

**Union for Democratic Communications: Circuits of Struggle  
Toronto, ON**

**ABSTRACTS: Sunday, May 3**

**10:30-11:45 am Panel session 8**

**8a. The Financialization of Documentary, Documenting Financialization: Activist Cultural Production in an Age of Speculative Capital**

**Max Haiven and Ezra Winton**

This workshop brings into alignment two recent trends and explores their bearing on the prospects for the struggle over democratic communication. On the one hand, the past few decades have witnessed a renaissance of the documentary film and the transition of the genre into a mass market [1]. On the other, this same period has seen the dramatic “financialization” of the capitalist economy, implying not only the increasing political and economic power of finance capital but also its deep and widespread influence over social and cultural life more broadly [2]. We explore this alignment by asking two key sets of questions: How has the documentary film culture and industry been affected by the rise of finance capital? How has the speculative idiom of accumulation changed the conditions and constraints of funding for documentary production and distribution? In what ways have these impacted the sorts of documentaries that get made and the themes, techniques and narratives documentaries employ? What lessons can activist cultural producers more broadly learn from this example? What can recent documentaries about finance capital and financialization teach us about these complex but important phenomena? What are their limits? How are these documentaries symptomatic or reflective of the financialized society and cultural landscape of which they are a part? (How) do they offer pathways beyond the financialized idiom? And, more broadly, how can activist cultural production address and challenge the forces of financialization?

The objective here is to use the case study of documentary films to delineate the ways financialization presents new challenges to activist cultural producers, challenges which range from political-economic concerns over funding, sponsorship, distribution and production to cultural and aesthetic questions about the modes and forms of representation. In a manner of speaking, documentary films, because of their unique form and their particular place within the ecology of contemporary media, represent an “indicator species” whose fate we can study for clues as to the socioeconomic forces challenging activist cultural producers more broadly. This workshop is led off by two 30-minute presentations, each illustrated with clips from recent documentary films. These will be followed by a structured, facilitated discussion with participants regarding the key thematics, aimed at exploring how financialization is operating across a broader range of cultural forms and communicative media. Max Haiven will open with a discussion of the key tenets of financialization and the growing chaotic powers of finance capital, both over the economy as a whole and over cultural production more specifically. He will show examples from recent popular and activist documentaries about financialization, noting their strengths and weaknesses. Beyond merely explaining financialization in

various ways, these films also tacitly reveal its impacts on documentary filmmaking and storytelling. Haiven's argument is that the complexities and nuances of financialization present almost insurmountable challenges to the conventional documentary forms of linear storytelling and visual illustration. Focusing on the temptation of filmmakers to personify financial forces, he proposes that conventional activist documentaries struggle with a central contradiction in their attempts to reveal the changing realities of financialization. Ezra Winton's presentation will focus on the impacts of financialization on the documentary film industry (starting with the problematic term "industry" itself), exploring the ways that film financing, production and distribution are shaped by the increasingly speculative and privatized economy of cultural production. His talk will highlight three distinct areas where his research has shown financialization to be a structuring mechanism and guiding ideology in documentary culture. The first is institutional, whereby resource-allocating institutions that traditionally governed so much production of documentary (at least in Canada) have been eviscerated by austerity measures and ruthless cuts to the arts by the state. As the old institutions, like the National Film Board, wither, new, power brokers like commercial film festivals take their place. The second area is funding, which is increasingly shifting to the speculative private sector, and where the commercial imperative to produce "market-ready" products has ushered in the problematic term "social action entertainment." Finally, as documentary succumbs to forces of financialization, screening spaces become increasingly privatized (at home, on private screens, etc), yet also more diffuse and interactive.

## **8b. Social Reproduction and the Emerging Institutions of the Common**

**Elise Thorburn:** Communication Technologies and Social Reproduction: Securitized and Autonomous

Using an Autonomist framework this paper investigates the role of communications and digital technologies in an ongoing crisis of social reproduction. Social reproduction refers to the capacities of populations to reproduce themselves both biologically and affectively; thus it is a site wherein human beings and capital compete for the reproduction of living bodies. In the contemporary composition of capitalism social reproduction is globally in crisis, but at the same time, new and ongoing social, political, and economic movements are centred on issues and concerns related to populations' socially reproductive capacities. This paper will make use of autonomist concepts such as class composition, social factory, and social reproduction. Emergent communicative technologies have allowed for an increase in control and discipline at the level of the social, contributing to a social reproduction that can be considered "securitised". Both surveillance and the command to communicate prevail. At the same time, these new technologies can provide important networks for the transmission of information, the expansion of affect, the formation of resistant subjectivities, and the cohesion of autonomous social and political infrastructures. This presentation will examine the case study of Concordia University Television's live streaming of the Quebec student strike in 2012 to suggest pathways for autonomous social reproduction through new communicative technologies. This will focus on the ways the specific convergence of a media form (live streaming) and a social

movement (the strike) can circumvent power while also constituting sites of resistance and constructing autonomous, recuperated socially reproductive capacities.

**Fiona Jeffries and Pablo Mendez:** Turning the Home Inside Out: Commoning Care in the Political Encampment

As mass unemployment, austerity policies, collapsing social safety nets, food insecurity and home foreclosures spread globally in the ongoing aftermath of the 2007-08 financial meltdown, the political encampment has appeared as a specific form of protest in dispersed sites around the world. While this form of political contestation is not unique to the contemporary crisis, what is compelling about its diverse manifestations today, from Tahrir Square and Zucotti Park to Gezi Park and Plaza del Sol, is the way in which discourses and practices of love, care and collectivity have re-emerged within the encampments as counters to the politics of everyday fear, insecurity and precarity. In this paper, we examine the contemporary strategy of encampment as a coming together of bodies in space to create "temporary autonomous zones" wherein the reproduction of everyday life is provisionally collectivized through a politics of care. Starting from a feminist-Marxist standpoint and drawing on the work of Silvia Federici, we define social reproduction as encompassing "that complex of activities and relations by which our life and labour are daily reconstituted". This critical perspective on social reproduction moves beyond strictly biological and productivist logics that, as Federici and others have argued, render women's unpaid labour invisible through an ideology of love while justifying the ever-increasing social/sexual division of labour upon which capitalist expansion depends. We argue that today's encampments, with all their local specificities, articulate a radical critique of global capitalism in which the intensifying crisis of social reproduction takes centre stage.

**Enda Brophy:** Cultural Workers Occupy

If at the opening of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Richard Florida (2002) and other celebrants were feeling bullish about the prospects for the creative class, a more recent book-length effort by the arts and culture writer Scott Timberg (2014) offers a disquieting snapshot of this much-discussed workforce's declining fortunes. *Culture Crash: The Killing of the Creative Class* documents the increasingly tenuous conditions of work and life for cultural workers in the United States amid technological disruption, concentration of ownership and intensifying neoliberal regulation. Timberg's portrait complements over a decade of research by critical scholars into the spread of workforce fragmentation, labour precarity, and intensifying competition for positions in creative industries such as the arts, fashion, and new media. Such tendencies have only become more acute in the context of the accumulation crisis faced by global capitalism in recent years. Relatively unexamined however are the emergent collective responses that have been enacted by cultural workforces to their precarious situations. Under the shadow of economic recession, a public debt crisis, and associated austerity policies, cultural workers in Italy have offered up one of the boldest models for the regeneration of cultural space and production from below—that of occupation and self-management. In 2011 workers, students and their allies began to occupy cultural venues to protest the insecurity of their employment

conditions and the drying up of state support for cultural institutions, but also to vindicate the importance of autonomous cultural production. Seizures of cultural institutions and spaces by workers have taken place in Rome, Milan, Venice, Pisa, Messina, Catania, Naples, and other cities across the peninsula, feeding into a movement that has galvanized cultural workers and drawn attention to their issues.

Drawing upon an international research project with Greig de Peuter (Wilfrid Laurier University) and Nicole S. Cohen (University of Toronto Mississauga) investigating collective responses to precarity by workers in creative industries (culturalworkersorganize.org), this paper surveys the emergence, trajectory, and currently embattled status of occupied cultural spaces in Italy. The paper begins by situating the occupations in relation to the longer history of the *centri sociali occupati e autogestiti* (the occupied and self-organized social centres) movement that took hold in the 1970s and exploded in the 1990s. Noting the differences between the *centri sociali* and the occupied cultural spaces, the paper moves on to relate some of the political and theoretical debates that have animated the recent occupations by cultural workers. Finally, with a view to facilitating the circulation of struggles among workers in creative industries, the paper concludes by placing these occupations within the broader context of what Gigi Roggero (2011) has called the *institutions of the common* developed by cultural workers amid the unfolding accumulation crisis of neoliberalism.

### **8c. Rules and Resources: Tapping the Potential of Technology**

#### **Gregory Taylor and Catherine Middleton: Spectrum Allocation: Best Practices for a Public Resource**

This paper explores the legitimacy of questions of spectrum scarcity. The wireless spectrum is increasingly the site of political struggle as it is a vital element of information transmission. This research considers whether the reality of spectrum deployment in urban Canada reflects the rhetoric presented to national regulators by licensed commercial wireless providers. This is not a uniquely Canadian phenomenon and this research has consequence for international spectrum allocation. Question: is the current method of spectrum allocation (auctions for exclusive licenses) an efficient deployment of a public resource or an exploitation of the commons? The most recent spectrum inventory in Canada was conducted in 2010 and the conclusion there was clear: the AWS frequencies auctioned in 2008 were 100% licensed but only approximately 33% were in operation. Drs. Taylor and Middleton investigated the contemporary deployment situation in Canada, juxtaposed against recurrent claims from Canada's incumbent wireless carriers that they were facing a spectrum shortage. Toronto's Yonge-Dundas Square is an open area at one of Canada's busiest intersections, that advertises itself as the "heart of the city". In the summer of 2013, Drs. Taylor and Middleton led a project which measured spectrum usage at this busy intersection, checking all of Canada's licensed wireless frequencies. To our knowledge, this research is the first to make such information publicly available in Canada.

Two students from Ryerson University's department of electrical and computer engineering collected data using a spectrum analyzer. Data was collected hourly for each licensed band in twelve-hour shifts on July 2, August 28, and September 5 2013. A

spectrum analyzer search was conducted for bands allocated for commercial mobile service providers in Canada. The spectrum analyzer registered activity for a band in the top chart and density of usage in the bottom chart. The results of the experiment were surprising: the data collected demonstrates that wireless providers in the centre of Toronto were indeed utilizing all of their licensed bands and did not reveal examples of “warehousing” spectrum reserves. However, the data also demonstrates the inefficiencies of paired spectrum allocation. We discovered large discrepancies between the Tx frequency (transmission) and Rx frequencies (reception). This is of relevance for spectrum management officials who still organize spectrum using the traditional paired approach. In short: the allocation of this public resource is poorly structured, allowing for large amounts of unused prime public spectrum by incumbents. We conclude that future spectrum management policies must offer a more efficient use of this resource by moving away from the paired spectrum approach and explores alternatives outside the neoliberal order.

### **Frederick Emrich:** Toronto Public Library and “Maker Culture”

The Toronto Public Library (TPL) is one of the largest and busiest public library systems in the world. With 98 branches operating throughout the city and an active online presence, TPL reports nearly one million uses by patrons in 2013. On an average day there are almost 60,000 visits to the various branches of the library system and 50,000 uses of the library website. Since issuing its most recent strategic plan, TPL has made visible and substantial moves to establish itself as an institution promoting creation of cultural material. This has made the Library a visible supporter of, participant in, and member of Toronto’s vibrant “maker culture”. In the past year, the library has established a “Digital Innovation Hub” – a computer lab outfitted with hardware, software, peripherals, and trained staff to support 3 D scanning and printing, robotics, audio and video production, web design, graphics production, book publication, and other activities – at each of the two hub branches; Both branches have hosted a series of “Innovators in Residence,” experts in audio, video, or other forms of production who spend six weeks or more offering lectures, workshops, and one-on-one mentoring sessions for library patrons interested in learning about or working in their areas of specialization; and the library has partnered with a variety of organizations to offer workshops, trainings, and events that are more about producing things (whether information or not) than about consuming them.

Beyond the main hubs, various TPL branches have gotten involved in “making” as well. Several Library branches host clubs and presentations for kids focused on making, from LEGO building clubs to sessions on making gifts with duct tape; the Library has established residencies for “Innovators in Communities,” experts in 3 D printing, programming, and video documentary production, who offer programs similar to those of innovators in residence, but do so at outlying branches of the library or at community organization rather than staying in the central library hubs; and TPL has plans to introduce Digital Innovation Hubs like those in the two main branches at some of the other library branches as well. This paper is a critical examination of TPL’s move toward “maker culture.” Drawing on theoretical literature in political economy of communication, technology studies, and theories of civil society, it addresses the contexts

in which TPL has moved to this focus on “making” and considers the implications of this move for the library of the future. Among issues considered are technological change, economic pressure, labor issues, and the role of the public library in the life of a vibrant city.

**Ishanie Perera and Curtis McCord:** Canadian Internet Infrastructure: Cloudy with a Chance of Sublimation

The global economy is irreversibly digitized, relying on vast networks of physical infrastructure from data centers to networks of cabling and signal relay. These facilities represent the entire foundation of information communication within the means of production of advanced human material and cultural life. The geopolitical distribution of these infrastructures, as well as the principles constraining their provision and ownership is thus a matter of great concern to industries, governments and individuals. This paper examines the state of Internet and ‘cloud-computing’ infrastructure in the Canadian context, siphoning theorists Meadows, Star and Sandvig (2008 ; 1999 ; 2011) through the lens of critical political economy. This paper critically articulates the power structures embedded in the economic situations of hegemonic ownership, profit-driven resources provision, and the choices of Canadian governments as they shape the trajectory of Canadian societal development. Survey of the current landscape of Internet infrastructure in Canada through this lens abets a position that Internet infrastructure should be considered as a public good (Mosco, 2014 ; McChesney, 2013) and a social resource. From this position, we lay out arguments for adopting different approaches of infrastructure ownership, oversight and development, (wanting only for mechanisms of exercising public power over the economically powerful) that can reconcile the short-term mindset of industry gains, with long-term goals of increasing and equitably distributing the stock of public goods. In particular, we believe that a manifold of standard and nonstandard approaches to Internet infrastructure, such as support for publicly operated distributed and mesh networking services could help Canadians to accomplish this goal over time. Inciting discourse about digital and physical infrastructures along these lines empowers Canadians to pressure their government to steadfastly advocate for labour, sustainable environmental resource management (Maxwell and Miller, 2012) and freedom of information access and service to peoples who are systemically marginalized.

**Evan Light:** Appropriate Telecom: Hacking Big Telecom From Within

Years before the “post-Snowden” era, groups within and around the global open-source movement began working on alternatives to corporate telecom, seeking to construct communications systems based on the ideals of security, privacy, transparency and accountability. Some examples are privacy-centric mesh networks, stand-alone wifi networks such as the PirateBox, software for communicating directly between cellphones (Serval) and the MeshPotato which allows communities to provide wifi and telephone services using dormant phone lines. While many such projects tend to build small, idealized “worlds apart”, such projects cannot realistically replace the global systems that our communicational lives have become so tied to. This paper documents the early stages

of a strategy for confronting big telecom to ensure that security, privacy, transparency and accountability do not remain value-added services and are instead integrated into the functional core of networking design, technology and use.

The Appropriate Telecom project draws inspiration from the Occupy Debt/Rolling Jubilee movement, a brilliant example of fighting corporate fire with fire and ingenuity, and was originally conceived during the 2014 Hackers on Planet Earth (HOPE) conference. It begins with an in-depth analysis of the various actors involved in the actual ownership of publically-owned telecom corporations in Canada, the interrelationships of these actors and their relationships to Canada's political and regulatory systems. Telecom corporations, in this context, are any corporate actors that provide telecom services such as personal telephone and internet as well as more specialized infrastructure services such as internet exchange points. Using public records, I calculate what percentage of a given telecom provider is owned by small investors (members of the general public) and institutional investors whose ethics may overlap with the ideals of security, privacy, transparency and accountability (such as labour pension funds). Ultimately I propose a strategy for centralizing telecom investments into an investment vehicle of sorts that acts as a shareholder activist with the goal of redefining market standards in telecom as ethical standards thereby introducing levers with which to attain behavioral change within corporate telecom entities. Ultimately this strategy may be applied as a way of changing the functioning of publically-owned/publically-traded corporations in general.

#### **8d. (Re)wiring Struggle and Transformation in Journalism Research and Education**

**Andrea Hunter** and Jessica Sanchez: (Re)Fund: Opportunities and Ethical Issues in Journalism and Crowdfunding

In recent years there has been much upheaval in journalism as many mainstream media outlets have faced budget cuts or been forced to close completely (McChesney & Pickard, 2011). One major concern is that what is being lost in the midst of cuts and closures is original and investigative journalism - journalism that is vital to democracy, but is also an expensive endeavor that requires significant funding and time commitments (Curran, 2011). Further, there are concerns that news is becoming homogenized as news organizations, particularly newspapers, reduce beat reporting in science and health, and make cuts to expensive foreign reporting (Starr, 2011). At the same time, journalism education has not reacted quickly or decisively to the new news ecosystem and many programmes continue to train students as they did in a bygone golden era of journalism (Mensing, 2010). In light of the current state of uncertainty in this critical field, considered to be a hallmark of and essential to democratic society, this panel will examine how we might (re)wire the struggles and challenges of journalism educators. Educators are faced with preparing students for an uncertain future in which full-time jobs are scarce and resources are low. Educators are, nevertheless, deeply implicated in struggles over journalism's democratic mandate, and this panel brings together three journalism educators who propose concrete ways to rethink current transformations. Individual presentations will examine how to (re)purpose modern journalism education

by reviving an idea from over 100 years ago, how to (re)model journalism through student ingenuity, and how to (re)fund journalism with crowdfunding and entrepreneurial ideas.

**David Secko:** (Re)Modeling: An Experiment in Providing Students with Alternative Frameworks for Science Journalism Production

Drawing on recent studies on models of science journalism [1], this paper examines an experiment that asked a class of journalism students to explore alternatives to the dominant model used for creating science journalism. Struggles and transformations in journalism education are in many ways linked to debates over the current usefulness of dominant models of journalism production. This domination is particularly apparent in the debates over reporting on science, health and the environment (here generically termed science journalism). Journalism students interested in science journalism are often trained within a classical model that seeks to support science literacy [2], despite numerous arguments over the past decades that alternative models to communicate science are needed and available (e.g., public participation and lay expertise models) [1,3]. However, scholarly arguments do not always filter to those that most need them. Journalism students, in particular, can be left adrift with no “clear” guidelines for how to use alternative models of science journalism practice. This can be frustrating for students when the current level of uncertainty in the field of journalism points some to thinking there is a strong need for innovation and entrepreneurial vision. Journalism educators can equally be adrift in unexplored assumptions and restrictions if their educational responsibility becomes overshadowed by the needs of the commercial news industry, which foremost wants students to have the practical skills they need – often based in a dominant model – to pursue a career in journalism. To innovate and seek an illustration of alternative frameworks, this paper provides a qualitative thematic synthesis [4] of how 13 students theorized and practiced journalism when asked to develop new approaches to science journalism production on energy topics [5]. The main sources of data for this synthesis is a course that produced: (i) three student-led, co-written briefing documents that theorized new models of science journalism (termed the *adaptive*, *contextual*, and *experiential* models); (ii) 13 journalistic stories that exemplified one of the new models of science journalism; and (iii) written student reflections on their participation in the course. Analysis of this data points to the struggles and transformations that journalism students undergo when asked to (re)model the dominant modes and values of journalism production seen every day in journalism school. It is argued that the choice of a model can affect a student's future ability to fulfill any democratic sense of purpose that journalism education may be seeking to examine and instill.

**Stanton Paddock:** (Re)work: Who do we Work for? Accreditation and the Historical Shift in Journalism Education's Purpose

Today, a student earning a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism receives a practical education designed to train and socialize the future industrial journalism worker. As the industry falters and the workforce shrinks, one must ask “is journalism education providing a useful service, and does it still merit inclusion in the university?” I argue its continued

relevance is found in an educational philosophy from the field's very earliest years. Understanding how this early philosophy became overshadowed by professional journalism education provides a clue to how the ideals of early journalism education might be resurrected. Modern journalism education, which is practical and professional, harks back to 1908 at the University of Missouri, the first school of journalism. A second model sprang up shortly after at the University of Wisconsin. It applied knowledge from other disciplines in the university to the field of journalism. The Wisconsin model dominated early journalism accreditation, and its values shaped the accreditation structure. Between 1951 and 1953, unaccredited journalism programs, which had subscribed to the Missouri model, carried out a coup d'état and opened the accrediting standards to include professional education (Folkerts, 2014).

This presentation asks why and how the Missouri model was able to quickly co-opt with the existing accrediting structures. Critically, the proponents of the Missouri model maintained continuity by keeping the external structure of Wisconsin-style journalism education. The schools shaped in the Wisconsin model remained accredited. At the same time, an opening was made for professionally oriented programs, and schools in the Missouri model were able to attain accreditation for the first time. Within the academy, the environment was generally more accepting of professional education. In this era, professionally oriented programs were growing in stature and power across the university system (Kerr, 1963). Outside of the academy, news organizations were increasingly reliant on the pre-trained news workers which Missouri-style journalism education provided. They supported professional journalism education through internships, scholarships, endowments, and hired graduates of professional journalism programs (Madison, 2014). The questions raised before, during and after the professionalization of journalism education, remain unresolved today. Who does journalism education serve? The academy? The students? Industrialized journalism? The democratic society at large? As the journalism industry falters, the situation in journalism education becomes unsustainable, and a reexamination of the core purpose of the discipline is needed. Rather than training journalism workers, a return to the Wisconsin model would focus on educating future journalism leaders. Journalism education has become too insular and separate from the world it covers. Instead of perpetuating the status quo, modern Wisconsin-style education would seek new pathways for journalism using the university's vast knowledge. If democratic society requires an informed public, journalism educators have a duty to set journalism on a new path. Journalism education should set its sights higher than preparing the cub reporter for their first job.

**Isabel Macdonald:** Comics Journalism: Illustrating a Critical Journalism/Research Practice

Recent years have seen the explosion of "comics journalism"--a form of nonfiction storytelling that combines journalistic methods with the medium of comics. Recent books of comics journalism have treated topics ranging from the war in Bosnia, to the Israel/Palestine conflict, to the 2009 Honduran coup d'état, to the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. This emerging form of visually-oriented storytelling (which has alternately been referred to as "graphic journalism," "comix reportage," and "investigative cartooning") is also very rapidly evolving in the context of new digital platforms.

My proposed presentation builds on growing interest amongst both scholars and media practitioners in comics journalism's potential. In this presentation, I critically reflect on my experiences of testing out this emerging form of reporting as part of my PhD research. More specifically, I will show a selection of visual examples of a comics journalism project which I am currently writing and drawing, based on my research in a camp of people displaced by the January 2010 earthquake in Haiti. My presentation reflects on these examples in light of the limitations that have been theorized in more standard forms of international humanitarian reporting. I will also discuss the process of producing this project, including the role of the distinct formal elements of comics, and the methodological challenges entailed in experimenting with comics journalism in the context of academic research. I argue that the unusual form of my comics journalism research project created opportunities for testing out a more critical and self-reflexive journalism approach, and for exploring complex power dynamics often eclipsed by journalists' standard claims that they just "report on the facts". I argue that this experimental form of journalism/research has particular potential for addressing some of the shortcomings of more standard forms of humanitarian reportage.

## **8e. Political Economies of Popular Culture**

**Peter Scheckner:** Apocalyptic, and Science Fiction Films: How Hollywood and Television Imagines Social Inequality, People's Power, and the State

Released since 2001, Hollywood dystopian films and the AMC television series "The Walking Dead," sometimes referred to as apocalyptic or post-apocalyptic works, reflect social, political, economic, or environmental issues and either explicitly or implicitly raise issues of social class, power structures and, on occasion, portray a collective struggle against the status quo. Films such as "V for Vendetta" (2006), "The Hunger Games" trilogy (2012), "The Dark Knight Rise" (2012), "Elysium" (2013), "Noah" (2014), "Divergent" (2014), "District 9" (2009), "The Children of Men" (2006), "World War Z" (2013), "Sleep Dealer" (2008), "Stake Land" (2010), and "The Walking Dead" AMC TV series (2010), typically reflect a number of contradictions that appears to be inherent in this particular film genre: while these works accurately and passionately depict the failure of a political system to deliver the essential social needs to its people, and may in fact be quite explicit about issues of class and race as they relate to these failures, they seem incapable of even imagining an alternative world that passes the basic test of plausibility. The dystopian film may be brilliant at recreating the failures of what is obviously a failed capitalist state, but it cannot even conceive of what ideology or movement could turn things around. However "progressive" the dystopian movie may be in depicting, for example, gross social inequality—a sensibility given great attention since the recession of 2008 and then the Occupy Wall Street Movement beginning in September, 2011—no Hollywood dystopian film can resist the urge to savage any collective struggle against this inequality. Witness such films as "The Hunger Games," "Elysium," "The Dark Knight Rises," "World War Z," all Zombie movies, and the recent "Noah," in which any crowd of people that reacts to social injustice—dead or alive people-- is characterized as unruly, barbaric, horrifying, and, above all, threatening. Get angry at the social, political, economic, or environmental injuries to which we are being

subjected, but don't look to yourselves for redress. Stay passive and scared. This is an ideology imbedded in most of these movies. All art is propaganda, wrote George Orwell in his essay called "Charles Dickens." And this observation is fascinatingly true of the dystopian movie.

**Joe Tompkins:** The Makings of a "Revolutionary" Franchise: Promotional Cynicism and *The Hunger Games*

One of the most commercially successful transmedia franchises of recent history, *The Hunger Games* (THG) raises numerous questions about the status of revolutionary ideals in the age of cultural capitalism (Zizek). The narrative depicts a dystopian future where most citizens live in crushing poverty, and children from across the country are delivered to the mega-wealthy Capitol to compete in the titular, all-inclusive media spectacle. However, whereas the recent blockbuster installments—*Catching Fire* (2013) and *Mockingjay—Part 1* (2014)—center on Katniss Everdeen as the unwitting "star" of a mounting countrywide revolution, the franchise itself provokes a sense of contradiction as regards its message of revolt. In essence, the films embody what they critique, giving us a denunciation of the Spectacle in the form of a well-funded, highly marketable series of cultural products. In particular, *Mockingjay—Part 1* invites us to be skeptical of "revolutionary" media and celebrity, while giving us a revolutionary-themed blockbuster starring Jennifer Lawrence. More generally, the intertextual commodities encasing THG brand belie its revolutionary ethos: where the books and films position us to identify with the revolution, for example, THG's many-pronged marketing apparatus, including websites Capitol Couture and Capitol TV, effectively hinge on our cynical identification with "the enemy." The result is a type of promotional cynicism that appears to contradict the narrative's overtly anti-Capitol, anti-consumerist message. This paper therefore considers THG an instructive case study for how cultural capitalism cynically mobilizes the concept of "revolution" as an effective commercial strategy. It integrates methods of ideological critique and political economy to address the following questions: exactly how does the concept of revolution function as a profitable strategy for contemporary media industries? Is it possible that THG represents a way of getting radical ideas across to a popular audience despite (or perhaps because of) the way such ideas are used to increase brand loyalty? In short, is THG merely all hype, or there is something indicative about the cynical reason at the heart of its transmedia brandscape, which must be reckoned with if we are to understand the current horizons of political resistance? This paper looks at the cultural and economic conditions that have made a "revolutionary" franchise like THG possible.

**Azmat Rasul and Jennifer Proffitt** A Passage to India: Indian Film Market and the Political Economy of Disney's Transnational Operations

Through the lens of critical political economy, this article analyzes Disney's operations in the Indian film market through UTV Motion Pictures, a UK-based subsidiary of the Walt Disney Company. Transnational conglomerates and marketers have used modern mass media innovatively to further their economic interests by striking deals with other media firms operating in different regions of the world. McChesney (2008) argues that the

commercial cart is pulling the cultural horse and transnational business firms are using “media firms’ entire arsenal of media assets” to promote their corporate interests in the profit-driven capitalist economy (p. 275). Thus, the synergistic relationship between media firms and transnational commercial ventures endorses consumerism and promotes a commercial culture that runs contrary to democratic values, freedom of choice, and sovereignty of the audience. Critical political economy questions the alliance between commercial interests and media firms by critically examining the political, economic, and ideological structures of media conglomerates. It is significant for critical political economists to question how various political, ideological, economic, and power structures are interrelated in the cultural sphere in different parts of the world. Similar to Marxian critique of capitalism, a critical appraisal of mass media would lead to a broader comprehension of the existing social, political and economic order in class-ridden societies (Flew, 2007). Hence, structure of joint ventures and economic relations is exceedingly important for political economists who analyze how class relations develop in capitalist economies. Critical political economy has focused on the globalization of media industry ensuing from the domination of a few giants who control the audiovisual media production across the globe.

The transnational entertainment industries are involved in coproductions and a multitude of joint ventures at the global level to geometrically enhance their profits and capture new markets. Hollywood has emerged as a major investor in Bollywood in recent years, mainly because of the gigantic Indian market where Hollywood’s traditional English language products made up only five per cent of the market (Rasul & Profitt, 2012). Critical political economy helps us understand these trends by addressing questions linked to the globalization of entertainment industries and their impact on local cultures. It is, therefore, significant to develop an academic appraisal of global operations of Disney by applying critical political economy to study how this global behemoth is making inroads into the Indian film market through its subsidiaries such as UTV Motion Pictures. Over the last few years, UTV Motion Pictures has established itself as a dominant player in the area of production, marketing, distribution, licensing, merchandising and syndication of films in India and worldwide. With a modest beginning in 2004, UTV Motion Pictures increased its size over the years, and coproduced mega hits such as Chennai Express and Yeh Jawani Hai Dewani in 2013 and Kick and Peekay in 2014, which were amongst highest grossing Bollywood films. Being a subsidiary of Disney Corporation, UTV’s operations in the Indian culture market necessitate a critical analysis of its synergistic relationship with Bollywood by applying critical political economy approach.

### **Aaron Heresco:** Audience Commodity Revisited: Affiliate Fees and the Changing Product of Television

Classic and revised works on the political economy of television foreground the role of the commodity audience as the driving force of the logic of television. The importance of this perspective would be difficult to overestimate, and yet new developments and trends within the television industry require additional theoretical work. Specifically, the growth of affiliate/retransmission fees as revenue streams for media conglomerates asks us to reconsider both the product and the players in the commodity-television system. Such a

reconsideration is especially important in light of recent moves by both HBO and CBS to offer standalone content from within a digital subscription model. This not only alters the relationship between the commodity (audience) and consumer (advertisers), but can also be seen as primarily a move by networks to secure higher affiliate fees in the expected future negotiations with cable system operators. From this vantage point, affiliate fees provide an alternative buyer/seller within the television industry, which means that which is being bought/sold must also differ. As television's digital future has become its digital present, the role of affiliate fees in the economics of the television industry calls out for a reformulation of the television commodity. Recent trends in the television industry – ranging from Comcast's purchase of NBC Universal to Oprah Winfrey's move to her OWN network – are predicated not on the view of a televisual commodity audience but instead on the economic logic of affiliate fees. The growing importance of affiliate fees is reflected in the larger and larger portion of the revenue portfolio of major networks they comprise. CBS, for example, expects its affiliate revenue to be \$1 billion per year by 2017 and \$2 billion per year by 2020 (Gottfried, 2014). As these fees continue to grow and shape the television landscape, critical and theoretical work is necessary to examine the role affiliate fees play in the accumulation of profit within the television industry. Tangential considerations would also include how these fees encourage further industrial consolidation and impact alternative digital distribution models. If, as Gurley (2010) argues, affiliate fees “make the television world go ‘round,” increased theoretical attention to these fees are vital if we are to understand how and why the television industry functions the way it does.

## **12-1:15 pm Panel session 9**

### **9a. Feminist Media Making: Sharing What We Know, Searching for What We Need, Archiving What We Have**

**Elise Thorburn and Sheila Sampath**

Feminist media brings together the theoretical, the philosophical, and political action in the realm of the everyday. In this collaborative workshop, we will bring together feminist media practitioners working in a variety of media and workshop participants to share their knowledge and skills around working on communicative projects for change. We will begin by discussing the challenges and opportunities that come from building and maintaining feminist media projects as we move into radical revolutionary futures together. We will think through the ways in which feminist media projects can and do radicalize extant models or create new models for making media. We will also explore how feminist media projects and practitioners negotiate and disrupt processes of intellectualization, institutionalization, and an increasingly neoliberal media landscape predicated upon voluntary labour. We will also consider the ways in which feminist media projects do and can act as a vital spring for community, collaboration, thought, action, and creativity.

Presenters and workshop participants will be invited to share what have we learned from our experience in feminist media projects and brainstorm ways we can build greater connections between feminist activism and media projects for change. We will

also discuss the obstacles feminist media projects have faced, and how we can overcome colonial, racist, and genocidal legacies which inhibit our abilities to create truly liberatory feminist media praxis. Come prepared to participate, ask questions about or share your experiences in feminist media making and to engage in some creative production. Acknowledging we all have varied definitions of both feminism and media, we invite everyone to bring examples of feminist media they have made, experienced, or love so that we can merge our stories and projects into a collaborative timeline and feminist media archive that will live beyond the life of the workshop and the conference.

## **9b. Panel Network Neutrality: Reflection and Critique Towards a New Circuit of Struggle**

**Brian Dolber:** Race, Informationism and the Network Neutrality Debate: Towards a Critical Race Theory of Technology Policy History

The debate over network neutrality took place within an ideological framework of informationism. As I have argued elsewhere, informationism holds that “there is no fundamental conflict between labor and capital”; that “access to digital technology will enable democratic participation and full citizenship”; and that “corporate elites within the new media sector and the defenders of democracy under neoliberalism.” (Dolber 2013, p. 145). These myths played out in the network neutrality debate as telecom lobbyists and some members of the African American community argued that network neutrality would leave African Americans at a disadvantage by discouraging the bridging of the digital divide. In this presentation, I argue that by reifying the centrality of entrepreneurialism, the network neutrality debate positioned African Americans as potential media consumers, but not active members of a digital community. I link this to the history of late adoption of technologies due to lack of access within communities of color. Thus, African Americans have been often unable to participate in debates around the structuring of media systems. For example, as radio remained dominant in African American communities during the Black Freedom Movement, its general commercial structure had already been determined by that point. While the structure of television was not called into question by a complacent white public during the 1950s, African Americans, who were becoming politically mobilized at that moment, did not have access to that medium. Thus, African Americans have had to use media systems, not under conditions of their own making, in order to further their struggles. In the context of network neutrality, this has meant the widespread use of mobile web technologies, with fewer regulatory protections, in contemporary racial justice struggles.

Expanding on McChesney’s (2007) “critical junctures” thesis, I look towards developing a model for thinking about media policy formation and activism that enables the inclusion of people of color’s voices. While some argue that a policy-oriented approach to constructing media systems excludes traditionally marginalized communities (Cyril, 2005), the disproportionately negative impact that globalization, de-industrialization, and the creation of an information economy have had on working-class African Americans means that the inclusion of black radical perspectives in debates about the future of communication systems will be essential to ensuring economic and racial progress.

### **John Anderson:** Astroturf Blowback

Corporations and industry trade groups regularly engage in a communicative strategy called astroturfing, involving the creation or manipulation of seemingly benign organizations to sway opinion on important policy issues. The primary goal of any astroturf campaign is two-fold obfuscation: to convince low-information policymakers and members of the public that more or less consensus exists on a policy issue than reflected by actual reality, and to complicate the policy debate itself. Astroturfing has been used to great success to sway policymaking on issues ranging from the environment to organized labor. However, when telecommunications companies and industry organizations have attempted to astroturf the ongoing debate over network neutrality, these efforts have, by and large, failed spectacularly. Astroturf in the network neutrality debate has taken three primary forms: donations to established non-profit organizations for support in the policymaking process, the establishment of "news" organizations to influence coverage of the issue, and bogus "viral" campaigns involving social media and street theater. Examining these campaigns in greater detail not only helps to inform existing research on the practice of astroturfing more broadly, but suggests that their failure in the context of network neutrality is due to a variety of factors, including a high level of public engagement with the issue and a surprising ignorance on the part of telecommunications companies to understand basic principles of online communication. In many respects, the "self-correcting" nature of online discourse, rooted in the notion of edge-intelligence, stymies astroturf efforts in internet policymaking and represents a prime example of what is at stake should policymakers abandon or diminish principles of neutrality in network regulation.

### **Russell Newman:** Network Neutrality's 2014 Boost: Beyond Open and Closed, the Consequences and Labors of a Neoliberal Debate

In 2014, the network neutrality debate in the United States received a shot in the arm. With the Federal Communications Commission's issue of a new notice of proposed rulemaking that explicitly set the stage for discrimination to commence aboard broadband networks, popular understanding of the issue reached new heights as reaction to the new policy resulted in massive outpourings of frustration. President Obama similarly made waves when he announced his own support of strong protections for network neutrality, particularly in his call for the FCC to reclassify broadband as a Title II service—that is, obligating incumbent providers to essentially become common carriers of data—an outcome long sought by public interest advocates. This outcome, unthinkable even five years ago, is now potentially on the table. It is significant, too, that even as the issue has grown a decade old (older still, if one considers its antecedents), its terms have not changed much: for example, longtime network neutrality advocates Free Press resubmitted its old materials from previous proceedings in the present docket. By the time this conference transpires, it is quite likely that the FCC will have rendered a decision as to its new approach to the issue. This paper draws on select moments from the latest round of debate to consider the ways that broadband activism experiences an increasingly common form of double-bind: crucial as the outcome will be, one is reminded of adman-turned-critic James Rorty's warning when he wrote of 'advertising'

in 1934: “The error here is that of mistaking a function of the thing for the thing itself.” Not dissimilarly, the production of debate about network neutrality has performed a variety of contiguous labors that will supply its true legacy beyond its (surely challenged) regulatory effects. It is a truly neoliberal conundrum in that it appears to challenge capital, yet in the end, it supports it in function; all the same, activists cannot let it merely slide by. The possibility of reclassification has been billed as the “free market” approach by a new consortium of companies, largely web-based, called the Internet Freedom Business Alliance. Similarly, the Ad Hoc Telecommunications Users Committee, comprising business interests that rely on but are not necessarily exclusively based aboard broadband circuits, has similarly chimed in. The debate’s ossified terms, such as they are, have become unmoored and mobile in important ways. Beyond notions of open and closed, the ‘channeling’ of such debates aboard socially and epistemologically constructed platforms becomes of crucial importance to trace as the internet’s circuits increasingly are fine-tuned to the needs of the sales effort. This presentation represents an effort to suggest directions for reconsidering “internet activism” in ways that push beyond network neutrality’s origin tale and the ways it has been made publicly legible.

### **9c. Social Movements and Digital Technologies**

**Stephane Couture and Sophie Toupin:** Digital Infrastructures and/for Social Movements: Contradictions and Convergences

Digital technologies are widely used by social movements for their political organizing. We’ve heard for instance a lot of hype about the «Twitter Revolution» during the Arab Spring. Even if this statement should be nuanced and criticized, it nevertheless shows the importance of proprietary social media for social and political organizing. Here in Canada, Facebook, Twitter and Google products also played a significant role in the Quebec student strike, Idle No More and other contemporary social movements. In short, social movements today heavily rely on proprietary technologies and web services to organize actions, contributing to the economic wealth of these industries, to mass surveillance while being affected by the politics of their algorithms. The use of proprietary software and services is of course regularly criticized by free and open source software (FOSS) advocates. However, tensions are acute between FOSS advocates and social movements activists (Juris and al. 2013). The FOSS movement is also often agnostic if not rooted in organizations or ideologies that might be contrary to social movement values. The Linux Kernel, for instance, is heavily funded by private companies and as Golumbia (2013) noted, libertarianism forms an important part of technological political action, which can contribute to the "deletion of the left".

Some hackers cluster in more politicised tech collectives (such as Riseup.net in the USA) and attempt to reach out or develop social movements' technologies by putting in place alternative tools to help organizing. However, these initiatives are still unknown or unappreciated because of a constellation of reasons: the bland aesthetics of tools developed compared to the more "modern" design of social media, the belief that these alternative tools perform less and the network effect which favours more popular services, etc. We also observed a rupture in the relationship between social movements and hacker movements, which was stronger a decade ago at the time of Indymedia

(Coleman, 2006). How then, should social justice movements relate to digital infrastructures? Is there a current situation of agnosticism towards technology by social movements? Have the Snowden revelations had an impact on social movements' use of alternative technologies? How can progressive movements and politicized hackers establish or consolidate their relationship? This presentation does not seek to provide definitive normative answers, but rather ask questions and explore the current state of affairs. Based on our activist experience and our fieldwork in hacker culture and FOSS development, we aim to explore and raise questions about the difficult convergence of hacker and social movements cultures and infrastructures.

**Elisabetta Ferrari** Social Media for the 99%? Rethinking Alternative Media and Social Movements' Identity in the Corporate Web 2.0.

In this paper I investigate the relationship between contemporary social movements and social networking sites, by looking at the social media content production of Occupy Chicago during the protests of May 2012. By critically engaging the literature on social movements and alternative media, I provide an account of the changes brought about by the web 2.0 and I underline how they influence social movement practices. Through a content analysis, I identify the most important functions that social media perform for Occupy Chicago. In contrast to the expectations arising from the literature on social movements and alternative media, my findings show a very limited importance of content that expresses the identity of the movement and criticizes mainstream media, while the preponderance of protest reporting content suggests that activists use social media mainly to inform the public of "what they do", rather than "who they are". My analysis also finds significant differences between the content produced on Twitter and Facebook, thus showing differences between the patterns of use on the two platforms.

The results of my analysis thus point to the need of rethinking theories of alternative media, of investigating the relationship between the affordances of SNS and the political and organizational features of social movements and of better conceptualizing the role of identity-based expression in contemporary activism.

Firstly, I argue that theories of alternative media should be rethought to account for the changed nature of Internet communications, the different needs of social movements and their strategic choices. Secondly, I explore the interaction between the features of social media platforms and the political and organizational choices of Occupy. I argue that the lack of "identity content" is the result of the incompatibility between the open and decentralized political processes of Occupy and the individual-centric nature of social media; using corporate platforms did not provide the movement with the means to either promote its multiple and work-in-progress identities or to support processes of inclusive decision-making that could help them come to terms with such different identities. I thus contend that, contrary to the expectations of many, the web 2.0 and corporate SNS do not solve the problems of participation and inclusion, but rather exacerbate them. Lastly, I suggest that we need further research on the action-based, event-driven character of collective identities that my findings point to.

Memes, cultural items that are transmitted by repetition and replication, have become an ubiquitous presence on social media. Creating a meme is a quick and fairly simple method to communicate a thought or respond to unfolding discourse. Memes are

dynamic and can have multiple purposes. Some are playful attempts at humour (e.g., Grumpy Cat), some are humorous, yet raise consciousness (e.g., Hitler Reacts to pepper spray meme), while others have more serious political intentions (e.g., those associated with the Occupy Movement), with political aims that render them seeds of resistance and protest. Memes give agency to polyvocal discourse, they provide space and allow for the voice of the 'other' to be included in the message. It is in response to polyvocal discourse that Adbusters founder Kalle Lasn has identified the political nature of "meme wars," in which struggles and resistance occur on an intellectual battleground, confirming the political role they play. This paper will explore how the power of image can create opposition to hegemonic forces through powerful political messages. Power is especially demonstrated when images in memes progress in ways that address social injustice, as was the case with ongoing narrative of the Occupy Movement through social media. This paper will rely on a selection of popular memes that represent the aforementioned definition of power and as a result have gone viral (e.g., The Pepper Spray Cop, We Are the 99 Percent etc.). I will explore the selected memes based on three characteristics: image, intent and interpretation. The way in which memes take up each of the characteristics determine the extent to which they serve as tools for critical discourse and socio-political resistance. My paper will draw these selected memes in relation to W. J.T. Mitchell's work on images and texts and Stuart Hall's theory on encoding/decoding to support discourse around intent and interpretation. It is through the framework provided by the aforementioned theorists that I intend to identify the features of political memes, and how these features translate into individual or collective resistance. My analysis illustrates how memes represent an active cognitive choice and the intent to participate in democratic dialogue on the part of the "prosumer" or meme producer. Examples will illustrate how some memes have been powerful in organizing social dialogue and interpreting movements (such as the Pepper Spray Cop meme), while others have attempted to enlighten and raise consciousness of social injustice (such as We Are the 99 Percent meme).

**Anne-Marie Romanko:** Pepper Spray, Photoshop, and Protest: The Meme as a Tool for Socio-Political Protest

Mememes, cultural items that are transmitted by repetition and replication, have become an ubiquitous presence on social media. Creating a meme is a quick and fairly simple method to communicate a thought or respond to unfolding discourse. Mememes are dynamic and can have multiple purposes. Some are playful attempts at humour (e.g., Grumpy Cat), some are humorous, yet raise consciousness (e.g., Hitler Reacts to pepper spray meme), while others have more serious political intentions (e.g., those associated with the Occupy Movement), with political aims that render them seeds of resistance and protest. Mememes give agency to polyvocal discourse, they provide space and allow for the voice of the 'other' to be included in the message. It is in response to polyvocal discourse that Adbusters founder Kalle Lasn has identified the political nature of "meme wars," in which struggles and resistance occur on an intellectual battleground, confirming the political role they play. This paper will explore how the power of image can create opposition to hegemonic forces through powerful political messages. Power is especially demonstrated when images in mememes progress in ways that address social injustice, as

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#### **9d. News Media and the Promise of Participatory Politics**

**Rich Templin and Jennifer Proffitt:** The Devil's in the Details: Media Coverage of Florida's Ongoing Pension Battle

The elimination of taxpayer funded pensions has become a major issue for far right-of-center groups like the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), Americans for Prosperity, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and Republican Caucuses (with some help from Democrats) have pushed state legislatures to do so. These groups argue that defined benefit retirement plans (pensions) are too expensive and place the entire risk for retirement investments on the backs of taxpayers. They have pushed for the weakening or outright elimination of these plans, replacing them with defined contribution retirement plans such as 401ks for which the investment risk is on the employee as opposed to the employer and to which employees must make larger contributions if they hope to use the funds for retirement. Public pension supporters argue that these plans do not provide enough retirement security and that public sector employees do not earn enough to make the necessary payments. They also point out that the financial backers of the campaigns to eliminate public sector pension plans are usually associated with the investment industry--which stands to make billions from this shift. One state where this issue has dominated the legislative process is Florida. In 2010, the so-called "Tea Party Wave" rolled through Florida, creating the largest Republican majorities in state history and giving Republicans control of the Governor's mansion and State Cabinet. Eliminating the Florida Retirement System (FRS), the state's publicly funded defined benefit pension plan, was a top priority of the new leadership. In 2011, the first plan to end FRS failed although several major changes, including a first time ever contribution requirement for FRS participants, were signed into law. In each year since, major initiatives to close FRS to all new hires, which many experts argued would destabilize the fund and thus force its eventual closure, were defeated by a coalition of labor unions and moderate Republicans

in the Florida Senate but only after long protracted battles that received substantial media coverage.

While pension battles have happened in other parts of the U.S., Florida's case is somewhat unique in that the FRS is considered one of the healthiest, best performing plans in the U.S. if not the world. The FRS is also a cornerstone of the state's overall economy and state general revenue. Actors on both sides have had to engage lawmakers and the general public in what can be complicated public policy, involving new vocabularies of complex jargon, detailed background information, and intricate comparative analyses of retirement systems. This has placed the media in an interesting position as they cover what is both a bare knuckle political brawl and a complicated public policy issue that is difficult to divorce from the details. The purpose of this paper is to examine how the Florida press has navigated this issue. We analyze the coverage provided by the Capitol Press Corps and select television and radio outlets that cover the Legislature. We compare the facts of the public policy with the ways in which those facts were covered in the press, or altered to fit particular political narratives, or ignored altogether. The hope is that this work can serve as a case study for others who may face similar pension battles and may guide them as they work to develop messages that can explain the complexities of this issue to the general public in effective ways.

**Jessica Sanchez:** Madame Premier, How Does the Press See You?: Sexism and Gender Differences in Newspaper Coverage of Canadian Female Premiers.

In the past few years Canadians have witnessed a significant increase in the number of women holding premierships. One CBC journalist even dubbed 2011 "The Year of the Woman" in provincial politics, noting that four out of the thirteen provinces and territories were led by women: Alison Redford in Alberta, Christy Clark in British Columbia, Eva Aariak in Nunavut and Kathy Dunderdale in Newfoundland and Labrador (MacKinnon, 2011). Further to this, in 2012 Pauline Marois became the Premier of Quebec and Kathleen Wynne was elected premier of Ontario in 2013. In light of this change in the political arena, and recent questions about whether, for example, media coverage of Christy Clark has been sexist (Hyslop, 2013; Orr, 2013) this paper will explore two key questions: 1) How are Canadian female politicians running to become leaders of their provincial parties being represented in the news? 2) Are they being portrayed differently from men by the media? Two case studies will serve as the main focus of this research. The first is Christy Clark's leadership campaign in British Columbia in 2010/2011. The second is Alison Redford's leadership campaign in Alberta in 2011. Using gendered mediation, representation theories, discussions of the public and private spheres, and with a focus on textual and framing analysis, this paper looks at how the media focuses on gender differences, which may lead to explicit or implicit forms of sexism. It analyzes how women and men, as candidates, are treated differently in the political arena by media and the implications of such coverage. Some of these implications may lead to potential female candidates to be discouraged to run for office because they will face the scrutiny of the press alongside the already existing sexism in Parliament (Ross, 2002; Ross and Sreberny 1997). Despite the advancements and efforts of past female politicians, political women today continue to struggle and fight for equality (for example, political women struggle to be treated as viable candidates).

Women continue to be a minority in governments. In Canada, women make up less than 30 percent of the elected representatives in the Canadian Parliament (Cool, 2010). For that reason, media representations are important for they indirectly influence voters and members of our society and how they perceive political women (Kahn 1994; Tankard, 2001, as discussed in Bligh et al., 2012, p. 565). Therefore, how the media engages with gender and the role of gender representation in politics must be addressed as an ongoing struggle for women at the political level.

**Shea Smock:** Replacing the Horse Race & Suppressing Protest: Findings from a Political Economic Analysis of Super PAC News Coverage

In light of the 2010 Supreme Court ruling in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, campaign finance law has been re-regulated to promote freedom of spending in elections. Previously, outside spending in elections was restricted to avoid corruption or the appearance of corruption in the democratic process. Corporations, unions, and individuals can now spend unlimitedly on political advertisements in an attempt to persuade voters. Unlike campaign advertisements, the newly christened Super PACs do not have to approve the message or disclose donors if the money was last received from a nonprofit organization. Super PACs must also pay top dollar for their ad space unlike campaign ads that receive the lowest rates. This has the possibility of creating a massive conflict of interest for the news media. Journalists are expected to serve as watchdogs on these ads so citizens may make informed decisions, but the concentrated media industry is making massive profits from airing them – can we trust them to report on the often misleading and negative ads? This dissertation examines broadcast, cable, and public television news transcripts surrounding Super PAC ads in the 2012 primary and general presidential elections utilizing textual analysis and political economic theory. After exploring the economic structure and ownership of the news media and its coverage of this issue, I argue that we cannot trust the commercial news media to report critically or even accurately on Super PAC advertisers. This analysis attempts to explain how and why the commercial news media failed in its coverage and how it perpetuated problematic ideologies that support the status quo and ignore public opinion and protestation.

**Nadia Martínez-Carrillo and Dan Tamul:** Shale We be Friends?: Analyzing International Criticism of a Repressive Regime in the Context of Neoliberal Energy Politics

In September 2014, 43 male students went missing in Guerrero, Mexico. Their disappearance exposed a systematic collaboration between drug cartels and government authorities in the region. The disappearances are typically seen as one symptom of the corruption and crime of the current government regime. While hundreds of people are disappeared in Mexico every year, the federal government's response served to ignite popular protests. Perhaps the most visible and inflammatory action on the government's part has stemmed from a press conference hosted by attorney general about the student disappearances. After several hours of questioning by journalists, the attorney general abruptly ended the conference by saying "Ya me canse," or "I'm tired." This

flippant remark has helped to crystalize social movement efforts across the country. In the following weeks, the student disappearances in conjunction with the “Ya me canse” rallying cry have generated widespread media attention both domestically in Mexico and internationally. Notably, the civil unrest in Mexico has met with little criticism from the U.S. even though several international organizations have openly criticized the Mexican President, Enrique Pena Nieto, for his repressive crackdown on political protest and dissent. Despite the 3 billion that the United States has spent to fund the war on drugs in Mexico, some of them through the Merida Initiative that Obama had recently authorized to run indefinitely, the U.S. government has been silent about the students disappearance. Interestingly, under the current Mexican president’s tenure, the vast shale oil reserves of Mexico were privatized, a major victory for the U.S. energy sector and the Obama administration.

For this study, I will conduct an international comparison of news coverage surrounding the students’ disappearances within both Mexican and U.S. outlets. Specifically, this study will conduct a framing analysis of domestic coverage of the disappearances, the government response (or lack thereof), international criticism, and the U.S. government’s response. A cursory examination of news coverage indicates that while news coverage in Mexican media seems to be more critical to Pena Nieto in this situation, news coverage in the U.S. media seems to reinforce Pena Nieto’s administration despite widespread international criticism.

## **9e. Media and Empire in the 21st Century**

### **Paula Chakravartty: The Infrastructures of the Empire of Liberty**

This essay attempts to account for the void in the study of media and empire in the shadow of 14 years of on-going wars in the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia. Looking specifically at the sites of the US led war on terror we find studies of media and political and cultural transformation since 2001 and more recently, the Arab Uprisings, have paid scant attention to geopolitical histories and the crises of neoliberal capitalism. This is partially explained by the limitations of Eurocentric discussions of Empire that were popular in the 1970s and 1980s. However, looking back to the end of the Cold War, it seems pressing to reassess the turn away from unfashionable critiques of “media imperialism” alongside the new common sense that emerges about cultural globalization and the rise of network societies. Moreover, we might want to ask how scholarship on the much longer history the US’ “exceptional empire” might better inform our contemporary analyses of media and empire in the 21st century? In tracing these connections, we might in the end rethink the promise of mediated liberal democratic revolutions and technological freedom as articulated in both policy and practice in these regions, as new necessary infrastructures of the Empire of Liberty.

### **Adel Iskandar: Imperial Transculturalism: Neoliberalism Meets Mainstreamed Alterity**

This paper tackles a qualitative transformation in the way imperial architecture manifests and amplifies its reach and influence. By looking at the cultural turn in US government outreach and the outsourcing of "public diplomacy," Americana is now more about

appropriation than imposition and more about assimilation than contestation. The notion of imperial transculturalism is expounded on to elaborate the contemporary iteration of power politics beyond the cultural imperialism of yesteryear. By examining how alternative discourses are mainstreamed and the role that neoliberalism plays in the commodification and consumption of imperial sensibilities, global communication hegemony is articulated as an increasingly multi-sited space of cultural production. The outcome of this, I argue is the obfuscation of power and imperialism under the veneer of disaggregated, dislocated, indigenous, localized, and even antagonistic discourses. The two broadcasting case studies to be examined in juxtaposition here are US "public diplomacy" and the growing Al-Jazeera monopoly.

**Deepa Kumar and Arun Kundnani:** Security as Psychological Wage: Race, Surveillance, and Empire

Analysis of surveillance is often limited by a failure to take on questions of race and empire. In this paper, we trace the ways that race, empire, and state surveillance have been intertwined in the history of the US. We argue that initiatives, practices, and ideologies of surveillance have emerged in the context of overseas empire and then repeatedly traveled homewards to be used against radical movements within the US – and vice versa. Racialized notions of security have underpinned state surveillance practices throughout US history. Moreover, surveillance does not only involve collecting information for the purpose of political control but also involves producing racial subjects themselves as objects of an official gaze. Comparing the constructions of racial “others” through state surveillance – Indigenous, Black, Asian, Latino, Muslim – illustrates that “security” is one of the primary means through which racism is ideologically reproduced. Finally, we argue that neoliberalism has been legitimized in part through racialized notions of security that offer a new “psychological wage” as compensation for the decline of the social wage and its reallocation to “homeland security”.

**Wazmah Osman:** Malala and the Other Activists You Haven’t Heard of—The Workings of Gender and Empire

Muslim women have been subjected to the colonial gaze for centuries. Feminist scholars across disciplines have shown how imperial narratives of extreme victimhood and oppression of colonized women circulated and captured the popular western imagination. This classic trope of stereotypes of women under Islam has gained new currency since 9/11 and the start of the “War on Terror”. Afghan and Pakistani women have come under the western spotlight evident the ubiquitous media that focus on their plight under repressive Islamic regimes. Yet while this type of media continues to proliferate, little attention has been given to the cultural productions that constitute local gender subjectivities and how local institutions “talk back” to this discourse. In this paper I trace and contextualize the trajectory of local activists and their role in key historical and contemporary moments of resistance and social movements in the Af-Pak region. By challenging colonial and neo-colonial interventions as well as local conservative groups, these heroines have been symbolically, literally, and often violently targeted by those same institutions. Yet why do some activists like Malala Yousafzai become global icons

and are internationally celebrated, while others, who are of equal stature and repute locally, silenced globally and remain in obscurity? What role does empire play? How do transnational collaborations, circuits of media, and global feminisms function within the structures of empire?

**1:30-2:45 pm Closing Lunch and Plenary**

### **Ruptures and Critical Junctures: Moments of Media Activism in Historical and Global Contexts**

**Todd Wolfson:** Digital Rebellion: The Cultural Logic of Contemporary Social Movements

In the past two decades, we have witnessed the emergence of a new form of social movement, which has taken the shape of a globalized, digitized, radically democratic network formation. Provoked by transformations in global capitalism and the “information age,” this transnational form of political organizing is reconfiguring how we understand socio-political resistance. Marked by a cultural logic of horizontalism, contemporary activists and organizers are building novel social movement institutions through forging “flat” networked structures, participatory democratic processes and media organizing practices that link manifold sites of struggle. In this paper, I historicize this contemporary logic of struggle by placing it in the context of the Old and New Left, arguing that we are entering a new phase in social movement organizing, the Cyber Left, that is interwoven with new information and communication technologies and other globalizing trends. I also aim to provide insight into some of the limits of this novel socio-political formation focusing on the lack of analysis of class and capitalism and the inability of the Cyber Left to build enduring institutions and consequently proactive power.

**Anita Say Chan:** Networking Peripheries: Technological Futures, Informatic Contests and the Myth of Digital Universalism

Channeling the promise of global interconnection, and framed as the mark of contemporary optimization, “the digital” has been promoted as the path to the future for diverse nations and populations alike. In the midst of its accelerating pursuit by national governments, however, little has been made of the universalist underpinnings that mobilize digitality’s global spread, and that are expressed through state-launched and nationally-scaled ICT initiatives. This talk attends to developments surrounding urban and rural hack lab spaces in Peru, that distinctly engage materialities of nature, technological heritages, and informatic cultures to reorient ICT frameworks and disrupt dominant logics of the digital. By fostering collaborations between Latin American open technology activists, indigenous communities, rural and urban-based educators, and transnational media artists, such networks work to develop distinct genealogies of the digital, and forge new inter-cultural futures through interfacing with multiple local pasts.

**Victor Pickard:** The Postwar Triumph of Corporate Libertarianism and the Future of Media Reform

That the American media system became dominated by lightly-regulated oligopolies—with virtually no competition from alternative models like public media—makes it relatively unique among democratic nations. However, this American exceptionalism was neither inevitable nor natural; it was historically contingent. A vibrant social democratic challenge was evidenced by reform movements and various forms of media activism in the 1940s, but was largely defeated by red-baiting and the rise of a corporate libertarian logic that demobilized radical reform movements and de-legitimated a progressive, activist state. This presentation will assess this history with an eye toward the present. Instead of lamenting what could have been, the purpose of this research is to draw connections between previous struggles and alternative futures, to learn lessons from past failures, and to see contemporary media reform movements as part of a long historical tradition. Historicizing the ascendance of the corporate libertarian paradigm is the first step toward dismantling it. And it sets the stage for a number of policy interventions meant to remake media systems according to democratic values for the digital age.

**Christina Dunbar-Hester:** Old Media, New Politics? Low-Power FM Radio Activism in the Age of “The Digital”

This paper provides an ethnographic examination of the practices of an activist organization focused on low-wattage FM broadcasting. Despite origins as a pirate broadcasting collective in the U.S., the group shifted toward building new stations both domestically and abroad and expanding access through policy work. These radio activists consciously cast radio as an alternative to digital utopianism, promoting an understanding of electronic media that emphasizes the local community rather than a global audience of Internet users. Activists and community members had hailed radio as uniquely suited to the local conditions in which it was to be deployed, but this required translational work to advocate for the suitability of radio in differing contexts (e.g. a community center in Tanzania versus farmworkers in northwestern U.S.), and to contrast it to digital technology. This study of activism explores the complex relationships between digital and earlier technologies, as well as how a technology suited to local use can also travel through activist networks. It also casts into stark relief how an “old” medium offers broader lessons about the ways in which political beliefs are expressed through engagement with specific technologies.