

The background is a blue gradient. In the corners, there are white line art designs resembling circuit boards or neural networks, with lines and small circles connecting them.

COMMS 201 – THE FOURTH ESTATE

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY THE 4TH ESTATE?

Don't Dream It's Over: Reimagining Journalism in Aotearoa New Zealand

Edited by Emma Johnson, Giovanni Tiso,
Sarah Illingworth and Barnaby Bennett

Featuring contributions by Peter Arnett, Brent Edwards,
Mihingarangi Forbes, Toby Morris, Paula Penfold, Nicky
Hager, Morgan Godfery, Simon Wilson, Cate Honoré Brett,
Sara Vui-Talitu and many more.

Journalist: Brent Edwards: long running political reporter for Radio New Zealand states:

- 'Speaking truth to power and keep this country's citizens fully informed'

Scholar: Mark Hampton: The Fourth Estate Ideal in Journalism History

- 'Any concept of the press as a Fourth Estate would require the accessible presentation of serious information and an independent perspective'.

ROLES OF JOURNALISM

- Informing us about our world, and about each other.
- Getting information, presumably accurate and objective, to the public quickly.
- Acting as a watchdog, holding the powerful in society to account.
- Allowing for public discussion of ideas, letting people have their say
- Providing interpretation and analysis of complex material (data overload)
- Entertainment

THE ORIGINS OF JOURNALISM: THE FOURTH ESTATE



- Journalism was initially a critical response to earlier dominant forms of authority and knowledge.
- Emerges early to mid-1600s, along with a mercantile and later capitalist bourgeoisie.
- We can see an interlinking of capitalism, democracy and journalism.

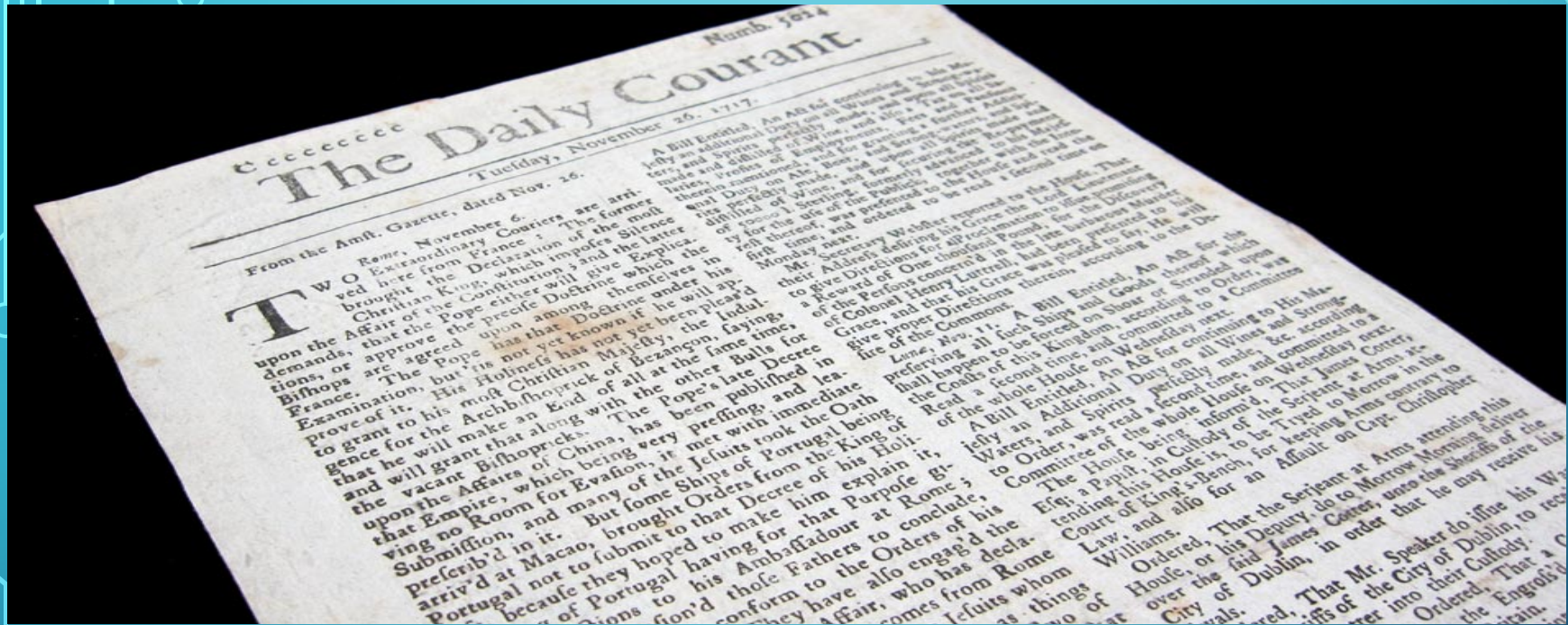
STRANDS THAT FUSED TO FORM JOURNALISM



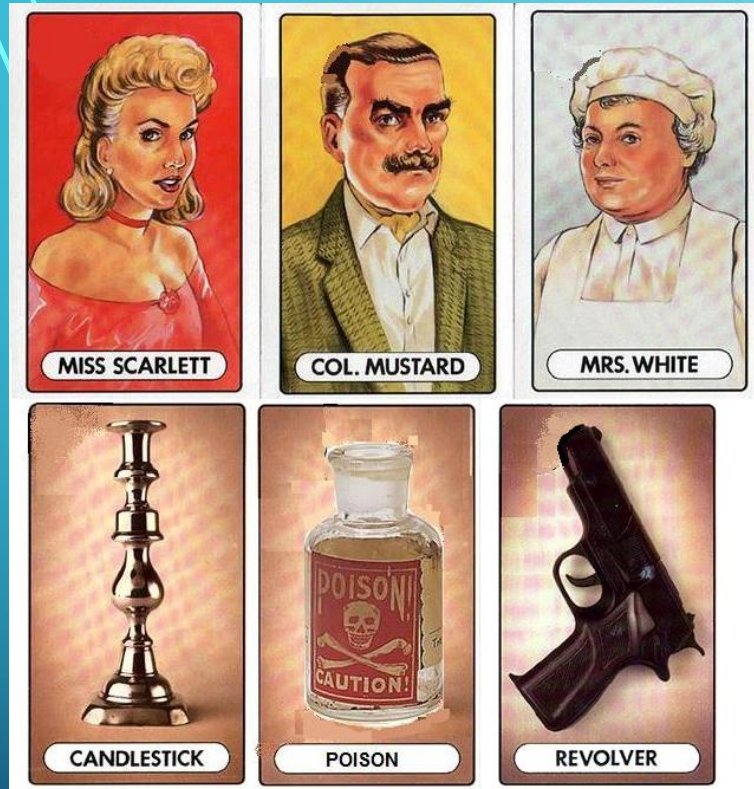
Empiricism: means the gathering of evidence from which to test universal cause and effect relationships.

Newly popular form of *essays and commentary*, so not on evidence collected like empiricism, but on an individual writer's own powers of observation, reasoning, writing skill.






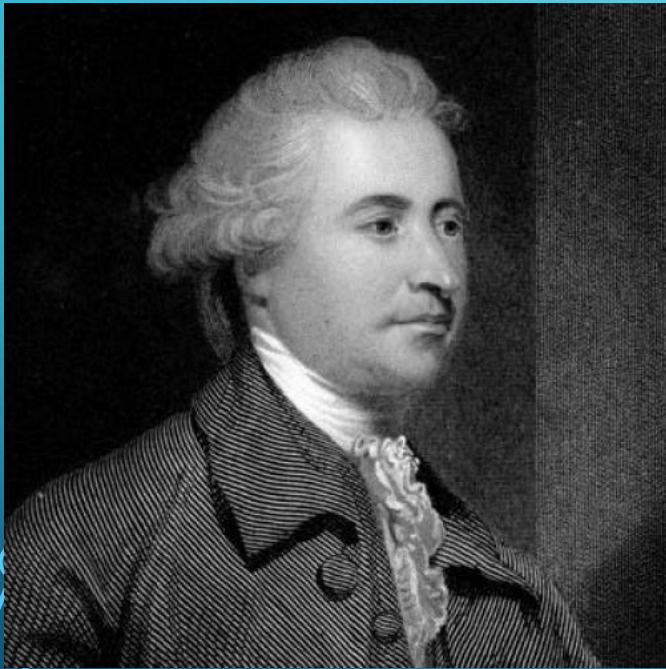
Reportage, a long-standing practice of hiring agents to travel to distant lands and report back to their benefactors on situations that had bearing on their interest.



- A fourth source of journalism was the *evolving standards of legal processes* and arguments, which fixed rules for establishing evidence or claims.

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- Empiricism + essays + reports from overseas + processes of law and evidence
= The origins of journalism.

WHEN DID THE TERM FOURTH ESTATE FIRST ARISE?



Edmund Burke

In 1841, Thomas Carlyle wrote, 'Burke said there were Three Estates in Parliament; but, in the Reporters' Gallery yonder, there sat a Fourth Estate more important far than they all.' Burke appeared to apply the term to the press gallery sitting alongside the other three estates in England – the Clergy, Aristocracy and Commoners.

PRESS GALLERIES – ABOVE THE FRAY



ENGLAND, 1880S



WELLINGTON, TODAY

CONCEPTS BEHIND THE FOURTH ESTATE

Mark Hampton: The Fourth Estate rested on two differing ideas of relationship between the press and its readers.

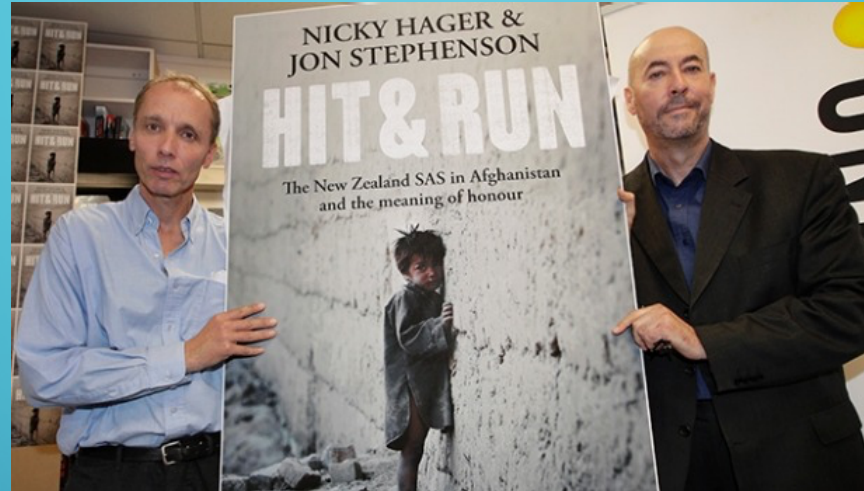
- First, the press as agency of public discussion, rival ideas and interests. Recast more recently as the 'public sphere'.



The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere (1961)

Jurgen Habermas

- Second concept of the Fourth Estate - the press reflecting public's interest, by publicising corruption, scandal (by the powerful) or government inattention.



Both understandings of the Fourth Estate based in providing accessible serious information from an independent perspective.

<http://www.radionz.co.nz/national/programmes/mediawatch/audio/201838017/mediawatch-for-26-march-2017>

EDWARDS: EROSION OF THE FOURTH ESTATE FUNCTIONS

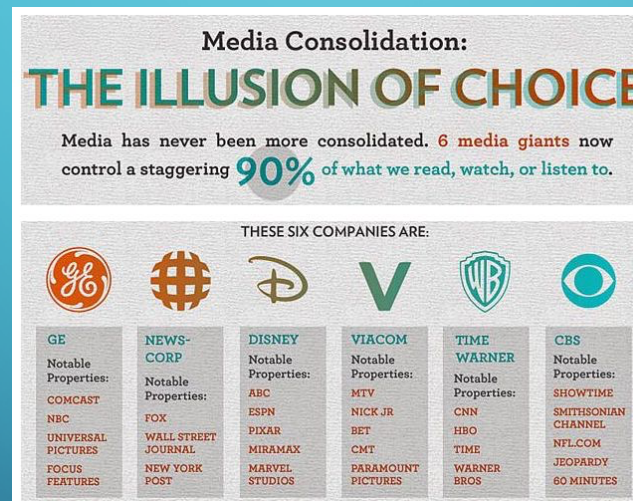
- News media mergers reduce diversity
- Celebrity news, rather than public interest, has begun to dominate
- Very little local coverage at all
- Fewer reporters and the rise of 'spin'
- Focus on personality of politicians, not policies
- Rise of opinionated journalism
- New media dominated by powerful corporations



HAMPTON: BUT DID THE FOURTH ESTATE EVER EXIST?

Commercial restraints:

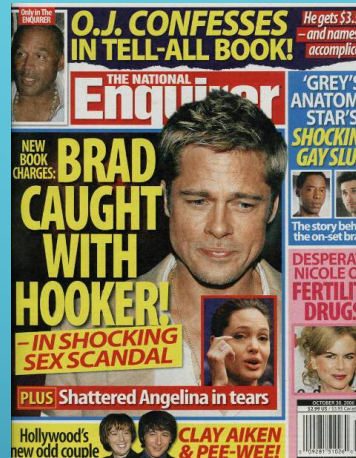
- High entry costs lead to 'oligopolies', a market dominated by very few powerful players reducing 'marketplace of ideas'



- News part of non-media conglomerates – how can the news then critique its owners? (Hollywood movie: The Insider
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5rkvxi5hdbA>)

HAMPTON: COMMERCIAL RESTRAINTS (CONT).

- Dumbing down argument: populism intending to maximise readership/profit



- Drive for profits undermines investigative journalism (see reflected in multiple Hollywood movies, such as Spotlight)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=56jw6tasomc>

HAMPTON: DID THE FOURTH ESTATE EVER EXIST?

State control over media also restrains investigative and fourth estate functions:

- Newspapers first criticizing the US war in Vietnam were bullied (Hager called 'left wing conspiracy theorist').
- Stephenson accused of fabricating news: successfully sued the military.
- 'National security' or 'commercial sensitivity' are used to prevent the release of information.



HAMPTON: DID THE FOURTH ESTATE EVER EXIST?

State control (cont).

Spin doctoring: Government & PR companies are adept at getting their perspectives into the media.

- Releasing complex info. close to a news cycle
- Developing EPKs that are free and readily useable
- News cutbacks make this an easy 'solution'
- Journalists' fear of alienating Government sources

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K_FrQnQv0Vw
(The Thick of It – British parody about spin doctors)

HAMPTON: DID THE FOURTH ESTATE EVER EXIST?



State control (cont): Embedded and non-embedded journalists


IS THE FOURTH ESTATE REAL OR IDEAL?

Hampton:

- Aspirational rather than 'real' but that can keep the powerful in check
- Maybe alternative and dissident media is the real Fourth Estate?
- These ideas can be taken up in the mainstream but takes time.

Edwards:

- Emergence of collaborations such as the Panama Papers
- New organizations, such as the Ethical Journalism Initiative, that emphasis ethics.

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“The Ethical Journalist Initiative recognizes that good journalist is more about illumination than advocacy, embracing the human virtues of wisdom, courage and fairness ...our case is it should be watchful and committed to truth, alert to injustice, jealous of its own independence and above all else a champion of public interest.”

“If a strong pluralistic journalist community cannot just survive but thrive, nor can the democracy so many of us take for granted”