

**Department of Media and Communication, University of Leicester  
Research Seminar Series**

***Radical PR!***  
**Exploring Agonistic Democracy Theory in Boundary- Spanning  
Communication Practice**

**ABSTRACT:**

As part of the ongoing project to seek social and intellectual legitimacy, academic public relations has attempted to address the problem of historical associations with propaganda. Mainstream scholars have posited the importance of symmetrical communication and dialogue while the growing body of critical scholarship has included the application of Habermas' discourse ethics and ideal speech situations. This paper explores and draws upon Chantal Mouffe, to critique the notion that symmetry or rational dialogue have solved the problem of PR's position within the maintenance and establishment of discursive hegemonies. In particular Mouffe's theorising on agonistic democracy that assumes the permanence of antagonism, the impossibility of fully inclusive rational consensus, and argues for an understanding of the positive dimensions to a society based on a everlasting struggle between adversaries. This paper also intends to draw upon Mouffe's interest in artistic and creative professions in constructing agonistic public spaces that both reveal all that is repressed by any given dominant consensus and encourage the articulation of voices that may have been silenced in existing hegemonies. In doing so, exploring the synergies with postmodern and "edge" PR theories that are seeking to radically reconceptualise practitioners as boundary spanning activists.

**SPEAKER'S BIO:**

Dr Scott Davidson is Lecturer in Media & Communication and the Programme Director of the MA in Media & Public Relations at the University of Leicester.