

Gordon Campbell
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Good evening, thanks for coming. My name is Gordon Campbell, and it is my privilege tonight to present this annual lecture which, as you know, is intended to honour the life and works of Bruce Jesson. As much as anything, it was the deeds of politicians - and the media's failure to hold them properly to account - that impelled Bruce into his life of commentary and political action. And I think he'd have enjoyed being here tonight, to argue the toss afterwards about this topic.

I do apologise for reading this lecture. Listening to someone read a lecture must be a deadly experience. If its any consolation...for someone who writes, reading this out loud is....well, its like karaoke. The music is all in the head. Believe me, I know.

One disclaimer I should make. The kind invitation to do this lecture came before I started work with the Greens. The views I express do not reflect in any way, shape or form the views of the Green Party or caucus. I'm here tonight strictly as a former journalist, and part time music promoter.

Oddly enough, the last time I was in the Maidment Theatre just over a year ago, was to hear a musician, called Joanna Newsom. One of her songs captures in a few phrases something of what I've got to say tonight. So please, bear with me if I quote :

And all the books our fathers wrote
are in the middle of the road
Little by little, we implode

We can't remember what was spoke
But we stare in wonder at the smoke
What it begets is born alone
We know not now what we have known...

It's a song about cultural amnesia, and not just with regard to the war in Iraq. I think that theme speaks to any regular viewer of the news, or of the visible workings of Parliament. The events matter, but they often don't seem to grounded in any sense of history or context, and nor is there any opportunity to respond. It looks like a private, hermetically sealed game. To the point where, as Joanna Newsom intimates, you can start to doubt your own convictions – we know not now what we have known.

In a speech delivered this time last year, Al Gore pointed out the obvious irony of this situation. Television is now more accessible to more people than any other medium of communication in history, but its content allows for less and less genuine participation. Unlike the marketplace of ideas that emerged in the wake of the printing press, Gore pointed out, there is virtually no exchange of ideas possible in television's domain. "It is a rigged market, an oligopoly, with imposing barriers of entry that exclude the average citizen."

Early on, people did try to get around television's lack of true interactivity. "Soon after television established its dominance over print, " Gore continues, "young people who realised they were being shut out of the dialogue of democracy came up with a new form of expression in an effort to join the national conversation – the demonstration." Basically, this

was a poor quality theatrical production aimed at getting the attention of the cameras [just] long enough to hold up a brief message on a placard to the wider public. These days, even that doesn't work any longer as an avenue for getting on the six o'clock news.

My starting point then has to be to look for the sources of what seems a fairly widespread sense of exclusion. Television keeps on telling us that it's our news, that it's us, that it's part of our community, because patently it isn't. It's an alien, pretending to be part of the family. But obviously television news isn't the only source of this alienation.

Politics is also a one way street - voters don't vote in governments, they vote out Governments whose apparent indifference to them has become intolerable, as the Helen Clark administration seems well on the way to discovering. Unfortunately, the operating stance of the political media is more part of the problem than it is part of the solution.

I'm talking in particular about the media's gaming impulse. As the American journalist James Fallows says: "Deep forces in political, social and economic structures account for most of the frustration of today's politics, but the media's attitudes have played a surprisingly important and destructive role. Issues that reflect the collective interest, such as crime, healthcare, education, economic growth – are presented mainly as arenas in which politicians can fight. The press is often referred to as the Fourth Branch of Government, which means that it should be providing the information we need, so as to make sense of public problems.."

Far from making those public challenges easier to grasp, Fallows says, the media routinely makes it harder. "By choosing to present public life as a contest between scheming political leaders, all of whom the public should view with suspicion, the news media help bring about that very result."

Now, there are several reasons WHY the media treats politics with such corrosive cynicism. Some are more justified than others. In part, I think the cynicism serves as a shield against the humiliations they endure daily at the hands of their sources, but....safe to say, if you do convince yourself that it's all crap - or all just a game, or all just business as usual – you've largely rid yourself of any imperative to evaluate it on any other level.

It is probably an unfair comparison, but it may be salutary. You can only contrast the stance of today's media with the achievements of the "golden age of public service journalism" – aka muckraking – between 1900 and 1912. As journalism historian Mark Feldstein says, that period of advocacy journalism was strongly linked to many progressive reforms – and he lists among them the Pure Food and Drug Act, child labour laws, federal income taxes, the direct election of Senators, and the anti-trust prosecution of John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil company – a blow against monopoly capitalism that Richard Prebble seemingly had never heard about before he sold Telecom.

The current stance of the profession has consequences for the news coverage that we receive, and affects both style and content. For the purposes of this talk, I'm classifying what I see to be the key elements in this process as being one, commercialisation, two personalisation and three, the tabloid mindset.

Commercialisation is easy enough. It has to do with the concentration of media ownership - and the impact this has had on the media's Fourth Estate role, to ensure that it remains

secondary to market forces and ratings. Media de-regulation here in the late 1980s quickly saw most of our print and electronic media fall into the hands of Australians and North Americans.

Worldwide, the concentration of media ownership has seen profits rise, while the number of journalists employed continues to shrink. The normal career path in print journalism in particular makes it look more and more like an apprenticeship scheme for the public relations industry. Even television is doing less, with less. As late as 1989, the CBS network had 38 foreign correspondents in 28 bureaus. Today, CBS has five correspondents in four bureaus. At home, TVNZ is being rumoured to be about lose nearly one sixth of its current workforce during 2007.

Personalisation is a bit more complicated. In practice, it refers to the relentless pursuit of the human interest angle – whereby political process is depicted as something done merely by individuals to individuals, usually without reference to the impact that class, income or other forms of privilege and opportunity have on the outcome of the story. It also elevates personal anecdotes above policy, puts victim narrative ahead of analysis, and focusses on outcomes far more often than it does on causes.

We saw much of this at work recently in the media's handling of the Herceptin cancer drug decision. The meta-narrative of that story – Paul Krugman calls it the “media script” - was that cancer victims were being denied life saving treatment by the heartless bureaucrats down at Pharmac. Telling the story via accounts of personal tragedy is always going to be easier to present and to consume than figuring out the real balance between Herceptin's costs and the extent of the benefits it may deliver.

A narrative of victim-hood is also easier than tackling say, the political decisions and Government priorities that give the Pharmac its skinflint mandate, which has meant that New Zealand now has the lowest per capita spend on pharmaceuticals among nine developed countries cited in a report last week by the Commonwealth Fund. Is that good for society? Hey, no one was asking last week. It was all about whether we should spend \$400 million, \$600 million or \$900 million on a rugby stadium, and where we should put it.

This personalised approach not only dramatises and exploits the emotional extremes of individuals - it can also expose them to retribution by the authorities. This is particularly the case when it comes to stories about the welfare system. The media always wants personal stories, but the exposure can be really dangerous, for people who are already vulnerable. The beneficiaries involved may also be naïve enough to expect that the media will look out for them, and protect them.

Even more to the point, this personalising process is wide open to manipulation by politicians, and the media is usually more than happy to serve as their production crew. The two parties have gained quite a lot of experience in recent years in staging folksy photo opportunities and media events. Right now, Rodney Hide's best chance of getting re-elected doesn't hinge on very much at all on Act policies – but on him being taken to our hearts as that oddly emotional guy who dances badly, swims across the harbour and cooks kebabs on television.

Similarly, the media has re-packaged Richard Prebble as a loveable elder statesman, the nation's rascally uncle. No one is churlish enough anymore to bring up his political legacy :

the sales of Telecom, Railways and a few other achievements. The game here is to maximise exposure, by choosing the sort of contexts where the opportunity for genuine scrutiny is kept to a minimum.

I thought the retirement of SIS Director Richard Woods a few weeks ago was the most striking example of the media's love affair with personality packaging. Surprise— there were no questions about the credibility gap or the human rights issues facing the SIS and other security agencies, post 9/11. No one asked Woods why — given the SIS had three whole years to prepare its case against Ahmed Zaoui - it failed to meet the deadline to get its paperwork ready in time this year, and thus forced Zaoui and his family into another round of delays.

No one has asked why, despite this history of official bungling and delays, the part time judge hearing the review is said to be working only three or four hours a week on the Zaoui case. And in particular, no one asked Woods why - of the 39 classified files of information that the SIS plan to present against Zaoui, a whole 28 of them don't even mention Zaoui by name. How can this stuff be so secret and so damning that Zaoui and his defence team can't be allowed to see it — when 72% of these classified files don't even mention him? We'll maybe never know, because the media image was a of a wise old head, taking his leave.

The third plank is the tabloid trend in news coverage. The jury is still split on this one, and that might seem surprising. Al Gore again, sees tabloid style and content as an erosion of democracy, because it denies citizens the information they need — not only to fully participate in decision making, but in the informed discourse with each other that is the stuff of a healthy society. Bruce Jesson used to talk and write a lot about the hollowness of discourse in New Zealand, and Gore is right there alongside him in decrying the consequences.

Tabloid style demands shorter stories That's been an undeniable trend. If you think television sound-bites are getting shorter, you're right. If you think stories in magazines and newspapers are getting shorter, you're right again. Count the word length of the one, two and three page stories in the Listener now compared to five years ago, and you'll find those stories have shrunk on average by a third, and that's the common rate of contraction in Time, Newsweek and other newsweeklies as well.

There are other symptoms. Sensational tone and celebrity driven content. The interviewing style is also ...increasingly on the hyper side. Often it's a schtick, a pantomime of aggression : news reporters get to ask softball questions in a phony, hardball fashion. If it is covered at all, politico-economic policy tends to be relegated down the bulletin, or into the business pages. At the same time, there has been a higher ratio of coverage afforded to celebrities, crime, sex and sports — or in the case of O.J. Simpson, all four at once.

If this sounds like I'm complaining about tabloid media, I am. But by doing so, there's always a risk of romanticising what came before — like the early days of television when authority meant middle aged men in suits. It wasn't that great. In fact, news and current affairs during the 70s and 80s tended to make a virtue out of one part of the elite talking to the other in a language and tone of exclusion - BBC accents and all. It was, in effect, a club for the educated few, claiming to be a national forum.

What it aspired to were the virtues of print journalism. Yet it now about 30 years since print lost its place as the main conduit of news in this country - although for the first 20 of those years, television news had slunk along like some low life cousin of the print media, ashamed

of its own flashiness. That all changed in 1992, when TVNZ consciously adopted the tabloid style of news coverage.

That was the year that Paul Norris, then head of news and current affairs at TVNZ, brought in the American adviser Fred Shook to transform the state broadcaster's mode of news presentation. This included teaching journalists how to write news for the visual medium and coaching newsreaders on how to read it - or more accurately, Shook taught them how to emote their lines. This included tips on how news anchors could signal the desired response to news items, via side comments and visible reactions, thus giving viewers comfort and guidance on how they should be reacting to a given story.

All of this being based on the premise, as Norris told me in a Listener interview at the time, that "Television is not very easy to use for detailed examination or analysis of complex matters." Mr Norris is now an astute critic of the media, and head of the Broadcast School of Journalism in Christchurch.

Not a happy state of affairs. Fourteen years ago, we entered an era when taxing the brain was seen to be a violation of television's true and essentially visual nature. TVNZ news, to use Lindsay Perigo's classic term, has essentially been 'brain dead' ever since that point in 1992, and the charter has made no visible difference.

Even so, the tabloid trend has its defenders. In their view, tabloid media are trading in different realms of subjectivity. Quite different so this argument goes, to the remnants of mainstream journalism – which, however shakily these days – still tries to present facts as if they belonged to an empirical reality. If there are any veterans of the 1990s cultural studies wars here tonight, you'll know I'm really channelling the views of the British cultural theorist John Fiske.

Fiske believed that more information is embedded in popular culture about the prevailing power relationships in society than mainstream journalism is ever likely to uncover. As Larry Strelitz, one of Fiske's protégés, says about mainstream journalism : "The tone [of mainstream journalism] is serious, official, and impersonal, aimed at producing understanding and recruiting belief – largely by addressing the audience from the position of one who knows, and providing information to those that don't."

By contrast, the tone of tabloids is conversational. It employs the language of its audience in order to promote DISBELIEF, and it provides the pleasures of not being taken in by a shifting constellation of them, the ruling others. The stance is a bit like the cynicism of the political press that I mentioned earlier, but at its best, its tone is far more playful. At its worst, it exploits and promotes the sexual and racial anxieties of its audience – particularly by directing them against foreigners and ethnic minorities.

Lets take a concrete example. A relevant one, as we head into a major debate here in New Zealand on immigration policy. Not so long ago, the term "refugee" had positive meanings. A refugee was a victim fleeing persecution, a survivor needing our help and deserving our sympathy. More recently, it has become fused in the public mind with the more negative term 'asylum seeker' - which carries the added sense of a foreigner seeking something for nothing, while being a drain on taxpayer funds, social services and the country's reputation.

From there, the leap to 'illegal immigrant' and 'potential terrorist' is a pretty short one. The tabloid media has been a key player in the transformation of language and attitudes. In a speech marking Refugee Week in Britain in 2004, Forward Maisokwadzo noted ironically how the British media had blamed asylum seekers for terrorism, TB, AIDS and SARS, for failing schools, failing hospitals, falling house prices, rising house prices, road accidents and dwindling fish stocks in British rivers.

In two sensationally untrue beat-ups, asylum seekers were blamed for snaring and baking swans on the banks of the river Lea, and for stealing and eating a missing donkey.

"If asylum seekers did not exist, " Maisokwadzo says, " they would have to be invented. When every major and minor problem of the day can be blamed on a small number of outsiders who make up only a tiny fraction of the population and expend only a tiny fraction of the public purse, then ..I want to put it to you that the problem has nothing to do with asylum seekers. It is a failure of democracy.."

For all that, John Fiske, who was a genuine maverick, saw tabloid media as potentially subversive. Why is the tabloid style so popular ? In his view, it was because its audience had been subordinated for centuries, and systematically excluded from conventional political discourse. Structurally, he wrote, shows like Jerry Springer, by giving open rein to conflicting voices, allowed viewers to challenge the traditional role of the news anchor. It was kind of a 90s thing. Since then, Fiske's approach has been pretty much supplanted by Ben Bagdikian and his protégé Robert McChesney, who use more trad left analysis to trace the impacts of media convergence and de-regulation.

I think we still do need Fiske's sensitivity to populist media and popular culture - allied to McChesney's analysis of the impacts of media ownership and de-regulation. Its easy to be conspiratorial about big media. And its true - the media corporates do have something of a vested interest in screening the hoopla around Tom and Kate's wedding, rather than giving their reporters a free hand and expansive budgets to chronicle the evils of growing income disparity.

I'm probably wrong about this, but I've never been as agitated as some by media ownership issues. If big media didn't exist would people be any less passive, as news consumers ? Beyond a certain point of critical mass – which we reached decades ago - genuine diversity in media opinion in New Zealand all but disappeared long ago. We've been gleaning for content ever since.

That doesn't bother me unduly. One, because I believe that in the United States and here at home, the private sector is reliably incompetent – you only have to look at the marriage of Time Warner and AOL, or scrutinise most issues of the Herald on Sunday to see that. Second, anyone who's ever worked for a media conglomerate knows the various arms compete with each other even more viciously than they do with players in the outside world. And thirdly, I think the ideologies that journalism embodies are a bigger problem than who happens to be sitting in the big chair in the media boardroom.

What is the ideology of the media ? Its collective mind and the socio-economic privileges that help to shape its worldview are rarely probed. The skirmish earlier this year between Michael Cullen and TVNZ's Guyon Espiner's over whether the latter's interest in tax cuts was driven by the prospect of personal gain, was not a very helpful exception. Tom Frewen

eventually estimated in NBR that the average gallery journalist earns between \$65 -\$85,000. That's the top tax bracket, but it hardly explains the desire to keep banging on about tax cuts.

More likely, it probably reflects another point made by Frewen – that once journalism's collective mindset gets fixated on a media script, no counter evidence can be allowed into the frame to disrupt the narrative. The S59 issue is a classic case. From day one, the media has framed this as an anti-smacking issue, about the rights of parents. In fact, the measure is about the rights of children, and about preventing violence against them. That perspective has never framed the news coverage of S59 – even though the international comparisons leave New Zealand with a lot to be ashamed about with respect to our record of violence against children.

The example Frewen chose was our nuclear policy. For years, the US has been telling us in various ways – hey guys we're pretty much over it. This year, Frewen indicates, they've even mentioned our anti-nuclear stance is as being of help in their anti-proliferation efforts. None of this seems able to deflect the media's insistence - - at say, the infamous Peters/McCain meeting this meeting -that it's still a barrier to better relations.

Most days, we talk about the media in the same personalised and theatrical terms – boy, that Sean Plunket interview was rough - that the media now use to talk about everything else. Its gossip. Unfortunately, I think it tends to inflate the power that journalists have, in their dealings with government and with bureaucrats. Sure, politicians who are in opposition, or who belong to small parties certainly do need to woo the media - but the Government and the media hardly need each other to anything like the same degree. It is a tricky intersection, though. Personally I've found it a bit disturbing to see the degree of dependence that journalists seem to have on the spin cycle, the press release, and on the "he said/ then he said" two hander that passes for objective reporting. Not to mention the managed leak by sources with agendas of their own that journalists seem to be quite happy to serve, as the admission price for information.

Initially, when I started on this lecture. I had thought that relationship counselling might help to explain what is so dysfunctional in this exchange. But its too lopsided for that to make much sense.

Out on the margins, the best journalists try to battle against the clock to extract information from people who – thanks to the prevalence of media coaching - have been trained not to divulge it on anything but their own terms. If all else fails, the Government is often quite willing to resort to the final sanction : shut up, release nothing, and after a couple of days, the media will usually go away, starved out for lack of official comment.

For all those reasons, I've come to think that the effectiveness of journalists usually stands in inverse proportion to their proximity to power, especially when it comes to investigative reporting. Its not an accident that the White House press corps, for instance, broke none of the major Watergate stories. According to the Columbia Journalism Review, the three US television networks screened 414 stories about Iraq between September 2002 and February 2003 – and all but 34 originated at the White House, Pentagon or State Department, with predictable results.

In most political press galleries around the globe, original research usually just means being the first person to be told something, by someone else.

So believe me, if Sean Plunket sounds a little testy some mornings, that's the least of our problems. If it really wants to be seen as the peoples' check on government excess – which is what its Fourth Estate privileges hinge upon – it had better start playing the part. Because more often, the ideology of the profession points it in the opposite direction. Quite some time ago, journalism came to regard its job as being to report the news, not to make it or analyse it – and as a consequence, the sayings and doings of public officials have come to dominate our news agenda.

I would argue that this co-dependency between officialdom and journalism became pathological quite a long time ago. In the name of objectivity, journalism largely shrinks from countering the spin machines of government and corporate public relations. There is a strong conservative ideology in journalism that says the format of news and current affairs should resemble a blank slate – on which the forces of the left and the right are invited to write, under equal fire from the host. I strongly disagree. I think the media outlet should be encouraged to reach conclusions based on its own prior evaluation of the evidence, and to subject the politicians to strong and persistent questioning to pursue the truth. That is precisely why the recent TV3 dioxin doco was so powerful. One other reason it was so effective was because it wasn't shoe-horned by TV3 into a commercial television hour.

It's a tough system to crack, though. Down at the Broadcasting Authority – for instance – the notion that fairness and balance require a theatre of conflict where all parties are subjected to the same rations of aggro from the interviewer is deeply ingrained. That was central to their verdict on TV3's Corngate programme. So the tabloid mindset isn't just popular with the viewers, its apparent in the thinking of the regulators as well.

In my view, that kind of ping pong dualistic thinking inhibits the media from performing its key functions: which I see as being to evaluate and to discriminate, and to pursue a responsibility for social outcomes that is rarely parcelled out equally on all sides, however rosily that might fit the textbook notions of balance. Not every story – in reality, hardly any - has two sides, neatly and equally arrayed.

My own theoretical grounding ? Such as it is, it derives from Louis Althusser and 1970s film theory, which holds that the medium IS its ideology. As I've said, that holds true for the media as well. Even at their best, the media's motivating impulses are reformist, not radical. In my experience, most of its practitioners have bought into the meritocracy – perhaps partly because, educationally at least, they have been prime beneficiaries of it.

What I mean by that is that the days when people could walk into journalism literally off the street – as I did – are all but over. Entry to journalism now requires a degree ticket, and specialist training. That's really quite a change. During the 1993 election campaign, I remember interviewing Jim Bolger on the National campaign plane and he asked me rhetorically at one point - how many of the journalists in this cabin here do you think, are Catholics, or used to be ?

Quite a few, at the time. It used to mean a career in politics, or journalism, Bolger said wryly. He was referring to the strand of Christian social activism cited at the recent Labour party conference, but which is now much less common as a motivating impulse for taking on the job.

For most people, objectivity is probably the word that would come to mind if anyone ever did bring up the question of the media's guiding ideology. Quite wrongly I think, the word has been equated with fairness or honesty. In practice, it enjoys only a fleeting acquaintance with either. I find it interesting that the objectivity ideal began as a commercial impulse 100 years ago – after the owners of the partisan press began to see it as a useful new tool of the trade, to help them extend their readership base.

Much of the time it is an excuse for a “get the two sides and go home” coverage. In political coverage, this is a particularly useless technique for framing stories about issues like immigration or national security - or any subject at all where the two major parties share roughly the same position.

For that reason, when the Zaoui review finally begins, I have a hunch that the Crown could well try a line of attack that seeks to discredit him personally – and I say that not because there is anything substantial for them to feed on, but because I really can't see how the Crown can have any faith left in the ability of the SIS to win them this case on legal and policy grounds. The Government knows the media's appetites. And apart from Keith Locke, there are no “two sides” with which the political media could even begin to frame a story of substance about the Zaoui case. With a couple of notable exceptions, the media have treated the subject as being too hard for them.

For many people, it is the language of objective journalism that is its real Achilles heel. Robert Fisk, when he was here earlier this year, talked about the sanitised language that that objective journalism routinely uses, particularly in its coverage of the Middle East. Fisk also objected to the way the profession's aversion to making judgement calls on contentious issues regularly leads it into putting the aggressor and the victim onto the same, morally neutral footing. Providing history and context is treated as advocacy, and self censored out of the frame.

There have been a few attempts to fill the gap. While the mainstream media potters about within its self-imposed restraints, the so called “newsbook” has come along to fill the void. People like Al Gore, Bob Woodward, James Fallows, Seymour Hersh, Ron Susskind – and in New Zealand, Nicky Hager – have ended up doing the traditional media's job. The news books have ended up providing the history, the context and the newsbreak research that the mainstream media has been failing to deliver.

In Fallows' opinion, the rise of Fox television in the States may have drilled the final nail in the coffin. As he told me in a Listener interview a couple of years ago, that 100 year experiment in objectivity now seems all but over. “Essentially the change to a market driven and more partisan press has become an undo-able thing ..Murdoch has set so powerful an example of the success of mainly market minded, mainly partisan media that the rest of the media world is just having to align itself with this example. It is taking the US system toward a European system of more identifiably partisan newspapers.”

While there will always be a high end niche for sophisticated news and comment – and some of that has migrated to the Internet – the mass market will, Fallows says, steadily become more partisan.

In the States, this process is well under way. The mainstream media is being hollowed out, with partisans rising on both of its flanks. The success of Fox on the right is matched by the

popularity of Michael Moore and the parody news of Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert - while at the centre, the bastions of trad news coverage, like the New York Times are in deep trouble.

In New Zealand, we're not in that situation of partisan diversity, as we might find in parts of Europe. Thanks to the legacy of Prebble and his colleagues, we're virtually at the mercy of media convergence. TVNZ's sale of its Sky shares under National, and the Clark government's ongoing refusal to invest in any significant way in digital media, has left control of the digital gateway in this country firmly in the hands of Rupert Murdoch.

What are we willing to do about it? Usually at this point, the speaker points at the Internet and disappears over the horizon in a visionary cloud I don't think the Web is our salvation. Its freedoms are crucial, but they're also vulnerable, and though I'm no expert, I don't think the battle for control over domain naming - which is just one area where the Net is vulnerable to control - is over. In fact, if you want a new cause, or career worth fighting that may be new to you start working on copyright law.

If I can take time for an aside on that point... There's a good reason why intellectual property rights are the leading edge of the US free trade agenda - its because copyright law is not only about commerce, but is perceived to be tool of social, economic and cultural domination. I think the battle over Don Brash's emails, which has been waged so far as a battle over property - is very revealing, because as argued in court last week, it's a gagging order on content of political and social importance.

For my five cents on this, I think an interesting double standard may be at work here. When employees use the office computer, the content is said to become an issue for the boss, because its his computer - that's what licenses him to read personal communications posted on office gear. Yet Brash seems to be arguing that emails on the Parliamentary Services system are his private property - I would have thought that if anyone should be filing for redress from the courts, it should be Parliamentary Services. In other words, there's not only a public interest in the content - arguably, there's public ownership at stake with the emails. Once Brash put this stuff onto publically owned systems, I think he may well have lost his absolute right to object if they now become part of the public discourse.

Moreover, when one considers the difficulty in gaining access to this information by traditional channels, the means used by Nicky Hager are far more understandable.

Back to the Net. For all its influence, it is still really a political niche player when its outreach is measured by gross numbers. In the US, Pew opinion studies a few months ago showed that the overwhelming majority of teens and young adults still receive get their news information from the television networks, just like everyone else.

In other words, blogging alone will not allow us to defeat or significantly alter the upcoming immigration legislation. This I believe is looming to be the single worst prospect during the twilight years of the Clark administration.

I hope you already know about the draft immigration proposals that were released earlier this year. Briefly, they increase the powers of surveillance and powers of entry of immigration officials, reduce narrow the access to Ministerial review and discretion, and significantly broaden the use of secret information and hearsay information by officials. Cumulatively, the

measures proposed would reduce the capacity of ordinary people to challenge the crucial and sometimes even life threatening decisions taken by officials and politicians.

My point throughout this talk has been that the media is just not configured in a way likely to be of very much help. The information lies elsewhere. Already, blogs such as the always excellent No Right Turn, and the efforts of Tze Ming Mok have been invaluable sources of information on the draft immigration documents, and their contributions have put the traditional media to shame. I think what we might need to do now - given the glimpses we already have had of what our immigration policy will look like, and given our related readiness to put some of our most ancient freedoms at risk in the name of the war on terrorism --is to pool our resources. I think there's a need here now for an organization that functions in a way very similar to the Liberty organisation in the UK. This organization - perhaps expanding upon the existing Human Rights Foundation - would seek to bring together legal expertise and campaigners. It would serve both as a lobby group to Government and an information base for the media on issues of human rights, and to protect the freedom of political and cultural expression. I think there's room within that mandate for centre left and libertarian perceptions to come together.

That's probably enough. I hope its not seemed too long.. Just over there on this stage a year ago, Joanna Newsom also played some long songs - some of them almost as long as this lecture, but with far more grace. The very long song I quoted earlier ends by warning us just what it can require to finally get our eyes open, and our minds engaged :

And all the baby boys we've born With eyes averted from the storm Sent off to die in perfect form We know now what we have known

And I guess thats always has been the ultimate price of not being aware - that you end up by betraying your children. That prospect should be motivation enough for all of us. Thanks for listening.

And all the books our fathers wrote
Are in the middle of the road
Little by little we implode
History brittle, brown and broke
We can't remember what was spoke
So we stare in wonder at the smoke
What it begets is born alone
We know not now what we have known

Ladies; breathe deep against your whalebones
For your children come home made of stone

The terror seething sees a way
Or like the wheezing of the bay
In miniature agonies
They travel westward on the breeze
Bring us all to our knees

The dappled horse, the sorrowed mare
With eyes that do not see but stare

Beneath boots as black as Malachi
He drives a nag into the nigh
Into the nigh

And all the baby boys we've born
With eyes averted from the storm
Sent off to die in perfect form
We know now what we have known