

RSCM Edit EC

Hello, I'm Shelley Allen from Routledge, Taylor & Francis and today I am talking with Kent Ono and Ron Jackson both of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and both are editors of *Critical Studies in Media Communication* with is an NCA Journal.

This is your first issue as editors of *Critical Studies in Media Communication* and it's a special issue, it's called Civil Discourse in the face of complex social issues, so tell us about why you have chosen this issue to launch your editorship?

Ron: Okay, well I can begin, I think that part of what makes this issue exciting for us is the way in which the contemporary media landscape has in many ways gotten the general, popular audience to think about public policy concerns and issues that are both global in scope as well as domestic. So what we want to do is to take some of the contemporary crises here in the United States and begin to think through how we as audiences and consumers and producers of information think about public values.

Kent: Yeah, and one of the important things that has happened in perhaps the last twenty years, since the internet and new media revolution is that major social events, such as hurricanes, other catastrophes such as earthquakes as well as even 9/11, have converged with the change in the way in which we get information via new media. So new media allows for greater efficient more diverse set of communications about given events, but the field of communication as with, I think much of the humanities and social sciences has not responded to the research problematic that is produced by our new and changed media environment and the kind of social crises that have begun to become even clearer in terms of importance to us as Ron said, both domestically and globally. This special issue helps to inaugurate a kind of conversation within the field and beyond it, about what is the role of academia with regard to both a changed media landscape and, as well changed social crisis arena.

What are the papers in the special issue talking about? Are any of them particularly strong?

Ron: Well I think that they are uniformly strong. I think that there is some exciting things that are happening with each essay and I will just mention a couple of things that I see across the essays. You know Henry Giroux is a penadile professor at McMaster University and he talks about what he calls the crisis of public values. In his essay he sort of takes on this idea that we have all this civic discourse about making the world a better place, but that there is also these kind of counter availing narratives that are showing us more and more that people want to live their private lives, sometimes at the exclusion of thinking critically about how their own values intercede or intersect with those values of the general public and so he really takes on for example, the public education system and the whole idea of it being a right versus a privilege and then thinks about how the various neo-liberal

institutions within our society including the public education system, you know, seems to continually ignore their responsibility to the general public and therefore we have failing schools, we have a tremendous drop out rate across the country and it just speaks to our own short term interests and our own selfish interests here in the United States. One of the things that I have consistently told my own students is that it is awfully telling when we talk about for example the World Series and we are only talking about people, you know teams that are playing from the United States, maybe Canada, so it says something very significant about how we are self engaged as Americans here in the United States and we don't think that much about folks throughout the world. So I think that the crisis of public values that Giroux talks about is really significant and this is I think reflected in really all the essays, but I will just mention one other one and that is the essay that is written by Murali Balaji which is about racialising pity during the Haiti earthquake and he talks about the aftermath of the Haiti earthquake and how US responses to it seemed to be quite charitable, there was this feeling that we are all one world, we are connected and there are people who just had an outpouring of support, there were doctors who flew to Haiti to help out and there were other agencies that began to contribute funds. There were both positive and negative contributions meaning there were persons who took advantage of this opportunity to create scams, but there were many others that actually and charitable giving. But what he says is that there is this problem that emerges which is that we here in the United States when we think about third world countries we often kind of racialise our pity, we begin to mark the other country and 'the other' and therefore they are ones who we have to support and we have to pity and our empathy is not as innocent and civic and contributory as we would like to believe, we kind of resonates with the neo-liberal instinct that Drew talks about in his essay.

Kent: Yes, the other two essays I think build off of and work with similar kinds of issues that both Giroux and Balaji are addressing, Giroux really reminds us and is weary of our tendency towards thinking about ourselves versus others. Balaji really reminds us that there is a difference between pity and empathy and the media have projected this concept of pitying others in crises and he brings us back home. But similarly Squires and Roberts take ideas that we are already familiar with and can rework them so with Squires in her essay 'Bursting the Bubble, a case study of counter framing in the editorial pages', she says that the editorial pages are a place where civic discourse happens, where people converge to talk about issues of social import, but she also tells us that within those contexts, different kinds of political ideas continue to resonate, hegemonic ideas and ones that with the mortgage crisis remind us that the world is not lacking of race and gender in everyday life. But at the same time she says we can't just give up editorial pages, we have to figure out a way to make them work for us and so she argues for a critical race approach to the study of and the participation in editorial pages. In Kathleen Glenister Roberts essay 'Brand America: Media and the Framing of "Cosmopolitan" identities', she takes us back to this notion of cosmopolitanism and many critical scholars have talked about cosmopolitanism and have said this idea of we are the world and this notion that somehow we know who others are and what their lives are like outside of whatever borders we have

established. She says that old version of cosmopolitanism is no longer useful, but she also says let us not abandon that very important concept, lets rethink that concept and make it useable. In that way she gives a kind of a critical reflection on the kinds of research that we have been doing and charts a new direction for communication studies and its use of cosmopolitanism.

Do you have any other special issues planned for your editorship?

Ron: Well we have decided that we would put out a special issue call at one point and so that should be coming fairly soon. Our interest though is not really in doing a lot of special issues. We do think that one of the unique features of our editorship is that we will have an invited scholar who will speak about the various essays within any given issue and we try to sort of collate the different essays that we receive into thematic categories so that we actually have the opportunity to have another issue about something that makes sense with the other essays that are in it. In doing so, I think we try to make sure that essays resonate with the readers and they resonate with one another and so the guest scholar will sort of do the intro and the preface for that issue. So it won't be necessarily a special issue in that way but it will be an issue that just collates all the essays we are receiving and that have been accepted and then will try to make sense of it for the reader.

Kent: Just to follow what Ron is saying, I think this is a real opportunity to take the scholarship that *Critical Studies in Media Communication* has historically produced and draw attention to the significance of that research by suggesting both the somatic importance of the work that is being published in the journal, but also to address the significance of the work within the different literatures in which the work is positioning itself. This is just one way that we have thought of to help to make the scholarship that is already being published in the journal that much more relevant to our readers and hopefully more useful as well.

What are your aims for the journal over the next three years?

Kent: Well I think the key thing is to publish high quality research and that is our main aim. With so many submissions to the journal we anguish about every rejection and therefore our commitment is to producing the best scholarship available. But perhaps more particularly we are aiming to publish work that is charting new realms of theoretical exploration, of creativity and of innovativeness, that is work that both suggests new ways of thinking about communication and media communication in particular, but also that research that itself explains it own unique innovativeness as well.

Ron: Yes, I think that there is as Kent was suggesting a real need for work that explores social justice and civic culture. So when we read our editorial policy, we talk a bit about that, but obviously because this is a critical studies journal and its one that is dedicated to media, we are interested in looking at a wide range of media and we are also interested in having people submit work that is multi methodological or that has cut across different methods. So I think for us excellent is the key term here and we do think that we, we have

already been fortunate to have a lot of really well written work submitted to the journal and at this point we are just interested in continuing the legacy of *Critical Studies and Media Communication* as a destination for high quality research. One of the concerns that we have and Kent spoke of this, is that we do sort of anguish over whether or not certain essays are accepted and as we look at each essay and we think about those that are recommended for rejection it is never an easy call because you want to support those individuals who are submitting work whether it is high quality or not. You want to be able to support them as colleagues but at the same time we have an obligation to the various readers that we have to produce the high quality work, so at the moment we have a fairly low acceptance rate, and I think that speaks to our commitment to providing high quality research, but we also do agonise over those things and we think that it really is a product of us kind of looking at some of the work that we get that is not necessarily appropriate for the journal that kind of elevates or heightens the rejection rate. Just because you know there are persons who are sending us work who would be better suited for, say *Broadcasting Electronic Media*, or *Critical/Cultural Communication Studies* or *Quarterly Journal Speech*, journals that are not necessarily the same as ours and have different foci.

Why should people read and submit to *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, what makes it unique in the field would you say?

Kent: Well I think one of the things that makes it unique is focussing on critical media communication and so by critical it is engaged with issues of power, power relations and different aspects of equity and social justice as well as theoretical questions about inclusion and exclusion, identity and culture. But at the same time really also emphasising media and the way in which we operate. So I think it is pretty distinct in that way, but in addition to that I think that *Critical Studies in Media Communication* has it's own kind of history and that history can be understood I think best by looking back at past issues of the journal to see where it came from and where it is going. So the very strong political economic focus of the early *Critical Studies in Media Communication* you can still see vestiges of that within the journal. Yet there are many more branches beyond the political economic one that you can see being emphasised especially in the cultural direction and perhaps as our issues will suggest as it relates to power specifically.

Ron: The interesting thing about critical studies and media communication as well is that writers, scholars are now more privileged than ever to have a wide range of places where they can publish their work. So when *Critical Studies in Media Communication* was first created and it was called *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, it was a place where all the media stuff went. Anyone who was writing in media was pretty much sending their work to *Critical Studies* if they wanted to submit it to a mainstream journal within the field of communication. There were maybe one or two other outlets that were possible at the time and so now in the last 10/15 years its amazing that we have had this tremendous burst of new journals even within the National Communication Association, you know we have a *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, and we also have the *Journal of International Inter*

Cultural Communication and these are just two places where people would have ordinarily sent their work to critical studies and now they have other options where they can send their work. Even the *Howard Journal of Communication* has been a place where people have ordinarily tried to send some of their work and so the *Howard Journal* and *Critical Studies in Media Communication* where two places where people who did culture and did critical work would send their work. Now what distinguished *Critical Studies in Media Communication* as Kent mentioned is that fact that we are focused on media which is something that *Communication in Critical/Cultural Studies* is not limited to and that we are able to take some of these divergent discourses about technology and begin to apply some of the critical praxis work that is out there to these kinds of issues and conversations and it is very exciting so I think that this is really been the kind of journal that has been cutting edge and you will find that I think not only throughout our editorship, but even in the past few editorships you have begun to notice some of these things emerging.

Well thanks for taking the time to tell us of your plans for *Critical Studies in Media Communication*. If people want to check out your first special issue they can find more information at www.communicationarena.com.