1 *The world stage*
Cultural politics and climate change

All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players. They have their exits and their entrances …

William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*

As we progress in the twenty-first century, climate change has become a defining symbol of our collective relationship with the environment. Diagnoses (what it is) and prognoses (what we should do) make for high-stakes, high-profile and highly politicized science and policy deliberations. They cut to the heart of how we live, work, play and relax in modern life, and thus critically shape our everyday lives, lifestyles and livelihoods.

Nowadays 'climate change' is no longer thought of merely as an environmental or scientific issue. Rather, the Kautskian 'climate question' is considered one that, now more than ever, permeates our individual, as well as shared, economic, political, cultural and social lives. As the notion of climate change has increasingly dominated the contemporary science and policy landscapes, it has also more visibly inhabited public discourse, through news and entertainment media representations and 'popular' cultures. Considerations of climate change and reductions in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions have become engrained in cultural and social behaviour, where being Politically Correct ('PC') has often given way to being Climate Correct ('CC').

In this volume, with a focus on mass media, I take up questions of *how* and *why* these interactions have unfolded, by considering the Lorax-like question 'Who speaks for climate?'

Most broadly, references to 'mass media' include television, films, books, flyers, newspapers, magazines, radio and internet. They involve publishers, editors, journalists, content producers and members of the communications industry who produce, interpret and communicate texts, images, information and imaginaries.

Over the last decade or so, there has been a significant expansion from consumption of traditional mass media – broadcast television, newspapers, radio – into consumption of 'new' and 'social' media. Essentially, in tandem with technological advances, this expansion in communications is seen to be a fundamental shift from broadcast, or 'one-to-many' (often one-way), communications to 'many-to-many' more interactive webs of communications (van Dijk, 2006; O'Neill and Boykoff, 2010a). This movement has signalled substantive changes in how people access and interact with information, who has access, and who are authorized definers of the various dimensions of climate issues. At present, new and social media have been accompanied by democratizing influences, as these channels of communication often offer a platform for more people to become content producers, and therefore have the potential to more readily shape the public agenda.

Together, these media are constituted by a diverse and dynamic set of institutions, processes and practices that together serve as 'mediating' forces between communities such as science, policy and public citizens. Mass media have (vigorously) debatable limits in terms of potential conduits to attitudinal and behavioural change. Nonetheless, as unparalleled forms of communication to wide audiences, it remains vitally important to examine the ways in which media representations and symbols are produced, interpreted and consumed, thus influencing a spectrum of possibilities for governance and decision-making. From visceral influences such as 'Hey, that's me on television!' to measured interrogations such as how corporate control of media potentially constrains dissent, the multifarious contributions that mass media make to public discourse deem it worthy of careful reflection and scrutiny.

Connections between media information and policy decision-making, attitudes, perspectives, intentions and behavioural change are far from straightforward. Coverage certainly does not determine engagement; rather, it shapes possibilities for engagement (Boykoff, 2008a; Carvalho and Burgess, 2005). Media representations – from news to entertainment – are critical links between people's everyday realities and experiences, and the ways in which these are discussed at a distance between science, policy and public actors. People throughout civil society rely upon media representations to help interpret and make sense of the many complexities relating to climate science and

governance. Furthermore, media messages are critical inputs to what becomes public discourse on today's climate challenges. As such, this book examines media coverage of climate change as it seeks to make sense of the implications of media representations on a 'scope of politics', as Clayton Rosati has put it (Rosati, 2007, 1008).

Furthermore, the explorations in this volume spring from an expansive view of science in society, where scientific understanding is part of, rather than separate from, public uptake. Mass media have thereby influenced a range of processes, from formal climate science and policy to informal notions of public understanding. Media representations are convergences of competing knowledge, framing climate change for policy, politics and the public, and drawing attention to how to make sense of, as well as value, the changing world. Emanating from these processes, public perceptions, attitudes, intentions and behaviours, in turn, often link back through mass media into ongoing formulations of climate governance.

Throughout, I work from Maarten Hajer's definition of 'discourse', as 'an ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categories through which meaning is given to phenomena. Discourses frame certain problems; that is to say, they distinguish some aspects of a situation rather than others … discourses provide the tools with which problems are constructed … [and they] dominate the way a society conceptualizes the world' (Hajer, 1993, 45–46).

So, this book sets out to make sense of how media reporting has made climate change meaningful for different Shakespearean 'players', and in various contexts, scenes and settings (as the quote to begin the chapter indicated). These pursuits have been referred to as the 'cultural politics of climate change': dynamic and contested spaces where various 'actors' battle to shape public understanding and engagement. This is a place where formal climate science, policy and politics operating at multiple scales permeate the spaces of the 'everyday'.

Cultural politics refer to dynamic and contested processes behind which meaning is constructed and negotiated, and involves not only the portrayals that gain traction in discourses, but also those that are absent from them or silenced (Derrida, 1978; Dalby, 2007). Framing processes have important effects on marginalizing some discourses while contributing to the entrenchment of others (Castree, 2004). Tim Forsyth has stated, 'assessments of frames should not just be limited to those that are labelled as important at present, but also seek

to consider alternative framings that may not currently be considered important in political debates' (Forsyth, 2003, 1).

Media representational practices can confront power as they critically engage with pressing contemporary issues. However, portrayals can also service political and economic power. Jaclyn Dipensa and Robert Brulle have warned that, 'The news media [can] serve as an important institution for the reproduction of hegemony' (Dipensa and Brulle, 2003, 79). Through complex, dynamic and messy processes, media have taken on varied roles, from watch dog to lap dog to guard dog for the public sphere.

Both discursive and material elements comprise the cultural politics of climate change. Discourses are tethered to material realities, perspectives and social practices (Hall, 1997).

Examples from politics, economics, culture, the environment and society surround us. We can briefly consider three instances from the malignant to the benign. First, in 2001 the United States (US) Army renamed 'School of the Americas' as the 'Center for Inter-American Security Cooperation'. This was seen partly as an effort to quell protests and shed their reputation as a training facility for human rights abuses. Second, in 2007, the US plum growers won permission from government regulators to move from 'prunes' to 'dried plums'. The alleged motive behind such a linguistic twist was to increase the appeal and sales of dried plums among a younger consumer base.

Third, in the aftermath of the 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil spill, many responsible parties that were involved actively sought to 'name the disaster' in order to minimize damage to their interests and to shift blame. Among them, BP, Transocean and Halliburton attempted to scrub their name from the disaster title by using names like 'the Macondo well incident' or 'the Deepwater Horizon spill' or 'the MC252 oil spill incident' (Soraghan, 2010). These acts of discursive positioning demonstrated the importance that carbon-based industry placed on how naming and shaming linked to perception and potential behavioural change.

Examining interactions between discourses and material lives in this way facilitates our consideration of questions regarding how power flows through the capillaries of our shared social, cultural and political body. It also helps us to ponder how this, in turn, constructs and maintains knowledge, norms, conventions and (un)truths (Foucault, 1980). Power here is not a thing to be bought and sold,

but is relational, shaping everyday interactions between individuals and communities. In this way, power is situated in professional and disciplinary practices, making actors both the object of discipline and the instruments of its exercise (Foucault, 1984). Furthermore, this power saturates social, political, economic and institutional conditions (Wynne, 2008).

Yet, these conditions and practices are inextricably shaped by the power of ongoing climate processes themselves. This has been referred to by Dennis Cosgrove and others as the inseparable dialectic of nature and culture (Cosgrove, 1983). In other words, nature is not a backdrop upon which various actors contest and battle for epistemological and material successes. Rather, (scientific) interpretation and knowledge is constructed, maintained and contested through intertwined socio-political and biophysical processes (Blaikie, 1985; Whatmore, 2002). Importantly then, meaning is constructed and manifested through *both* ontological conditions of nature and contingent social, political, cultural and scientific processes involved in interpretations of nature (Robbins, 2004).

Approaching these spaces of the cultural politics of climate change in this way helps to interrogate 'how social and political framings are woven into both the formulation of scientific explanations of environmental problems, and the solutions proposed to reduce them' (Forsyth, 2003, 1). These 'framings', then, are inherent to cognition, and effectively contextualize as well as 'fix' interpretive categories in order to help explain and describe the complex environmental processes of climate change.

It is instructive to consider more specifically how and why these forces have interacted with media representations of climate change. Historically entrenched cultural preoccupations with free markets and economic growth in capitalist societies – along with the concomitant politics of interest groups – have resulted in a naturalized consideration of market-led approaches to policy action (see Chapter 8 for more). Commitments to economic growth, and deeply entrenched technological optimism, have been significant forces influencing the wider cultural politics of climate change. In this context, it is often the case that those deemed as permissible discourses have remained encased in the logic of neoliberal late capitalism (Bailey, 2007).

Many associated critiques have emerged regarding the dangers of emergent 'carbon capitalism' associated with commodifying the

atmosphere, and the fixation with market mechanisms as primary tools to 'answer' climate questions, among others (Liverman, 2004; Bumpus and Liverman, 2008). Moreover, these movements are deemed problematic to the extent that these activities, at their core, 'render the messy materiality of life legible as discrete entities, individuated and abstracted from the complex social and ecological integuments' (Prudham, 2007, 414), and in so doing, reduce the need for decarbonization to a matter of simple (neoliberal) political economics. As the following chapters in this book discuss, these critiques have remained largely absent in mainstream mass-media representations to date, while representations of market-led solutions have been dominant. Nonetheless, largely within these discursive tropes, business groups, ideologically driven think tanks and environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOs) have continued to heartily debate and discuss associated features and consequences in the landscapes of mass media.

Climate change by any other name?

Mike Hulme has traced the term 'climate' back to third century BC Greece (Hulme 2009a). Aristotle's student Theophrastus made early connections between deforestation, water management and the cooling and warming of the climate (Glacken, 1967).

The climate on planet Earth is regulated by way of input from energy of the sun and the loss of this back into space. Incoming solar radiation enters the atmosphere here on planet Earth and is partly absorbed or trapped, and partly reflected back to space. The composition of the atmosphere dictates the balance between these forces, and this is called the 'planetary energy budget'. Certain atmospheric GHGs are critical to this balance, and these include carbon dioxide (CO_2), methane (CH_4), nitrous oxide (N_2O), tropospheric ozone (O_3), halocarbons (CFCs, HFCs, HCFCs) and water vapour (H_2O_v). Emissions of GHGs into the atmosphere cause changes in the climate.

Today, there are differences in strict scientific definitions of each of the terms 'climate change' and 'global warming'. While 'climate change' is a broader term that accounts for changes in many climate characteristics, such as rainfall, ice extent and sea levels, 'global warming' refers to a more specific facet of climate change: the increase in temperature over time. Clearly, temperature increases do not occur

in isolation from other climate characteristics; rather, many other sources and feedback processes contribute to changes across time and space. Temperature (particularly atmospheric temperature increases) is seen as the most clear and distinguishable climate characteristic that indicates more general climate change, and has been called the 'fingerprint' for climate change (Wigley, 1999).

These scientific distinctions might seem relatively straightforward. Yet, as the term 'global warming' migrates to the policy realm, things can get muddled. For instance, the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) define the term 'climate change' differently. The IPCC definition is more closely aligned with the strict scientific definition. It calls climate change, 'any change in climate over time whether due to natural variability or as a result of human activity' (Houghton *et al.*, 1995). However, the UNFCCC departs from this phrasing as it focuses on the human component. The UNFCCC defines it as, 'a change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the consumption of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability over comparable time periods' (quoted in Pielke Jr, 2005, 549). Roger Pielke Jr has argued that differences between IPCC and UNFCCC definitions of 'climate change' have confused considerations of 'what to do about it', and have 'set the stage for the politicization of climate science' (2005, 548).

Over time, mass media have taken these potentially insular etymological science and policy definitions and thrust them into popular vernacular. However, throughout various media and across different countries, representations have often deployed these terms interchangeably or inconsistently. Needless to say, this has fuelled colloquial confusion amongst the general public.

For example, some press coverage has invoked these in contrast with one another, where global warming has referred to human activity and 'climate change' has signified natural variation. Illustrations abound: in a 2002 *News of the World* commentary in the United Kingdom (UK), the editors wrote, 'Ireland and Britain are set for 100 years of wetter winters because of global warming … they *blame man for the global warming which is causing the climate change*' (2002, 2, emphasis added). In 2004 in the *Mirror*, deputy political editor Bob Roberts wrote, 'Tony Blair yesterday issued a doomsday warning

about the threat *from climate change because of global warming*' (2004, 2, emphasis added).

Over time, many have debated which of the terms 'climate change' and 'global warming' should be invoked when. Others have argued that neither term adequately captures the meaning behind it. For example, Frank Luntz – a well-known US political strategist and advisor to the George W. Bush administration – issued a memo in 2003 called 'Winning the global warming debate – an overview'. He argued that, 'It's time for us to start talking about 'climate change' instead of global warming … 'Climate change' is less frightening than 'global warming' (2003, 142).

Similarly recognizing the power of language, in 2005 *ActionMedia* produced a report called 'Naming Global Warming'. In efforts to deliberately shape perceptions, they recommended, 'DO NOT call the problem "climate change". "Climate change" is understood as the natural process the earth's climate has undergone in the past. DO call the problem "global warming". "Global warming" is the result of human activity' (2005, 6, emphasis in original).

This report came on the heels of a study released by the non-profit group EcoAmerica, who argued that the terms 'global warming' and 'climate change' needed re-branding. In their place, the group recommended that the phrase 'our deteriorating atmosphere' be invoked, and to re-frame discussions about atmospheric reductions of carbon dioxide instead as 'moving away from dirty fuels of the past'.

Focusing on carbon can be seen as somewhat reductionist: there are greenhouse gases that do not contain carbon (e.g. nitrous oxide), and not all carbon-containing emissions (e.g. carbon monoxide) trap heat. However, this element provides helpful 'exchange value' and, as Gavin Bridge has noted, 'a common denominator for thinking about the organization of social life in relation to the environment … from fossil-fuel addiction and peak oil to blood barrels and climate change, carbon's emergence as a dominant optic for thinking and writing about the world and human relations within it is tied to the various emergencies with which it is associated' (2010, 2).

As these examples indicate, awareness, concern and possible actions are critically shaped by what the phenomenon may be called, or how it is described. Through a survey in southern England, Lorraine Whitmarsh found that 'global warming' was frequently associated with heat-related impacts, human causes, ozone depletion and the

greenhouse effect. Meanwhile, the survey data showed that 'climate change' was most often associated with observed weather and climate impacts, and natural variation in the climate (2008). She concluded that citizens considered 'global warming' as 'a more emotive term, in part because it suggests a clear direction of change towards *increasing* temperatures', and they found that 'implications of "climate change" are more ambiguous' (2008, 16, emphasis in original).

Moreover, in February 2010, the *New York Times* columnist Tom Friedman commented, 'Avoid the term "global warming". I prefer the term "global weirding", because that is what actually happens as global temperatures rise and the climate changes. The weather gets weird. The hots are expected to get hotter, the wets wetter, the dries drier and the most violent storms more numerous' (Friedman, 2010, A23). Through linguistics, George Lakoff has offered numerous insights on how to successfully activate framing devices, and potential pitfalls therein, within a contentious political landscape (Lakoff, 2010).

Robert Entman has commented that, 'framing essentially involves selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition' (Entman 1993, 52). However, Robert Brulle has cautioned that these approaches 'based exclusively on cognitive science, rhetoric and psychology … lack any contextual basis within a larger theoretical structure of the role of communication in facilitating large-scale social change processes … [and] fail to address meaningfully the ecological imperatives defined by global warming. Additionally, the professionalization of political discourse upon which these approaches are based actually reinforces existing relationships of power and institutional dynamics. These factors lead to a weakening of efforts to increase political mobilization over the issue of global warming, and thus undermine the capacity for significant social change' (Brulle, 2010, 83).

Certainly, media representations serve to assemble and privilege certain interpretations and understandings over others (Goffman, 1974; Entman, 1993). This has been the case with the highly charged discourses surrounding climate change. Yet there are dangers that the power behind these terms can be harnessed and manipulated via mass media in order to elicit more (or less) alarmed responses in civil society. These terms have the potential to become empty signifiers or dangerous diversions, filled with desired meanings by those actors

with the power to produce and influence content. Meanwhile, Steve Curwood – host of US National Public Radio's 'Living on Earth' – has cautioned, 'Right now we have an alarmed citizenry, but still not a very well-informed one' (Russell, 2008).

As Teun van Dijk and many others have pointed out, discourses themselves must be carefully considered in context (van Dijk, 1988). It is important to acknowledge that particular ways of discussing 'climate change' or 'global warming' are steeped in historically derived and iterative relationships with various ways of knowing and interacting (Fairclough, 1995). Analyzing frames as they relate to ongoing climate discourses are helpful, but they often provide only partial explanations for these wider interactions that comprise 'climate communication'. In fact, there is a clear danger of displacing and decontextualizing important considerations through over-emphasis on analyses of how key actors choose to discuss and 'frame' climate change.

For example, Matt Nisbet has developed a 'typology', where eight categories capture climate-change discourses from 'social progress' to 'public accountability and governance' (Nisbet, 2009). While this approach provides a helpful starting point, such explorations would do well to further consider deeper historical and ontological dimensions of communicating about science and the environment.

Through a wider and context-sensitive lens of cultural politics, we can effectively consider claims and claims-makers, as well as capture the processes and effects of media practices shaping representations of 'climate change' and 'global warming'. Dynamic interactions form nexuses of power–knowledge that shape how we come to understand things as 'truth' and 'reality', and in turn, contribute to managing the conditions and tactics of our social lives (de Certeau, 1984). Rather than brash imposition of law or direct disciplinary techniques, throughout this book I consider how more subtle power–knowledge regimes permeate and create what becomes 'permissible' and 'normal' as well as 'desired' in everyday discourses, practices and institutional processes (Foucault, 1975).

To illustrate, in 2009 it was reported that the Obama administration purposefully began to refer to greenhouse gas emissions as 'carbon pollution' and 'heat-trapping emissions'. This discursive 'switcheroo' was noted in a series of statements from top officials such as White House science advisor John Holdren, Energy Secretary Steven