have been very much appreciated.

Just as significant a marker of transition is our adoption of an Open Access publishing model. From Volume 45, all works published in Communication, Politics & Culture are freely available to readers with an Internet connection. We no longer produce a printed edition, although we do retain some of the conventions of traditional paper-based publishing (e.g. page numbers are included in downloadable PDFs to enable accurate traceable referencing).

Copyright for material published here continues to be owned by its authors—this has always been the case in this journal—but the adoption of a Creative Commons license streamlines the conditions of re-use.

It is routine in journal publishing to announce such a change through a more or less populist proclamation of scholarly freedom, a call to ‘break free’ from one or other perceived constraints of the past. To be honest, we knew our decision was risky, and we remain uncertain about whether our gamble with Open Access will pay off, and that we will indeed continue to publish. No Pollyanna here!

I say this because Open Access is not ‘free’. Just as much voluntary labour is embodied in the production of an Open Access journal, perhaps even more, as there is in other business models. In my view, a message of freedom here would therefore be disingenuous, and a more realistic note to sound is simply a registration of some elements of the current situation we find ourselves in.

The decision to move away from a subscription model was a choice made on the basis that Open Access was an available strategy we could adopt to satisfy our desire to be more visible to digital readers who baulk at pay walls, and to reach new authors.
by offering a shortened submission-review-publication cycle. We formulated these objectives as we watched journal subscription systems tighten around the interests of the commercial titans of academic publishing. But there was never one singular ‘ah-ha!’ moment where everything became clear, rather a long and sometimes fraught series of announcements, reflections, procrastinations and confusions.

In one sense, our decision was also a non-choice, forced by a meeting of financial and architectural imperatives beyond our control. We were faced by a declining number of institutional subscriptions post the GFC, which almost halved our print run. Sometime in the late 2000s, numerous library decision makers—already busily reformatting their floor space for digitally equipped users—responded to the impact of the financial crisis by further reducing their spending on print-based journals, including ours.

But we cannot and should not ‘blame’ libraries. They are as much caught up by forces beyond their control, as are editorial committees and advisory boards like ours. Journal publishing stands at a complex political, economic and cultural crossroads. We all face a range of overlapping dilemmas brought on by the drive to place the activities of research and teaching on a more market-like footing. That drive comes into focus in a number of different ways: e.g. urgings to compete for new forms of funding to supplement traditional (and ever declining) state support; the requirement to respond to new business-like performance instruments that try to make our activities more visible, measureable, and governable; and of course the seemingly continuous rhetorical incitement that we ‘leverage’ our ‘investment’ in research by addressing our work to new audiences through a range of new social media forums.

In any case, we are all caught up, repeatedly and distractingly, trying to decide whether and how to engage with the conditions of financially chastened, increasingly commercialised and communicatively saturated scholarly work. This is the context of our decision to adopt an Open Access format and business model, and the artefact you are reading now is the current version/outcome of that process. It was not a simple decision to make, nor a straightforward thing to bring about, and the future is not at all certain. Nevertheless, this is the path we are now on.

So let me now introduce the content of Volume 45. We commence with three general articles (Mickler, Coghlan, King), a themed section comprising five papers drawn from a 2011 conference on media, communication and democracy (introduced by Štetka & Örnebring), and two book reviews.

In ‘Blame liberals: Conservative columnists and the GFC in Australia and Canada’, Steve Mickler provides a deconstructionist reading of the work of a selection of conservative newspaper columnists, in Australia and Canada, on the causes of the GFC. This is a particularly useful read for anyone interested in the role of media in the strategic game of politics.

Mickler explores the rhetorical moves made by columnists like Albrechtsen, Henderson, Foster and Corcoran, who he says blamed liberal commentators and regulators for the credit crisis of 2008-2009, in a way that worked to mask their earlier contributions to calls for deregulation of banking and finance. This, he suggests, is at the core of ‘the contradiction in neo-liberal free-marketism and “warfare Keynesianism”: having previously supported deregulation, these columnists now worked to construct the causes of collapse as ‘interference’ by liberal agents...
external to the market. This is a game made all the more awkward by their continued refusal of ‘the possibility of systemic market failure owing to unregulated pursuit of private interest because the market’s supposedly auto-regulatory “invisible hand” is imagined almost as a supernatural force and assumed to be infallible’. Mickler reminds us of one of the key ingredients of a neoliberal approach to the communication of economic life, namely that ‘the economy’ is naturalised as a discrete system, which human agents—governments, in particular—are then warned not to tamper with.

Jo Coghlan focuses also on journalism and politics, but shifts our attention to ‘episodic framing’ devices used by journalists in English-language news coverage of politics in post-Suharto Indonesia. In ‘Reporting Megawati’s bid for the Indonesian presidency: Framing and social realities’, Coghlan presents an analysis of a substantial sample of news reports published during 1998-1999, and argues that episodic framing (i.e. a portrayal of events and issues as unfolding, without any sense of wider social, political or cultural context) compromised public knowledge of Megawati outside Indonesia, focusing readers’ attention on Indonesia as occupying a ‘state of crisis’, with Megawati as its likely saviour.

Noel King’s interview with Mick Counihan is one of a number of interviews compiled for an ARC-funded project on the emergence of film studies in Australian universities. King—and co-researchers Deane Williams and Constantine Verevis—have considered the conditions of the emergence and consolidation of film studies during the period 1975-1985. This decade saw a number of people depart the then-dominant intellectual formations such as English, History and Sociology, in order to pursue a teaching, research and writing in film and (later) television studies. As King notes in his short introduction, his interview with Counihan overlaps with but also differs from other interviewees’ accounts (including the one given by Ian Hunter, published in Volume 41 of Communication, Politics & Culture), and in this sense the various interviews generated by the project can be seen as being in dialogue with one another.

Vaclav Štětka & Henrik Örnebring introduce the first section of themed papers for Volume 45 by noting that contemporary studies of media and democracy need to take account of a set of enduring issues, including political and economic pressures on journalistic freedom, concentration and conglomeramation of media industries, commercialisation and tabloidisation, and ongoing political pressures on the independence of public service. They make this point to suggest that ‘the relationship between democracy and mediated communication remains complex and internally diverse’. In turn, this was the rationale that informed Media, Communication and Democracy: Global and National Environments, a conference held in September 2011, jointly organised by the School of Media and Communication at RMIT University and the Media and Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe Project based at the University of Oxford. Five papers were selected from the conference, presenting a selection of cases covering Australia, Asia, the Pacific, and Eastern Europe. Many thanks to Vaclav and Henrik for their work in editing this collection, and to Cathy Greenfield, Stephanie Hemelryk Donald, Jan Zielonka and Bruce Wilson for laying the groundwork for the conference.
Finally, Akina Mikami reviews Nick Couldry's *Why Voice Matters: Culture and Politics after Neoliberalism* and Alanna Myers reviews Julie Doyle's *Mediating Climate Change*.

Volume 45 will continue with the release in December of a short series of articles on governmental dynamics pertaining to diplomatic, economic, political, media and cultural exchanges with, and within China, edited by Mary Griffiths and Ying Jiang (University of Adelaide).

**Notes**

1. For example Lingard (2012) asserts that Open Access will free journal publishing 'from the ghetto of academic library subscriptions...[and] will foster discussion and impact'. He claims that 'open access articles are cited more frequently than their locked-up counterparts', and then goes on to suggest that the 'gold' model of Open Access publishing 'offers one solution to the questions of guaranteeing access and ensuring impact'. Lingard's claims are slightly misleading. The 'gold' model he proclaims generally requires payment by authors to ensure publication, while 'green' refers to self-archiving in institutional repositories. Public debate about the Finch Committee's report on scholarly publishing in the UK have turned this distinction. It doesn't take long to dig into the fine print of the website run by the company (CoAction Publishing) that publishes the journal promoted in Lingard's posting (*Research in Learning Technologies*), to find statements about publication fees. That particular journal does not charge authors, but a number of others published by CoAction do charge fees of just over €800 for articles up to eight pages long. This is not the place to exhaustively explain these distinctions, but it is important to bear in mind that somewhere in between these 'gold' and 'green' models of Open Access lies an institutionally supported form of publishing—where internal grants and an assortment of different forms of labour-in-kind support the activities of editorial committees—which this journal now works with.

2. A moment that comes close to qualifying for 'ah-ha!' was our realisation that if we were to contract with a large publisher they would require our frequency of publication to increase from twice yearly to five times a year, in order to guarantee profitability.

**References**