

- EDITORIAL -

Issue 15.2: New Zealand Mediascapes

Kevin Fisher and John Farnsworth

This collection of essays, co-edited by Kevin Fisher and John Farnsworth represents the first 'open call' issue of *MEDIANZ: Media Studies Journal of Aotearoa New Zealand* since its name was changed from *The New Zealand Journal of Media Studies* by a reconstituted editorial board in 2013. In keeping with the journal's new stated mission of being 'international in scope yet regional in its commitment', the call for papers for Issue 15.2 was cast broadly along the theme of 'New Zealand Mediascapes,' reflecting Arjun Appadurai's (1990) seminal articulation of 'mediascapes' as intersectional sites of tension between the global and the regional produced through the mediatization of cultural, social, economic and political spheres.

The four essays address a diversity of topics: the mediatization of the 2014 election in radio, television and newspapers (Rupar et al.); the complexities of public-private partnerships through online applications in relation to the Canterbury earthquake recovery (Bourk et al.); the 'third way' debates around the formation of the radio station KiwiFM (Mollgaard); and the role of media personalities on television (specifically Annabel Langbein—*The Free Range Cook*) in practices of neoliberal self-governance (Reid). Respectively, the articles also showcase a range of media research methodologies: content analysis, narrative and discourse analysis, and interviews. The themes of neoliberalism and the contemporary transformation of the media, refracted across all four essays, are also addressed in Brett Nicholl's review article of Sean Phelan's *Neoliberalism, Media and the Political* (Palgrave Macmillan 2014) and Emma Mesikämmen's review of Graeme Turner's *Re-Inventing the Media* (Routledge 2016).

In the first essay, 'Diversity, Inclusivity and the News: Coverage of the 2014 New Zealand General Election', Verica Rupar, Thomas Owen and Sarah Barker take issue with both the Key Government's claims to 'inclusivity' and the media portrayal of this as

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an exceptional election, marked by scandal, surprise and the extraordinary influence of minor parties. Through a content analysis of election coverage on RNZ National, TVNZ and *The New Zealand Herald*, they argue that the veneer of inclusivity and exceptionality conceals ‘a traditional status quo—dominated by male, white, major party, affluent voices, in a media gaze consumed with political process over political issues’. The authors point out how these structuring biases are corrosive to the avowed function of the media in promoting public forums for debate and ‘discursive pluralism’ within New Zealand’s self-conception as a liberal democracy.

The articles by Bourk, et al. and Mollgaard are each, in different ways, concerned with the fate of public-private partnerships within the rise of neoliberal governmentality and ‘free market’ rhetorics.

In their essay “‘Because we are in an emergency situation, we are unable to meet with you’: A crisis of a crisis commons during the 2011 Christchurch Earthquake’, Michael Bourk, Kate Holland and Warwick Blood focus on the Christchurch Recovery Map (CRM), an online interactive tool developed by citizen-volunteers. Based on the concept of a crisis commons, the CRM relied upon input from social network users contributing local knowledge of the disaster site. Through interviews with a key developer of the CRM, citizen-users, and government officials, the authors argue that central agencies were less able to correctly anticipate the specific types of information required by residents in particular locations. Over the objections of government officials that information posted on the CRM was not always reliable, Bourk et al. cite research in risk communication. This argues that it is more critical to inform citizens about uncertainties than to leave an ‘information vacuum’ or project a level of certainty that doesn’t exist. The study also explores how the experience of the CRM challenges criteria of expertise, and underscores the need for more flexible hierarchies of information flow and scaled involvement between centralized agencies and citizens in the age of social media.

Public-private models of support for creative industries are the central concern of Matt Mollgaard’s essay ‘Pop, Power and Politics: Kiwi FM and the “Third Way” in New Zealand’. Grounded in research from his recent Ph.D thesis, it presents an analysis of news coverage, documents and communications among key industry and government players. Mollgaard traces the complicated history of Kiwi FM from 2005 to its closure in 2015 as it mutated from a failing private commercial radio station focused on New Zealand music, to a state-supported partnership under the last Labour and National Governments. The analysis is discussed within the context of questions regarding the role of government in supporting ‘national culture’ and ‘creative industries’; and against the background of considerations of the function of the popular within cultural studies and critical theory.

In the fourth article, Donald Reid reads Annabel Langbein's *Free Range Cook* as exemplary of the ascendance of neo-liberal ideology and 'class aspirationalism' within the reality TV and lifestyle genres. He describes how this gets articulated within the New Zealand context as an unattainable and idealized version of rural life in the face of an increasingly urbanised society and casualised labour force. Within the context of Foucault's analysis of self-governance, the essay analyses Langbein's role as 'celebrity-expert' in terms of her negotiation of these contradictions, and compares its ideological function to that of similar shows in the UK and Australia.

Brett Nicholls' review article of Sean Phelan's *Neoliberalism, Media and the Political* explores a central question of the book that is relevant, with different inflections, for all the essays here, namely: why established news media rarely question neoliberalism? Nicholls outlines Phelan's explanation of how the very principles and professional practices of journalism—its 'habitus'—have appropriated (and been co-opted within) the anti-ideological and post-political discourses of neo-liberalism. Nicholls contextualizes Phelan's argument within broader theoretical discussions of the 'post-political situation', and describes the book's analysis of its implications globally and within a New Zealand context through a number of case studies. Finally, in her review of Graeme Turner's *Re-Inventing the Media*, Emma Mesikämnen picks up on the book's key theme of how the 'reinvention of media' has changed its relation to the nation state and to celebrity in the shift from information to entertainment within the context of neoliberalism.

References

Appadurai, Arjun. 1990. 'Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy'. *Theory, Culture & Society* 7: 295-310.