



AUSTRALIAN SENATE

OCCASIONAL LECTURE SERIES

Media Decadence and Democracy

John Keane

Main Committee Room
Parliament House

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12.15pm–1.15pm

WE LIVE in an age of communicative abundance in which many innovations—satellite broadcasting, iPhones, electronic books, Freegate and cloud computing—have spawned fascination and excitement. In the field of politics, hopeful talk of digital democracy, web 2.0, cybercitizens and e-government has similarly flourished. Much less attention has been paid to the troubling counter-trends, the decadent media developments that encourage concentrations of unaccountable power, so weakening and potentially reversing the growth of ‘monitory democracy’.

THIS LECTURE prompts key questions about these trends. Why do we have no comprehensive account of their origins and worrying power to induce rigor mortis in the democratic body politic? To what extent is the decadence exacerbated by the collapse of newspaper business models and by the new journalism? What (if anything) can be done about this media decadence? Does communicative abundance on balance proffer more risk than promise? Are there developing parallels with the early twentieth century, when print journalism and radio and film broadcasting hastened the widespread collapse of parliamentary democracy? Are the media failures of our age the harbingers of profoundly authoritarian trends that might ultimately result in the birth of ‘post-democracy’ polities in which governments claim to represent majorities that are artefacts of media, money, organisation and force of arms?

JOHN KEANE is Professor of Politics at the University of Westminster and the WZB (Berlin) and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. Founder of the Centre for the Study of Democracy, a consultant to the United Nations and a recent member of the American Institutions of Democracy Commission, his books include *The Life and Death of Democracy*, *Global Civil Society?*, *Vaclav Havel: A Political Tragedy in Six Acts* and the prize-winning *Tom Paine: A Political Life*. Born in Australia, he now lives in London.

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Inquiries to Senate Procedure Office
Phone: (02) 6277 3074
Email: research.sen@aph.gov.au