

學術對談

## 新媒體與媒介化中心

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(Prof. Nick Couldry)

「『媒介中心的迷思』是建立在事實基礎上的，也就是說，現實中我們確實會把注意力集中在那一個特定而普遍的『媒體』。但現在這個事實基礎正在發生劇烈的變化。許多社會機構是這個迷思重要的既得利益獲得者——這當然包括媒體本身，也包括試圖接觸大

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量觀眾的廣告商，以及需要『現身交流空間 (space of appearance)』的政府機構，它們通過媒介中心的迷思來合理化聚合在一起的受眾。我們不應期待這些機構接受『媒介化中心』必然消亡的預期。相反，同 Graeme Turner 提出的論點相似，我們可以預期這些機構會更積極地創造這個中心——媒介機構正持續不斷地在搜尋一些它們認為是舉國皆應關注的事件。」

## **New Media and the Myth of the Mediated Centre**

Discussants: Nick COULDRY, Joseph M. CHAN, Anthony Y. H. FUNG

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### **Abstract**

Nick Couldry explicates and demystifies the notion of “mediated centre” which captures the force of media institutions’ particular power over the means for representing shared reality. Noting that the focused attention of the public on a particular common media is radically changing nowadays, he finds that the tension between “the myth of the mediated centre” and the ongoing media revolution is growing. He explores how our understanding of “the myth of the mediated centre” will change as the analysis is extended beyond the Western contexts of UK and USA and to places such as China. Couldry also touches on the concept of “voice” which he elaborated in a book of his, treating it as a value cherished by all human beings to express themselves and represent the world. Finally, he advises researchers to stay away from media-centrism and adopt an interdisciplinary approach in media studies.

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## 尼克·庫德瑞教授簡介

尼克·庫德瑞(Nick Couldry)博士為倫敦政治經濟學院傳播與社會理論講座教授，曾任倫敦大學金斯密斯學院媒介與傳播學系系主任及教授。他曾以作者或編者身份出版11本著作，包括《媒介倫理》(與Mirca Madianou及Amit Pinchevski共同主編，Palgrave MacMillan 2013年出版)、《媒介、社會、世界：社會理論與數位媒體實踐》(Polity 2012年出版)、以及《聲音為何重要：新自由主義後的文化與政治》(Sage 2010年出版)。庫德瑞博士近期與Andreas Hepp合寫一本有關媒介建構現實的新書，將由Polity出版社出版。

NC: 尼克·庫德瑞

JA: 陳韜文、馮應謙

**JA: 「媒介化中心」是你在研究媒介的社會位置時提出的一個關鍵觀察。但經過你對大眾傳媒內容生產及發行的研究後，你認為「媒介化中心」的說法只是一個「迷思」。我們希望您能借此機會向讀者重新闡釋「媒介化中心」的意思，以及您為什麼將其視作「迷思」?**

NC: 所謂「媒介化中心」並不存在：我們的社會確實找不到這樣一個「中心」——它是整個社會價值與規範的核心源頭，或者說是導致所有社會現象的首要因素。任何一個社會其實都包含一大套不同的過程與機制，它們運作的方向如此多元，以致於不可以歸約為任何一個「中心」。但與此同時，很多機構卻着力強調這樣一個中心的存在！在多數現代性形態中，媒介機構在構建「中心」過程中扮演了極端重要的角色，並且媒介機構通常還會格外強調，媒介自身即是一個通向社會中心的特許管道，即所謂的「媒介化中心」。我試圖用「媒介化中心的迷思」來描繪這些宣稱與構建：它是對媒介機構之特有力量的一個簡約概括——這種力量(通常是被神話化了的)可以影響到現實被再現之方式：媒介的運作使得我們接受、認可這個被再現的現實正是「我們的現實」。

為什麼我會用「迷思」這個詞來形容媒介機構的種種宣稱？主要有兩個原因。第一個原因，如我剛剛說到，這些宣稱並不真實。第二個原因則是，「迷思」這個詞比「意識形態」更好地把握了這些「宣稱」運作的方式。因為這些「宣稱」從來都不是直言不諱的，相反，他們通常以暗示或內嵌的方式表達，正如迷思往往嵌藏於語言模式之中。「直播媒介」或者「媒介名人」的都是箇中的範疇例子。

我之前的著作(《媒介力量的地位：媒介時代的朝聖與目擊》，[2000])就論述過，我們的社會往往不斷強化這樣一個觀念，所有在媒介中得到呈現的事物比沒有呈現的都是更好的，更有價值的，更有分量的。「實況性(liveness)」這個類別就是基於時間性的一個例子：它暗示我們應該留意此刻正在發生的事情因為它正是我們此時此刻的社會現實。名人(celebrity)的範疇，把「非比尋常」的和「尋常」的人類清楚區隔開來。物件也可以體現這種區隔。我最喜歡的一個案例來自真人秀《英國老大哥》的第一季節目。其中參賽者被要求坐在一把椅子上，選手需要在對質裡直面他的謊言，直到無法承受而退出節目。後來這把椅子在拍賣上拍出了大價錢，並非因為這把椅子本身的特質，而是因為它曾經在媒介聚焦之下坐着一個謊話連篇的人物。我的另一本書《媒介儀式：一種批判的方法》(2003)把這些觀察發展成了一個理論，它關注這些媒介儀式強化迷思的濃縮時刻。

「媒介」是我們要回歸的概念，事實上它本身最能表達這種範疇差異：我們的社會不僅有一套異質的媒介機構運營着不同種類的媒體，其實我們所擁有的「那個」媒介同時是更具一致性與中心性的——或者說，這至少是在英國、北美以及很多歐洲國家媒介呈現的狀態。

換句話說，「媒介化中心迷思」的構建分散在數量龐大的社會踐行與時刻之中，不僅僅是媒介機構，每個生活在社會中的人都活在這種迷思之中——從我們的一些行為方式可以看出端倪，例如，當一個「普通人」和一個「名人」分別走進房間時，我們的反應如此不同(看到名人我們會喊出「天啊」)。迷思與意識形態(至少是經典馬克思理論意義上的「意識形態」)不同，迷思在**各地各處**

不斷地被製造，對維持媒介機構的社會合法性，以及維護媒介作為機構的理據都顯得極端重要。

**JA:** 媒介中心的迷思這個現象在很大程度上基於對大眾媒體主導的媒介系統的考察。但現在我們進入了一個媒介融合與個人媒介的時代，我們看到更多可以同時用於內容生產與消費的傳播平臺。在「媒介中心的迷思」與正在越演愈烈的媒介革命之間，你是否看到一些張力？你認為「媒介中心的迷思」最終會被消解麼？有沒有可能「媒介」這個觀念本身正在瓦解？

**NC:** 當然，這樣的張力是存在的。我第一次思索這個問題大概在2006到2007年，那段時間在英國高速互聯網接入已經非常普遍，社交媒體平臺開始流行。確實，那段時間我在懷疑是不是我的理論和實證框架在劇烈的媒介數位化環境裡註定會變得無關緊要。然而，透過反思，我意識到我的理論框架不但沒有過時，反而成為一個吸引了更激烈爭論的焦點。在2009年發表在《歐洲傳播學刊》的一篇論文裡，我提出了我的論點，在這裡我可以簡要說明。

「媒介中心的迷思」是建立在事實基礎上的，也就是說，現實中我們確實會把注意力集中在那一個特定而普遍的「媒體」。但現在這個事實基礎正在發生劇烈的變化。許多社會機構是這個迷思重要的既得利益獲得者——這當然包括媒體本身，也包括試圖接觸大量觀眾的廣告商，以及需要「現身交流空間 (space of appearance)」的政府機構，它們通過媒介中心的迷思來合理化聚集在一起的受眾。我們不應期待這些機構接受「媒介化中心」必然消亡的預期。相反，同 Graeme Turner 提出的論點相似，我們可以預期這些機構會更積極地創造這個中心——媒介機構正持續不斷地在搜尋一些它們認為是舉國皆應關注的事件。

看上去，社交媒體提供了一個異於大眾傳媒以外的「社會中心」。但所有參與構建「媒介化中心迷思」的利益方（大眾媒體，廣告商，政府）卻幾乎從一開始就對社交媒體表現出興趣。大眾媒體與社交媒體分別暗示的「中心」也許並不矛盾，更有可能共同發展，我把這個可能的狀況稱作「雙螺旋 (double helix)」。結果，儘管有眾多真實的力量正在瓦解我們既有的媒介的使用及經驗，我

卻並不認為作為中心的那個「媒介」觀念會因以社交媒體為特徵的「社會中心」的興起在可見的將來會消失。這個狀況將如何繼續演化對我來說則是一個極其有趣的話題。

**JA:** 你對於「媒介化中心的迷思」的分析主要是基於英國的情況。我們瞭解到你也想要把這一研究延伸到其他社會。是什麼促使你在研究中使用比較的角度？舉例來說，中國在許多方面都在經歷一場社會變革，包括社交媒體和手機的迅速普及。你的分析框架是否適用於中國的情況？

**NC:** 確實，我在英國工作，而且我做的關於媒介權力、媒介儀式，以及媒介化中心的迷思的田野研究全部都是在英國完成的。但是我最初的靈感不僅來自於英國媒介文化中的案例，還有北美和其他地方。事實上，激發我對建構的「中心」這一概念的興趣的主要來源是Edward Said對於美國社會「中心主義」的思考，影響我的主要因素還包括哥倫比亞的媒體，以及文化理論家Jesus Martin-Barbero，還有《媒體事件》(*Media Events*)的作者Elihu Katz和Daniel Dayan。所以從最初構思「媒介化中心的迷思」開始，我就已經參考了大量英國之外的研究。

當然，正如我在最近出版的獨著《媒體、社會、世界》中也提到，我在早期的研究中並沒有探討這一適用於英美「媒介化中心」的概念或許不能推廣至世界其他地方的可能性：事實上，2002年，在倫敦政治經濟學院就有一位中國學生對我的研究提出過質疑，這也是該研究遇到過的最佳質疑。所以從很早開始，我就開始考慮到我的理論可能有地理局限。當然，我的理論只是一項假設，應該因應研究對象的制度而區別思考。而且毋庸置疑的是，比如宗教機構是否在一個社會的權力集團中扮演重要角色，是有很大的差別的，伊朗就是一個有別於英國的案例。Marwan Kraidy關於中東真人秀節目模式的複雜含義研究對我來說很有啟發，原因不是因為該研究挑戰了「媒體儀式」的概念(事實上是確認了這一點)，而是因為它說明我們不能把媒介儀式的詳細含義從一個特定地區推廣至權力結構及文化歷史不一樣的地方。



所以，目前我的研究（包括它的理論框架）發展到了比較研究的階段，我也對比較不同的媒介文化和社會背景更加感興趣。這與媒介研究的國際化趨勢非常契合。媒介研究的國際化在過去十年中一直在發展（這是非常好的現象），而目前達到了這樣一個階段——誰提出關於媒介機構的社會影響的普遍理論而不引進一些比較材料加以說明理論的適用性，誰就變得十分可笑。

從這個觀點來看，中國的情況很有趣：一個非常強大又文化多元的國家，國家媒介機構的社會正當性比英國更有爭議性，中國快速發展的商業媒體和發展更快的社交媒體（以微博為例）從某種程度上來說已經發展成了一個鮮明與國家對立的反中心（counter-centre to the state），但是國家現在也在着力投入於發展這些媒體。我認為邱林川的《工人階級的網路社會》（*Working Class Network Society*）在這方面是一部非常重要的著作，因為它提出了多層次的複雜性，並且在很多方面提到了媒介機構在社會嵌入中的矛盾性：中國的國土之大，意味着工人階級流動人口的「媒介化中心」和其他人口（例如中產階級的都市人口）的「媒介化中心」的取向不同。但是這並不意味着「媒介化中心」的持續性就不值得考慮——或許對中國、中國的廣告商，以及中國正在發展的公民社會來說，這還是一個重要的議題。香港與中國「中心」的關係為「我們如何看待中文媒介機構的社會地位」又增加了一層重要的複雜性。當然，因為我並不是一個專門研究中國的學者，所以我也無法回答這些問題，但是我相信對於那些對中國媒體、政府以及社會感興趣的學者來說，這些都是十分重要的問題，而且這些問題都是由「『媒介化中心的迷思』是數字時代不同機構之間和社會之間主要的衝突點」這一觀點直接衍生的。對於有中國學者參考我的研究來探討像「超級女聲」這樣的現象，我一直很高興，我也希望即將出版的《媒體、社會、世界》的中譯本能夠帶來更多的關於此類問題的討論，以及更多的實證應用。

**JA:** 在你最近出版的《聲音為何重要：新自由主義之後的文化和政治》（*Why Voice Matters: Culture and Politics after Neoliberalism*）一書中，你將聲音定義為「人們對於他們所處的世界的敘述實踐」。你

還認為聲音是與流行於西方社會的自由主義爭持的「價值」，在英國更是如此。那麼你認為聲音的概念也適用於更廣大的、集權統治更加普遍的全球背景下嗎？現時如何創造出一個真正可以表達有別於新自由主義另類價值的空間？

NC: 我認為聲音是一個基本的人類價值。它出於人類對於敘述自我或敘述他們所見的世界的需求(他們在世界上的軌跡)。我之所以決定在《聲音為何重要》一書中提出這一價值，是由於英國、歐洲、北美和拉丁美洲在2000年代末的政治和文化皆是由新自由主義所主導：這在當時似乎是一個應該加以關注的重要議題，而且目前從許多方面來看仍然如此。但我當時也意識到，隨着以市場主導的政治邏輯在全世界廣泛流傳，「新自由主義」在很多地區已不是瞭解主流政治的最佳框架，而且新自由主義的形式也多種多樣，正如 Aihwa Ong 條理分明地指出那樣。

最近，我開始思考聲音的價值作為一種對抗其他壓迫性政治的方式的重要性。關於這一點在《聲音為何重要》中一直表達得比較隱晦(例如第六章中關於多種壓迫環境下——不限於新自由主義——的「聲音社會學」，我當時的有關闡述或者並不够明確。)我已在一篇文章中開始講述這一觀點，該文預計在2014年出版於 Chris Atton 編輯的一本手冊中，我希望未來有機會再進一步發展該觀點。

所以我十分相信「聲音」的概念和價值對於理解專制環境下的政治是有潛在的益處的。關鍵是不僅要強調聲音的重要性(作為一種表達的過程)，還應包括聲音重要性本身，也就是說，要在更廣闊的情境下去考慮社會是如何組織的，以及一個社會的物質資源和符號資源是怎樣的及如何分配的。事實上，關於「發出的聲音」是否會被放在制度下(通過制度實踐和架構)定期地、持續地考量的問題，是非常困難也是被忽略的，主要是因為有些強大的社會力量不願意去思考這個問題。所以，對於能否發展出真實而有效的空間，使新自由主義以外的另類價值得以持續不斷，我並沒有現成的答案。(三年前佔據各大新聞頭條的「佔領運動」，長遠看來，也沒有提出多少答案)。但我認為這是一個關鍵的問題。

最近澳洲在聆聽的過程方面做了一些重要的探索性研究(由 Tanja Dreher、Penny O'Donnell 等人完成),以及悉尼科技大學(University of Technology Sydney)的 Jim MacNamara 也開始了關於政治機構內聆聽設置的研究,這是一項非常重要的實證研究,不過,該研究只能算是有關議題初階研究。

**JA:** 就您作品的主旨及理論取向而言,您似乎是一位跨學科研究的貢獻者和推動者。事實上,您最近的一本著作即是以「社會理論及數位媒體實踐」為副標題。關於跨學科研究方法的好處以及如何培養跨學科研究的必要條件兩個方面,您對於博士研究生及青年研究者有何建議?如若您能夠結合書中內容予以舉例,大家將會受益匪淺。

**NC:** 這是我對於青年研究者的建議:抵抗一切(自然存在於學術專業化之中的)使他們一切提問皆從媒介(媒介機構,媒介內容,媒介結構)出發的壓力。「為何研究媒介」這一重要問題對媒介研究者甚具挑戰性,而這一問題曾被我偉大的導師之一,羅傑·西爾弗斯通(Roger Silverstone)巧妙地解答過。答案有時與媒介的本質相關,但更多時候則是源於媒介可以有可能改變我們的文化、社會、政治、經濟的能耐。在這個角度看,對媒介的理解成為了一個至關重要的智能:媒介新聞議題的顯著性,以及關於媒介結構的規範及道德爭辯,例如許多全球性監控,就印證了這一點。抓住這些更大的問題對設計自己的研究框架至關重要,否則將會迷失通向社會科學、人文學科及公共文化廣泛探討的橋梁。我對於狹義的、只顧內看的「媒介研究」完全沒有興趣,不少其他人大概也是如此。

我們的媒介研究在知識意義上必需向外開放。如果有理論腹地可資利用,為界定問題及分析問題提供資源,研究者無疑會從中受益。理論腹地來源於社會學、社會理論、政治學、政治理論、文化理論、語言學、心理學、道德準則或其他任何學科,我們應緊緊抓住並珍惜與媒介相關議題可以植根的跨學科土壤。在我最近的著作中,我對此進行多方面的嘗試:在第2章關於實踐理論(源自社會心理學和社會理論)、在第3章及第4章中關於價

值與社會秩序的社會理論取向、在第6章中關於政治學的探討、在第8章中關於道德與正義的哲學探討。換言之，我鼓勵青年學者在界定研究問題及熱忱時，至少在主要方面不要受制於媒介中心論。我另一位重要的導師、我的博士導師戴維·莫利(David Morley)堅持這一有力主張已有多年，而這亦是我自從事研究初期開始的核心原則。由於現今世界媒介的複雜性正在激增，媒介與多方面糾結更甚，避免以媒介為中心的提問更形重要。

**JA:** 非常感謝您這次充滿深刻洞見的對談。

### 尼克·庫德瑞教授著作選

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Academic Dialogue with **Nick COULDRY**

## **New Media and the Myth of the Mediated Centre**

NC: Nick COULDRY

JA: Joseph M. CHAN, Anthony Y. H. FUNG

**JA: The “mediated centre” is a central observation in your research on the social location of media. But your study of the perceived centrality of mass media in the production and distribution of content has led you to refer to it as “the myth of the mediated centre.” We would appreciate it if you would recapture for the readers here what is meant by the “mediated centre” and why you have characterized it as a “myth”?**

**NC:** The “mediated centre,” as such, does not exist: There is no literal “centre” of society, in the sense of a central source of society's values and norms, or a site that is the primary cause of everything that happens in society. Any society is a very large set of processes operating in multiple directions whose complexity cannot be reduced to one “centre.” But, at the same time, much is invested by many institutions in claiming that there is such a centre! In most forms of modernity, media institutions have been crucial to the making of such claims, and they have added an additional claim of their own: that “media” are themselves a privileged access point to that social centre, which is a “mediated centre.” Those claims are what I try to capture by the term “the myth of the mediated centre.” It is a shorthand way of capturing the force of media institutions' particular (and often mystified) power over the means for representing shared reality, reality that becomes recognized as “ours,” in part, through what media do.

Why do I use the word “myth” to describe such claims by media institutions? There are two main reasons. The first reason I have already given, namely, that such claims are not literally true. The second is that the word “myth” is much more suitable than the word “ideology” to capture the way such claims work. They are rarely made explicit, but much more often implied and embedded, as myth generally is, in patterns of language: in this case, for example, the category of “live” media or the category of media celebrity.

I have argued since my early work (*The Place of Media Power* 2000) that an immense amount of work goes into reinforcing the idea that whatever is “in” the media is somehow better, more valuable, more weighty than what is not “in” the media. The category of “liveness” is a privileged time-based example of this: the idea that we should pay attention to something right now because it is the reality now for us, as a society. Celebrities (people who are “extraordinary,” not “ordinary”) embody such a category distinction in human form. Objects can also embody this category: one of my favorite examples happened when a chair in which a key contestant in the first series of UK Big Brother sat when he was confronted with his lies, leading to his expulsion from the show, was sold for a large amount of money at auction, not because of its qualities as a chair but because it was “the” chair in which “Nasty Nick” had sat at that (mediated) moment. My book *Media Rituals: A Critical Approach* (2003) develops these insights into a theory of the concentrated moments of media-based rituals that reinforce this myth.

The very idea of “the media” to which we will return is itself an expression at the largest scale of this category difference: the idea that in society we do not just have a heterogeneous set of media institutions making multiple types of media, but something more cohesive and more central, “**the** media.” Or at least, this is how media are spoken of in the UK, North America, and many European countries.

The making of the “myth of the mediated centre” is, in other words, distributed across a huge number of practices and moments, which involve not just media institutions but all of us who live in societies characterized by such a myth. We enact it, for example, when we react differently (shouting “Oh my god” or whatever) when a celebrity, rather than an “ordinary person,” enters the room. Myth, unlike ideology (at least in the classic Marxist sense of the term “ideology”), is produced continuously **everywhere**, and it is of crucial importance to sustain the social legitimacy of media institutions, their rationale to remain as institutions.

**JA: The myth of the mediated centre is very much based on the examination of a media system where the mass media prevailed.**

**But we are now entering an age of media convergence and personal media where the communication platforms for the production and consumption of content proliferate. Do you see any tension between “the myth of the mediated centre” and the media revolution that is gaining momentum? Do you think that the myth of the mediated centre will be undermined eventually? Is there a chance that the very idea of “the media” is imploding?**

**NC:** Absolutely, there is such a tension. I first started thinking about this when fast Internet access started to become very common in Britain and social media platforms became pervasive, around 2006-07. Indeed, I certainly did question at that time whether my theoretical and empirical framework was destined to become irrelevant in the emerging and intensified digital media environment. However, on reflection, I realized that, rather than becoming irrelevant, it had become the site of **evermore intense contestation**. I set out this argument in a 2009 article in the *European Journal of Communication*. Let me summarize that argument here.

The myth of a mediated centre relies on a factual basis, namely, the **actual** concentration of our attention “around” particular common media, and this factual basis has started to change radically. But many institutions have a lot invested in this myth: media institutions themselves of course, but also advertisers that still want to reach large audiences and governments that need the “space of appearance” (in Hannah Arendt’s phrase) that the focused gathering of audiences rationalized by the “myth of the mediated centre,” as it were, underwrites. So we should not expect those institutions to accept the inevitable collapse of the “mediated centre”; on the contrary, and Graeme Turner has argued something similar, we should expect them to be more active in calling that “centre” into being. Media institutions do this constantly in their search for “events” that they can claim “the whole nation” should be watching.

It might seem that social media provide an alternative and very different “social centre” to mass media, but all the parties most interested in the myth of the mediated centre (mass media, advertisers, governments) have been interested in social media from almost the beginning. The “centres” implied by mass media and social media, rather than being opposed, are more likely to grow together in what I have imagined as a “double helix.” As a result,



although there are many real forces fracturing our uses and experiences of media, I think it is unlikely that the idea of “the media”—and the daily practice of consuming media in massively parallel ways focused around an assumed social “centre” for which the idea of “the media” stands—will disappear in the foreseeable future. How it continues to develop, however, is a topic of great interest to me.

**JA:** Your analysis of the myth of the mediated centre is based primarily on the case of the United Kingdom. We understand that you would like to extend the examination to other societies. What has prompted you to take a more comparative approach to your studies? China, for instance, is undergoing a social transformation on many fronts, including the rapid popularization of social media and mobile phones. How does the case of China fit in with your analytical framework?

**NC:** It is true that I work in the UK and the fieldwork that I did from which my ideas about media power, media rituals, and the myth of the mediated centre emerged was done entirely in the UK. But from the beginning, my thinking was informally influenced by a range of examples from the media cultures of not just the UK but also North America and elsewhere. Indeed, the key source of my interest in the notion of a constructed “centre” was Edward Said’s reflections on “centrism” in US society, and my key influences included the Colombian media and cultural theorist Jesus Martin-Barbero and the authors of *Media Events*, Elihu Katz and Daniel Dayan. So from the beginning I conceived of my analysis of the myth of the mediated centre as applying well beyond the UK.

It is certainly true, however, as I acknowledge in my most recent solo book *Media, Society, World: Social Theory and Digital Media Practice* that I did not address in the earlier work the possibility that the particular institutional frameworks that made the notion of a “mediated centre” plausible in, say the UK or the USA, might not apply in other parts of the world. Indeed, one of the best challenges to my work in a teaching setting came at the London School of Economics from a Chinese student in 2002, so I was interested from quite early on in the possibility that my theory might have geographical limits. Certainly, it is at best a hypothesis that must be



answered separately each time we think about the institutional framework of a particular country, and there is no doubt, for example, that it makes a big difference whether or not religious institutions play a large role in a society's power blocs, as in, say, Iran (and unlike in the UK). Marwan Kraidy's work on the complex meanings of reality TV formats in the Middle East was a particular stimulus to me here, not because it challenged the notion of media as "ritual" (indeed, it confirmed it), but because it brought out how we simply can't anticipate the detailed meanings and social/political consequences of such rituals outside the particular power nexus and cultural history of a particular region.

So now I see the development of my work (including its theoretical framework) as in a comparative phase, where I am more and more interested in comparisons between different media cultures and societal settings. This is very much in tune with the wider internationalization of media research that has been building for the past decade and has now (which is a very good thing) reached the stage where it is ridiculous for anyone to propose a general theory of how the social consequences of media institutions "are" without at least inviting comparative evidence on whether such a theory is in principle useful in a range of particular societies, or regions, of the world.

China is a particularly interesting case from this point of view: a society with a very strong and culturally complex state, state media institutions whose social legitimacy is massively more contested than in, say, the UK, fast-growing commercial media, and even faster-growing social media which (in the case of Weibo) has in part developed as a site of an explicit counter-centre to the state, but in which the state is also now intensely invested. Jack Qiu's book *Working Class Network Society* was very important for me in bringing out the multi-level complexity, and in many ways, contradictoriness of how media institutions are socially embedded in China. China's huge size means that the "mediated centre" for its working-class migrant populations may be differently **oriented** from that of other parts of its populations (say, middle-class cosmopolitans). But that is not to say that the sustaining of something like a "mediated centre" does not remain an issue—perhaps a crucial issue—for the Chinese state, Chinese advertisers, and indeed China's

growing civil society. Hong Kong's relationship with the Chinese "centre" adds another important complexity to how we think of the social status of Chinese-speaking media institutions. Naturally, since I am not a specialist researcher on China, I myself do not have answers to these questions, but I do believe they **are** important questions for those interested in understanding the future development of Chinese media, government, and society, and they flow directly from the idea that "the myth of the mediated centre" is a key **site of conflict** between institutions and across society in the digital age. I have been delighted when Chinese scholars have used aspects of my work to understand phenomena such as Supergirl, and I am hoping that the forthcoming translation of *Media, Society and World* into Chinese will generate more debate with my ideas and proposals, and hopefully more empirical applications.

**JA:** In one of your latest books, *Why Voice Matters: Culture and Politics after Neoliberalism*, you defined voices as "people's practice of giving an account of the world within which they act." And you also conceived voices as "value" in contesting neoliberalism that is prevalent in Western societies, particularly in the British context. Do you think the concept of voices also applies to the broader global context where authoritarian rule is more common? How is it possible nowadays to craft a genuine space for voicing values alternative to neo-liberalism?

**NC:** Voice is, I believe, a basic human value. It derives from the need all human beings have to give an account of themselves and the world as it appears to them (their trajectory through the world). I decided to articulate this value in the book *Why Voice Matters* because of the particular political and cultural dominance of neoliberalism in Britain, Europe, North America, and Latin America in the late 2000s: that seemed an overwhelmingly important context to respond to at that time, and in many ways it still is. But I was aware at the time that, while market-dominated political logics are spread very widely across the world, "neoliberalism" is not necessarily the best frame for understanding prevailing politics in many places, and there are many forms of neoliberalism, as, for example, Aihwa Ong has eloquently argued.

Quite recently, I have started to think about how the value of voice is important as a means for standing up against other oppressive forms of politics. This was always implicit in *Why Voice Matters* (for example, in Chapter 6 which discusses a “sociology of voice” for multiple contexts of oppression, not just neoliberal, but I did not make this perhaps as explicit as I should have). I have started developing this idea a little in an essay which will be published in 2014 in a handbook edited by Chris Atton, and I hope to take this further still.

So I do believe that the concept and value of “voice” can be helpful, potentially, for understanding politics under authoritarian settings. Its crucial point is to insist not just on the importance of voice (as a process of expression) but also on the importance of voice itself being valued, that is, taken into account in larger narratives about how society is organized, and how a society's material and symbolic resources are and should be distributed. The question of how institutionally (that is, through institutional practices and architectures), voice once expressed can come also to be regularly and sustainably taken into account is, in fact, very difficult and neglected, in particular because there are powerful forces that do not **want** to think about this. So I do not have any ready-made answers on how genuine and effective spaces for sustaining voices as an alternative to neoliberalism are possible (the Occupy movement which was so much in the headlines three years ago did not, in the long term, provide many answers here). But I do think this is a crucial question. Some important exploratory work has been done recently in Australia on processes of listening (by Tanja Dreher, Penny O'Donnell, and others), and more recently, Jim MacNamara at University of Technology Sydney has started very important empirical work on architectures of listening within political institutions, but it is early days for this subject of research.

**JA: According to the subject matter and theoretical approaches in your works, you appear to be a benefactor and promoter of interdisciplinary studies. In fact, a recent book of yours is *Social Theory and Digital Media Practice*. Do you have any advice for doctoral students and young researchers in regard to the benefits of interdisciplinary approach and how one can equip oneself with**

**the necessary tools? It would be great if you could refer to the book in question by way of illustration.**

**NC:** My advice to young researchers would be to resist all the pressures (natural within an academy based on specialization) to frame their research questions exclusively in terms defined by the media (media institutions, media contexts, media infrastructures). The question of **why study the media**, often put to media researchers as a hostile challenge and brilliantly confronted and answered by one of my great mentors, the late Roger Silverstone, is a serious one. The answer is sometimes to do with media's intrinsic qualities, but much more often to do with what media **do** for our possibilities of culture, society, politics, and economy. Framed this way, the understanding of media becomes a vital intellectual faculty. The prominence of media news issues—and normative and ethical debates about media infrastructures, for example, those of global surveillance—only confirms this. It is vital to keep hold of those larger questions in framing one's own specific research questions; otherwise, the bridges to wider debates in the social sciences and humanities, and in public culture generally, are lost. I am really not interested in a narrow “media studies” that is turned inwards, and I don't think many other people are, either.

Our media research needs in this intellectual sense to be outward-facing. It follows from this that it is good, if you can, to be able to draw on a theoretical hinterland that provides resources for framing one's questions and interpreting one's answers, whether it is from sociology, social theory, political science, political theory, cultural theory, linguistics, psychology, ethics, or whatever. Keep hold of and treasure that interdisciplinary “soil” in which one's media-related research ideas can take root. In my latest book, I offer my own best attempts to do this from various angles: drawing in Chapter 2 on “practice theory” (from social philosophy and social theory), in chapters 3 and 4 on social theory approaches to value and social order, in Chapter 6 on debates in political science, and in Chapter 8 on philosophical debates about ethics and justice. Put another way, I would encourage younger scholars to maintain a way of framing their research questions and passions that is not, or at least in a dominant way, media-centric. Another of my great mentors and my own PhD supervisor, David Morley, has made this argument

forcibly for many years, and it has been the central principle of my own research from the beginning. As the world in which media's complexities continue to proliferate **itself** becomes ever more connected and so more complex, the importance of avoiding media-centric questions increases all the time.

## Selected Works by Nick Couldry

Please refer to the end of the Chinese version of the dialogue for Nick Couldry's selected works.

