

**Report on 'Disability, Democracy, Media & Listening' workshop, held at UNSW, Friday 10th October, 2008.**

Attended by approximately 40 people from academia, service provision, policy, law, and non-government organisations, this workshop was highly successful. The workshop was co-convened by Gerard Goggin (UNSW/CRN) and Rosemary Kayess, Acting Director, Disability Studies and Research Centre, UNSW -- and, of course, was impeccably organised by Dr Cate Thill, project officer, 'Listening' project.

On Thursday 9th October, a curtain-raiser to the workshop has held -- in the form of a seminar on 'Disability, Cinema and Culture'. This featured Neil Marcus, a writer, actor, and dancer, based in Berkeley, CA, and Associate Professor Petra Kuppers (Michigan), a leading figure in US and international disability scholarship, showing and talking about their videopoem project, 'Tiresias', and then their book 'Cripple Poetics'. The second part of the seminar was Dr Kathleen Ellis (UWA), giving a seminar on her pioneering work on disability in Australian cinema (and launching her book on this topic).

On Friday, the workshop was opened by the Human Rights Commissioner, and Disability Discrimination Commissioner, Mr Graeme Innes, AM. Mr Innes noted the strong interest in 'Listening' among policy agencies, such as the Human Rights Commission. However, he also laid down an important challenge: that of relevance of the outcomes of the project to those engaged in consultation and listening, and also the need for language of cultural research to be accessible to wider audiences. Dr Tanja Dreher followed with an introduction to the 'Listening' project, and a response to Mr Innes also.

The first session focused on 'Disability and Listening', and featured presentations by Dr Fiona Kumari Campbell (Griffith), Dr Leanne Dowse (UNSW), as well as Michael Bleasdale (from peak organisation People with Disability Australia). We were also very fortunate to have two distinguished international guests present in this session -- Neil Marcus, a writer, actor, and dancer, based in Berkeley, CA; and Associate Professor Petra Kuppers (Michigan), a leading figure in US and international disability scholarship.

The second session looked at 'Laws and Listening', especially the experience of formulating the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. We had the benefit of engaging with two experts who were on the Australian delegation to the Convention, Rosemary Kayess (UNSW) and Alistair McEwin (Combined Community Legal Services).

The third session discussed 'Media and Technology', with presentations by Dr Kathleen Ellis (UWA), Kath Duncan (Griffith) and Gerard Goggin (UNSW).



The final session concentrated on 'Democracy and Disability', featuring Robbie Lloyd (Centre for Remote Health, Flinders U.), A / Prof Helen Meekosha (UNSW) and Dr Anna Hickey-Moody (Monash).

The workshop ended with a tribute session to Professor Christopher Newell, who began the organising of the workshop with Gerard Goggin.

The workshop was successful in a number of respects: in opening up the topic of disability and listening, and highlighting links between disability and other parts of the 'Listening' project; in promoting the importance of disability to the cultural research agenda -- and in impressing a number of well-placed figures from disability studies and policy on the worth of emerging work in cultural research; in bringing together both academics and practitioners from a very wide range of areas and interest -- and confirming the theoretical and practical importance of listening to work unfolding in a number of settings; the workshop also gave prominence to researchers and practitioners with disabilities; and finally, there was strong participation by a number of early career researchers and PhD students from Griffith, UTS, Monash, UWA, and elsewhere.

Organisers felt that the workshop had really only started to open up the various aspects of disability and listening. And that a further workshop in 2009 would be invaluable for a more systematic and structured exploration of the area, its research implications and potential. Also that a publication devoted to disability and listening would be invaluable -- and that this would be a feasible outcome of a further workshop.