COMMUNICATION AS THE INTERSECTION OF THE OLD AND THE NEW

THE INTELLECTUAL WORK OF THE 2018 EUROPEAN MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION DOCTORAL SUMMER SCHOOL

Edited by Maria Francesca Murru, Fausto Colombo, Laura Peja, Simone Tosoni, Richard Kilborn, Risto Kunelius, Pille Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, Leif Kramp, Nico Carpentier

COMMUNICATION AS THE INTERSECTION OF THE OLD AND THE NEW

THE INTELLECTUAL WORK OF THE 2018 EUROPEAN MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION DOCTORAL SUMMER SCHOOL

Edited by Maria Francesca Murru, Fausto Colombo, Laura Peja, Simone Tosoni, Richard Kilborn, Risto Kunelius, Pille Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, Leif Kramp, Nico Carpentier

Table of Contents

Section 3. Mediatizations

Section 4. Media, Health and Sociability

Abstracts

Mediation and place:
The sharpening and weakening of boundaries

Magnus Andersson

Abstract
This chapter starts off in communication geography and discuss the dynamic relationship between media and place. The main argument is that processes of mediation are central to the meaning of place although without determination; mediations may both strengthen and weaken boundaries of place. This argument is based on an interdisciplinary double theorization where the concept of place as well as media are elaborated. Hence, place is here understood as composed of social relations and infused with meaning and power, while media are considered broadly, including infrastructures, representations and communication practices.

Keywords: Mediation, place, double theorization, communication geography, the concept of media

1.   Introduction

Media studies is a proliferating research area. This is related to the development of communication technologies and the associated abundance of media forms in our everyday life. The advances within technology are, however, not the only reason for the dynamics of the field; meta-theoretical currents within social and cultural theory are also important for the development of media studies. In recent years, media studies has been moulded by a number of theoretical "turns" – for example a spatial turn (Warf & Arias, 2009), material turn (Bennett & Joyce, 2010), practice turn (Shove, Pantzar & Watson, 2012), mobility turn (Sheller & Urry, 2006) – which have had a substantial impact on varied branches of media research. The topic of this chapter is the spatial turn and its implication for media studies, with a particular focus on the inter-relationship between media and place. The aim is not only to point out communication geography as a recent supplement to the wide family of media studies traditions, but also to stress the necessity of interdisciplinarity in this particular context. A meta-theoretical turn is also an interdisciplinary bridge.

The main argument of the chapter is that media are complex things that may both strengthen and weaken boundaries of places. This is based on theoretical elaborations of place as well as media; a so-called double theorization (Andersson & Jansson, 2010). This leads to a view where, on the one hand, place is constituted of social relations and invested by meaning and power, and, on the other hand, media are more than symbolic content, namely infrastructures/materials, representations and practices.

2.   Meta-theoretical turns and media studies

Time and space, temporal and spatial structures, have always been important themes in social and cultural theory. With the digitalization and the presence of communication technologies in all aspects of life, the centrality of time and space has increased. Of particular interest in this context is the interdependence between, and entanglement of, media and temporal and spatial arrangements.

Like other appeals for specific theoretical perspectives the spatial turn should be conceived as a theoretical argument. It should be understood as a plea for a spatial perspective on things; that there always is a mutual sharpening between space and social phenomenon. In media studies this reciprocity is captured by André Jansson and Jesper Falkheimer claiming a focus on "*how communication produces space and how space produces communication*" (2006: 9). Attention to place,

space and mobility have a long history within media studies. Transport was for example a central aspect of the Toronto school with Harold Innis and later on Marshal McLuhan, scholars who stressed the overlap between transport and media (which recently became the point of departure in a book by David Morley (2017)). Scholars like James Carey (1989) and Joshua Meyrowitz (1985) developed Innis and McLuhan's spatial media studies, with an addition of cultural theory. Place, space and movement have also been present within cultural studies research on media; maybe most salient through concepts such as *mobile privatization* (Williams, 1974) and, later on, private mobilization (Spigel, 1992). Nevertheless, it is in the 2000's that the spatial turn emerged as a concept in media studies, and with that a somewhat firmer framework. Important contributions are, for example: *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Boundaries* (Morley & Robins, 1995), *Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity* (Morley, 2000), *Geographies of Communication: The Spatial Turn in Media Studies* (Falkheimer & Jansson, 2006), *Mediaspace: Place, Scale and Culture* (Couldry & McCarthy, 2004), *Media, Place and Mobility* (Moores, 2012). This is a heterogenous group of books, yet, the curiosity and a will to elaborate on the spatial aspects of media and the media aspects of place and space is a common denominator.

An essential prerequisite for applying communication geography, i.e. a spatial turn in media studies, is an open mind not only regarding empirical questions, but also vis-à-vis theory. It is, however, not enough to elaborate on media in relation to geography; a supplementary elaboration of place and space is necessary. The risk with a monodisciplinary elaboration of media would be that we reduce place to a static container for social interaction and community, something few geographers would agree upon.

3.   Double theorization

In order to grasp the meaning of place in times when processes of mediation are entangled in all social and cultural processes, we need to dig into the concepts of space and place as well as media and mediation. The definition of place was in the 1990s a question that caused a heated debate within human and cultural geography. One of the more salient voices at that time was Doreen Massey, who from a sociocultural vantage point stressed place as relational, i.e. always dependent on social relations:

> what gives a place its specificity is not some long internalized history but the fact that it is constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus. [...] Instead then, of thinking of places as areas with boundaries

around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in in networks of social relations and understandings, but where a large proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself (Massey 1994: 154).

Another way to put it: links make places. Massey's stress on *"networks of social relations"* underscores the importance of media for the meaning of place, since the relations beyond the place are mediated to very large degree. Another important implication of this perspective is that places are always dynamic; their meaning change due to the constellation of social relations. This is something to think of in relation to current political debates on nationalism; the meaning of a nation is always in transition.

The stress of social relations comprises feelings and experiences of place; the sense of place. It is a reason to add a phenomenological perspective, stressing that place, in contrast to anonymous space, is invested with meaning and is closely related to power (Cresswell, 2004). A phenomenological perspective implies that we pay attention not only to social relations, but also the involvement of meaning and power. It thus features aspects such as sense of place, place attachment and that places may arouse fear, anxiety, warmth, or other emotions. We can also note that Tim Cresswell uses the same principle to distinguish between movement and mobility; the latter is imbued with meaning and power whilst he views movement as displacement *"before the type, strategies and social implications of that movement are considered"* (Cresswell, 2006: 3).

In order to study the role of media for place – where place is understood as a slice of space that is produced by social relations and infused with meaning and power – we also need to elaborate the concept of media, and not take its inarticulate meaning for granted (Andersson, 2017). The concept of media is, surprisingly, seldom defined by media scholars. There are, of course, scholars who elaborate what media mean (see Couldry, 2000: 6; Hepp, 2012: 21; Krotz, 2014). Nevertheless, within the field of media and communication there are many studies that equate "the media" with institutional (mass) media and/or journalism and their representations. Hence, the concept of media is reduced to an organized institutional production of symbols. An aspect of this view is an implicit assumption about communication as linear, with clear demarcations between producers, content and audiences. What I want to argue is that the studies that take representation, mass media discourse and transmission as a point of departure, should be complemented with studies of other aspects (see below). Digital media studies and media history are inspirational precursors when it comes to unfold the meaning of media.

In the wake of digital media and their significance in all parts and spheres of society, the focus of media studies – and disciplines related to media studies - has been broadened. There has been an emphasis of, on the one hand, material aspects, technology and infrastructure, and on the other hand, practice theory. These theoretical developments are important and inspirational since they put a focus on things that have been neglected in media studies. This can be illustrated by a mobile phone: its mediated content is not all there is, there is also the material phone itself, a Wi-Fi infrastructure and of course a range of practices connected to the phone (Hjort, Burgess, & Richardson, 2013; Madianou, 2014). A conclusion to draw is that materiality/infrastructure and practices should be added to representations.

A drawback of the unexpressed, although taken-for-granted definition of media as institutional media, is that it omits many 'mediating technologies' like CCTV, letters and PowerPoint. An interesting detail in this respect is that the multifunctionality of mobiles and laptops reminds us how many communication media we have neglected in the past. For example, e-mails and mail servers throw light on the meaning of personal letters, post offices and postal infrastructures of previous periods, while digital games remind us about the historical meaning of board games and card games. In this context we can learn from media historians who have taken the question of how to define media much more seriously, and who also affirm the difficulties in discerning media from its immediate social contexts; its practices, rituals, institutions and so on (Marvin, 1988). As Lisa Gitelman puts it,

> Naturalizing, essentializing or ceding agency to media is something that happens at a lexical level every time anyone says 'the media' in English, as if media were a unified natural entity, like the wind (Gitelman, 2006: 2).

The implication of this is that we should avoid expressions like "due to media…" or "thanks to media…" since it becomes a way to ascribe agency to media, which in turn is to confirm technological determinism. Instead, Gitelman advocates specifications: the concept of media should be defined broadly with an inclusive character, although the media aspects have to be specified in use. In other words, we should affirm that the media comprise representation (in a broad range), materialities (like artefacts and infrastructures) and practices, yet, in each empirical context we should pinpoint which aspect we are referring to.

4.   Media, communication and place: In practice

In line with the elaboration above I am not going to argue that media affect place in a particular way. Rather, since aspects of media are constitutive of place, there will

be a range of outcomes in the mediatized place. In other words, this is an argument for the centrality of media and mediation – although without a determined outcome. Processes of mediation may contribute to weakened, as well as, sharpened boundaries of place – and everything in between. In addition, different processes with opposite outcomes may occur at the same time, although in different layers. This is illustrated by an argument from the geographer Paul Cloke – not concerning mediation but the relationship between the country and the city:

> Rural society and rural space can no longer be seen as welded together. Rather, rurality is characterized by a multiplicity of social spaces overlapping the same geographical area, so while the geographic spaces of the city and the countryside have become blurred it is in the social distinction of rurality that significant differences between the rural and urban remain (Cloke, 2006: 20).

Cloke is thus arguing that infrastructures of different kinds – roads, public transports, broadbands – are linking the countryside and city tighter together. Simultaneously, the social depicting of the rural and the urban are becoming more distinct. It is not mentioned by Cloke, but we can assume that mediated representations of dynamic vivid cityscapes and peaceful and quite rural villages in mass media, adverts and social media play a part in the sharpening of this distinction. The principle of this argument holds for places as well; due to media infrastructure places are more interconnected while representations of places tend to cultivate their specificity.

This spatial dialectic of media has been discussed in other contexts. For example, in relation to the home where domestic media have been seen as links to the surrounding world that expand the home as well as the centre of socio-cultural rituals, which in a way shut the world out and enclose the home (Andersson, 2006). In a similar vein, Jansson analyses social media practices in relation to "the ambiguous balance between *encapsulation* and *decapsulation* in glocal settings" (2011: 240, *italics in original*). The dialectic is also discussed by Scott McQuire in relation to his concept of 'geomedia':

> Digital media have become increasingly personalized and embedded, and are widely used to activate local situations and connect particular places. In other words, as much as digital media enable *emancipation* from place, they have also become a key modality of contemporary *placemaking* (2016: 6, *italics in original*).

Having established these conjunctions is an important step. Next is to follow Gitelman's suggestion and specify, which in this context means to scrutinize the aspects of media in the light of different spatial outcomes. In other words, which

aspects contribute to sharpened and weakened boundaries respectively. I will discuss this briefly from three vantage points: infrastructure, representation and communication practices.

We are surrounded by visible and invisible infrastructures: older ones, like electricity, postal service and distribution of newsagents; and newer ones, like CCTV and Wi-Fi (Graham & Marvin, 2001). Infrastructures are primarily links that connect places. It is thereby easy to see how infrastructures dissolve place through weakening its boundaries. Yet, infrastructures also shape places through an impact of the movement and flows of people – just like the arrival of electricity once had an impact on the social micro-geography of the home. Erika Polson's ethnographical study from Havana illustrates this phenomenon on a larger scale (2018). She describes how a previous dynamic urban square, where the social life revolved around a couple of phone booths, suddenly is abandoned in favour of a spot on the other side of the road where one of Havana's few portals to the Internet is placed. The argument here is that infrastructures, whether we are talking about phone booths, Wi-Fi hotspots or CCTV, have an impact on the flow of people and thereby contribute to the making of place.

Media infrastructures, as we just saw, have the potential of both sharpening and weakening the boundaries of place. The impact of representation is clearer. There might of course be examples where representations weaken boundaries of place, although the general tendency is that representations accentuate the meaning of a place through demarcation and distinctions. An indication of this is the enormous economic investments, by regional stakeholders, in place branding and the distribution of positive images of their global city or rural municipality. The discursive power of representations on the meaning of place is a well-known phenomenon. Without delving into this topic it is worth mentioning that these type of sociocultural processes are more complex than they might look: the meaning of place can seldom be deduced from representations.

Mass media are not the only form of representation that shapes places. Also, commercial shop signs (Trinch & Snajdr, 2017), urban screens (Krajina, 2009), and graffiti (Campbell, McMillen, & Svendsen, 2019) contribute to the distinctiveness of a place. These are important for communities of different kinds, as identification, appropriation and, of course, commercialization. Their shaping of place may occur at different levels; there are the individual messages of signboards on the one hand, and the general texture on the other hand. Time Square in New York, where it is the large amount - the bricolage - of signs that signifies.

Another branch of representations are the ones created by social media users (hence, they can be considered as practices just as much as representations). Of particular interest in this context are geographical hashtags, presenting neighbour-hoods, public spaces, villages, cities and even nations in a different fashion, based on a very different logic, than the mass media images. Such examples would be Molenbeek in Brussels (Belgium) or Rosengård in Malmö (Sweden), suburbs that, by national and to some degree international, news organisations have associated with migration, criminality, and terrorism. However, #Molenbeek and #Rosengård on Instagram tell a very different story. Both forms of representation are important for the social construction of Molenbeek and Rosengård, although in very different ways, for different groups.

Media practices are spatial practices, and so is communication. A thing not in relation to practice is how communication evolves around 'presence'. Face-to-face communication is characterized by the creation of a bubble or communicative space for the participants, which screens out the surroundings (Asplund, 1987). The phe-nomenon is obvious for someone coming late to a mingle party. We can draw on this when we think of a phone conversation; how we are sort of in two contexts at once. (Mass) media practices are similar. When reading a book, we are in the plot, as well as on the comfortable sofa where the reading practice is conducted. We immerse ourselves in films or games, while sitting in the cinema or the living room. Scannell discusses this "*magic*" aspect of mediation as "*doubling of place*", meaning "*being at two places at once*" (1996: 91), Morley (2017) discusses the same phenomenon as "*transport of the mind*" and Annette Hill (2019) coins the concept as "*roaming audiences*". Media practices as travelling practices has thus been described in sev-eral ways, and a common denominator is the blurred boundaries of place; other places and other realms that are part of the individual place. Yet, media practices are also placemaking practices (Moores, 2012). The hashtags described above are good examples of Massey's argument that it is constellations of social relations that gives placer their specificity (1994: 154). The range of mobile phone practices on trains, cafes and public spaces, are also contributing to the meaning of place – based on social interaction as they are. Hence, we cannot state that media practices dissolve places; they work both ways depending on the particular context.

It has not been the goal of this text to provide a detailed description of how to approach place and media. My hope is rather that these initial thoughts on an approach towards mediation and the meaning of place work as inspiration and can be developed in a range of directions.

References

Andersson, M. (2006) 'The flexible home', pp. 171-188 in J. Falkheimer and A. Jansson (Eds.) *Geographies of communication: The spatial turn in media studies*. Göteborg: Nordicom.

Andersson M. (2017) 'Mediatization from below' pp. 35-56 in O. Driessen, G. Bolin, A. Hepp, and S. Hjarvard (Eds.) *Dynamics of mediatization: Institutional change and everyday transformations in a digital age*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Andersson, M. & Jansson, A. (2010) 'Rural media spaces: Communication geography on new terrain', *Culture unbound Journal of Current Cultural Research*, 2: 121-130.

Asplund, J. (1987) *Om hälsningsceremonier, mikromakt och asocial pratsamhet*. Göteborg: Korpen.

Bennett, T. & Joyce, P. (Eds.) (2010) *Material powers: Cultural studies, histories and the material turn*. London: Routledge.

Campbell, L., McMillen, H. & Svendsen, E. (2019) 'The written park: Reading multiple urban park subjectivities through signage, writing and graffiti', *Space and Culture*.

Carey, J. (1989) *Communication as culture: Essays on media and society*. New York: Routledge.

Cloke, P. (2006) 'Conceptualizing rurality', pp 18-28 in P. Cloke, T. Marsden and P. Mooney (Eds.) *Handbook of rural studies*. London: Sage.

Couldry, N. (2000) *The place of media power: Pilgrims and witnesses of the media age*. London: Routledge.

Couldry, N. & McCarthy, A. (Eds.) (2004) *Media space: Place, scale and culture in a media age*. London: Routledge.

Cresswell, T. (2004) *Place: A short introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Cresswell, T. (2006) *On the move: Mobility in the modern western world*. London: Routledge.

Falkheimer, J. & Jansson, A. (Eds.) (2006) *Geographies of communication: The spatial turn in media studies*. Göteborg: Nordicom.

Gitelman, L. (2006) *Always already new: Media, history, and the data of culture*. Cambridge (MA): The MIT Press.

Graham, S. & Marvin, S. (2001) *Splintering urbanism: Networked infrastructures, technological mobilities and the urban condition*. London: Routledge.

Hepp, A. (2012) 'Mediatization and the "molding force" of the media', *Communications*, 37(1): 1-25.

Hill, A. (2019) *Media experiences: Engaging with drama and reality television*. London: Routledge.

Hjort, L., Burgess, J., & Richardson, I. (Eds.) (2013) *Studying mobile media: Cultural technologies, mobile communication and the iPhone*. London: Routledge.

Jansson, A. & Falkheimer, J. (2006) 'Towards a geography of communication', pp. 7-26 in J. Falkheimer and A. Jansson (Eds.) *Geographies of communication: The spatial turn in media studies*. Göteborg: Nordicom.

Jansson, A. (2011) 'Cosmopolitan capsules: Mediated networking and social control in expatriate spaces', in Christensen, M., Jansson, A. and Christensen, C. (eds) *Online territories: Globalization, mediated practices and social space*. New York: Peter Lang.

Krajina, Z. (2009) 'Exploring Urban Screens', *Culture Unbound: Journal of Current Cultural Research*, (1)2: 401-430.

Krotz, F. (2014) 'Media, mediatization and mediatized worlds: A discussion of the basic concepts', pp. 72-87 in Hepp, A. and Krotz, F. (Eds.) *Mediatized worlds: Culture and society in a media age*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Madianou, M. (2014) 'Smartphones as polymedia', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 19(3): 667-680

Marvin, C. (1988) *When old technologies were new: Thinking about communication in the late nineteenth century*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Massey, D. (1994) *Space, place and gender*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

McQuire, S. (2016) *Geomedia: Networked cities and the future of public space*. Cambridge: Polity.

Meyrowitz, J. (1985) *No sense of place: The impact of electronic media on social behaviour*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Moores, S. (2012) *Media, place & mobility*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Morley, D. (2000) *Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity*. London and New York: Routledge.

Morley, D. (2017) *Communications and mobility: The migrant, the mobile phone and the container box*. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell.

Morley, D. & Robins, K. (1995) *Spaces of identity: Global media, electronic landscapes and cultural boundaries*. London: Routledge.

Polson, E. (2018) 'Information supercalle: The social internet of Havana's WiFi streets', pp. 67-78 in R. Wilken, G. Goggin and H. Horst (Eds.), *Location technologies in international context*. London: Routledge.

Scannell, P. (1996) *Radio, television & modern life*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Sheller, M. & Urry, J. (2006) 'The new mobilities paradigm', *Environment and Planning A*, 38(2): 207-226.

Shove, E., Pantzar, M. & Watson, M. (2012) *The dynamics of social practice: Everyday life and how it changes*. London: Sage.

Spigel, L. (1992) *Make room for TV: Television and family ideals in postwar America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Trinch, S. & Snajdr, E. (2017) 'What the signs say: Gentrification and the disappearance of capitalism without distinction in Brooklyn', *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 21(1): 64-89.

Warf, B. & Arias, S. (Eds.) (2009) *The spatial turn: Interdisciplinary perspectives*. London: Routledge.

Williams, R. (1974) *Television: Technology and cultural form*. London: Fontana.

Biography

Magnus Andersson is associate professor at the Department of Communication and Media at Lund University. He holds a PhD in Media and Communication Studies from University of Gothenburg. His research is within the field of media and cultural studies with a particular interest in questions on mediation, mediatization and media practices of everyday life and how these aspects relates to mobilities, immobilitites and place.