

University of Leicester
Department of Media and Communication
Research Seminar Series

DATE/TIME: 5 March, 430 to 6PM (with drinks reception after the event)

VENUE: Seminar Room, Department of Media & Communication, Bankfield House,
132 New Walk.

TITLE: Reconstructing Journalism's Public Rationale

For a century or more in developed democracies, it has not been necessary to build a rationale for the public value of journalism. Debates have raged about whether particular aspects of journalistic practice meet the moral standards that some or most of society would expect (e.g., the UK phone-hacking scandal); such debates often involve a reliance on the notion of a 'free press', but always operate on the assumption that journalism in the above sense will continue to exist. It is quite another matter to build normative arguments as to why journalism needs to exist and, in order for it to exist, to be funded: we are much less good at making such arguments, and the warm glow of de Tocqueville, Milton or Mill's older vision of a free press is insufficient in itself to amount to a satisfactory argument for the digital world. Yet the digital world will almost certainly require us to build such normative arguments for reasons that are only gradually becoming apparent. As Joseph Turow's (2011) work on the advertising industry has shown, the value of audiences to advertisers is increasingly being redefined: no longer the speculative value of an aggregate of viewers paying attention to a mass-targeted content, it is now more the precisely weighted value of the data that can be gleaned about consumers. If journalism (and other forms of media) are to survive at all longer-term, they will need to become directly profitable in their own right or benefit from cross-subsidy from another, as yet undiscovered, source. Hence the need for new arguments to provide a public rationale for journalism. This talk will explore how we can begin to develop such normative arguments and what intellectual resources we may need to undertake that task. The task will require a renewed link between empirical accounts of what journalists do (and the ways in which they get practically

supported) and the more rarified domains of democratic and social theory. Far from being straightforward, this task may turn out to be the collective effort of a whole generation of media and journalism scholars.

Bio: **Nick Couldry** is a sociologist of media and culture. He is Professor of Media, Communications and Social Theory at the London School of Economics and was previously Professor of Media and Communications at Goldsmiths, University of London. He is the author or editor of eleven books including *Ethics of Media* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), *Media, Society, World* (Polity 2012) and *Why Voice Matters* (Sage 2010). He has led funded research on citizens 'public connection' (see <http://publicconnection.org.uk/>) and on story exchange in community engagement (<http://www.firm-innovation.net/portfolio-of-projects/storycircle/>).