

Editorial

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The nomenclatures of technological innovation, communication and representation pose semantic difficulties for researchers. The meanings ascribed to key words and concepts change over time, often in unexpected ways. In this issue, Robin Mansell moves beyond generic definitions of ‘the internet’ to examine evolving contestations for control over networks, infrastructures, architectures and databases. From a historical institutionalist perspective she analyses the unfolding interplay of three normative imaginaries: free markets, state intervention on public interest grounds and civil society generative power. The relative primacy of each imaginary during different historical periods and junctures is seen to shape those ‘bits of power’ which constitute the internet. Trish Morgan reconsiders critical theoretical understandings of mediated communication and culture in order to explore the ideological limits of climate change activism. Under the prevailing socio-ecological relationship, capitalism alienates society from nature and reifies an instrumentalist approach to nature. Understanding the double processes of alienation and reification allows us to specify the in-built asymmetry of the socio-ecological relationship and to determine the efficacy of radical climate change actions. Morgan here reflects upon and evaluates recent protests against the Dakota Access pipeline in Missouri. Rosser Johnson analyses the infomercial as a persuasive commercial genre, including its response to recent media technology developments. Drawing upon a unique combination of interview data from advertisers, broadcasters and audiences, he shows that infomercials are received and comprehended in diverse ways. Thus, the dispositions of advertisers and broadcasters are surprisingly ambivalent. Audience members’ perceptions are mostly pragmatic; infomercials are understood according to their usefulness rather than their manipulative purposes. Wayne Hope’s review essay discusses the manipulative intent and definitional slipperiness of public relations and lobbying in an era of global capitalism. Sue Jansen’s *Stealth Communication*, Tamasin Cave and Andy Rowell’s *A Quiet Word* and Susan George’s *Shadow Sovereigns* together suggest that the democratic ethos, as such, is threatened by transnational corporations. Their enormous structural-economic power translates into political influence across all state formations. Yet, such influence is not easily hidden in a hyper-mediated global environment. Transnationals are caught within a dialectical struggle between secrecy and visibility. Definitionally, each concept presupposes the other. In practice it is often the case that these are incommensurate objectives. TNCs cannot *always* manipulate behind the scenes while advancing publicity for their brand. Jonathan Hardy’s commentary explains how commercial speech has dissolved the boundaries between promotional content and communicational genres. Amidst virtual digital environments and convergent media forms, advertising, PR, marketing and online content categories have blended amorphously. Critical researchers must therefore map this newly emerging ecology against the business logics and ideological claims of contemporary capitalism. For Hardy, this imperative also necessitates ‘granular’ empirical studies of media practices and of regulatory frameworks which obscure the corrosive impact of branded marketing on the integrity of media production.