



# mediapolis

media practices and the political spaces of cities

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*Joe Painter, Durham University*  
*Farida Vis, The Open University*  
*Joe Smith, The Open University*  
*Allan Cochrane, The Open University*

# Mediapolis: an introduction

Scott Rodgers, Clive Barnett and Allan Cochrane  
The Open University

## Media/polis

The organisation of this workshop has been prompted by concerns with the way media so often seem to get left out of writing on cities and urban politics (rather than vice-versa). We agree with Iveson's (2007) argument that urban and media studies have much more in the way of shared concerns when it comes to politics than is conventionally thought to be the case. As a result, we are hoping this workshop will create an occasion for urban scholars to meet those studying media, to explore what difference it makes to explicitly consider the place of media practices in making a politics of cities, and conversely, to consider what is left out when such practices are relegated to the background. In certain ways, we are suggesting a contemporary return to something like Robert Park's inclination in relation to cities and media. In his seminal essay on the natural history of the newspaper, for example (Park, 1925), Park exhibits a style which does not generally seem to distinguish between or oppose the urban and the media when studying politics and democracy. This surely has something to do with Park's own intellectual period, and the absence of established disciplines in media or urban studies. Yet this is also precisely the point of the workshop: an opportunity for engagement and discussion through a similar sort of pre-disciplinary spirit.

Why 'mediapolis'? In using this term, our intention was not to propose a groundbreaking new concept. Indeed, the initial rationale was significantly less ambitious. Mediapolis was just a way of provocatively interweaving media, politics and cities, by joining together 'media' with the various urban and political meanings of 'polis' (e.g. city, state, citizens). It pointed out, rather nicely and in a single word, an opening for discussion on the intersections of media with cities and urban spaces as settings for, and objects of, politics.

We soon realized, however, that it would probably not be enough to say simply that the term mediapolis conveniently joined up two or three key concepts. In no small way this was because we became aware of a recent book by Roger Silverstone (Silverstone, 2007) – completed in the last year of his life, during a period of illness – carrying the main title of *Media and Morality* and subtitle of *the rise of the mediapolis*. In this book, Silverstone explicitly proposes 'the mediapolis' as a central concept<sup>1</sup>. He refers in particular to the writings of Hannah Arendt, whereby polis is not a city-state in physical location, but a 'space of appearance' for acting and speaking together, regardless of location. This mediapolis, which Silverstone regards as empirical and normative – 'both a reality and an ambition' (2007: 186) – indicates a unified global public sphere. While it mirrors the classic Greek polis, it points to the constitution of politics or public life, the relations between self and other, taking-place on an increasingly global scale. Silverstone is not saying that media are a single undifferentiated mass, or that they make physical distance meaningless. Rather, he is saying that the many practices, organisations and technologies making up the media produce a single discursive and judgmental space that makes for distinctive kinds of proximity and distance in a moral sense (see Dayan, 2007). In other words, the mediapolis is a unified-yet-centrifugal moral space of communication, made of a multiplicity of others, and different patterns of inclusion and exclusion.

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<sup>1</sup> We also discovered that 'mediapolis' has been used – if not in a central, conceptual way – in the title of at least two other books broadly on media: Inkinen (1999) and de Jong and Schuilenburg (2006).

Through this morally-led argument, one major conclusion Silverstone makes is that the media is far too important to be left to professional journalists alone.

There is, of course, more to *Media and Morality*. The book not only explores media but wider issues in moral philosophy and politics, engaging – along with Arendt – Jacques Derrida, Emmanuel Lévinas, Ulrich Beck and Edward Said. It can also be seen as a personal and perhaps even religious utopia of Silverstone's making (Peters, 2007); his hopeful vision concerning the communicative preconditions for future humanity. At the same time, and even if for these philosophical reasons, the book works media and polis together through a distinctive spatial imagination. This is one focused on the relations of the self to the mediated spaces of communicative interaction (the mediapolis), whereby the figure of the mediapolis is not city or city-state but a global space of appearance. And if we hold to this simpler and less morally-focused reading Silverstone's mediapolis for the moment, it makes for an interesting juxtaposition with a different reading of polis, from within a broadly urban studies tradition: Engin Isin's *Being Political* (Isin, 2002).

Isin's book is a major text on the notion of citizenship, which he argues to be a condition always set against various Others, who are encouraged to conduct themselves in the ways that affirm the virtues of those regarded as citizens. He illustrates this claim through exploring a series of 'group configurations' that have historically defined citizenship, beginning with the classic Greek polis and moving on to describe the civitas, the Christianopolis, the eutopolis, the metropolis, and the cosmopolis. In so doing, Isin argues for an understanding of citizenship and polis explicitly hinged on the city. This is because, for Isin, the city is distinctive as a 'difference machine' around which different historical and contemporary forms of Western citizenship have been delineated. At least within geography – if the critiques and queries of a recent special issue of *Political Geography* are any indication – this urban focus is fairly contentious. Isin was there accused of inadequately defining 'the city' (Godlewska, 2005), reducing the polis and the political to cities (Elden, 2005), and spatializing citizenship as urban and thus implicitly excluding distant others (Ó Tuathail, 2005). Isin's (2005) response is interesting, however, because it stresses the city as *not* a place or specific space, but a 'figuration' (375), implying a city without a fixed definition but instead contingently defined through its problematization by various groups (377). So, for Isin, the polis is not reduced to the city but the city is elevated to generalized polis: an 'entity that is simultaneously both the concentration and diffusion of acts that are political' (2005: 377).

Just as Silverstone's *Media and Morality* goes beyond a narrow concern for media *per se*, Isin's *Being Political* goes beyond a narrow concern for the city. It is, after all, a book principally concerned with citizenship, and one engaging a broader range of philosophical thought spanning matters of politics, law and the social. Nevertheless, Isin's polis – despite being a non-territorial reading of the city – places a certain emphasis on groups coming together and differences being worked out through the city that is characteristic of urban studies. If we accept this simplification for the moment, just as we did earlier in the case of Silverstone, we might be in a position to generalize that there are some interesting differences when a broadly media studies reading connecting media and politics is set into contrast with a broadly urban studies reading connecting cities and politics. These apparent differences indicate for us an opening that we would like the dialogues of this workshop to explore. While we do not claim that bringing together these two areas, no more than these two particular writings, will lead to a singular synthesis of the intersections of media, politics and cities, we do hope it will make way for a discussion explicitly oriented to *politics*<sup>2</sup>, and specifically to an urban politics. We think

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<sup>2</sup> As contrasted to the comparatively plentiful work on the more general intersections of media and cities. On this, for example, see the online proceedings for 'Cities and media: cultural perspectives on urban identities in a mediatized world' (<http://www.ep.liu.se/ecp/020/>), a wide-ranging conference held in Vadstena, Sweden in October 2006.

this is an important enterprise, not least in the context of understanding the reconfiguration of politics in a world often proclaimed to be becoming more and more mediated and more and more urban.

### **Spatial imaginations of media studies and urban theory**

One of the most prominent contrasts between Silverstone's polis and Isin's conceptualisation of the polis – and we would suggest by extension media studies and urban studies – is their different spatial imaginations. Paradigmatically, media studies might be seen as deploying space in two ways: first, as mediated spaces of communicative interaction, in which space is understood to be a plastic configuration for variable relations of presence and absence (Barnett, 2004); and secondly, as highly localised sites of, for example, production, rituals, or domesticity. By contrast, urban studies' concern with the city has typically directed its focus to spatial definitions of urbanity in terms of locality, scale, place, density, and heterogeneity – conceptualisations which tend to characterise the urban as a space of co-presence or gathering of various processes, practices, actors, and technologies. These are generalizations, of course: there has been much recent work investigating media for its multiple spatialities (e.g. Couldry, 2000; Couldry and McCarthy, 2004; Falkheimer and Jansson, 2006; McCarthy, 2001; Morley, 2000, 2006); and recent geographical work on cities has been marked by a decided shift towards a non-scalar and relational vocabulary of intensities, distribution, connectivity and mediation (e.g. Amin and Thrift, 2002; Graham and Marvin, 2001; Iveson, 2007; Massey, 2007; Massey *et al.*, 1999; Pile and Thrift, 2002; Sieverts, 2003). We might nevertheless restate this contrast in a slightly different way: for media studies, space is always already mediated, spatially and temporally extended, distanced and dispersed; urban studies' longstanding concern has been on the various effects and affects brought about by particular types of spatial configurations of co-presence or proximity.

The contrast of these spatial imaginaries indicates that there is a discussion to be had around different understandings from within and between these respective disciplines on their key (spatial) concepts. For one, we might think about the ways in which cities, urban space or 'the urban' get conceptualized in media studies and urban studies respectively. We might likewise think through how these interdisciplinary areas conceptualize the media, media (without the definite article) and communication<sup>3</sup>. More importantly, we might ask whether and how such conceptualizations inform different images of politics. In thinking through these contrasting spatial imaginations, we imagine that a good deal of their differences result from the substantive concerns and disciplinary boundaries being played out within these already interdisciplinary areas. At least anecdotally, the latter was certainly underlined for us in the lead up to this workshop. In developing a list of possible invitees, for example, it was quite difficult to find scholars in media studies that explicitly affirmed an interest in cities, whether in publications or on their personal website. This perhaps reflects the degree to which canonical media studies tends to focus on territorial spaces such as the nation state, the 'global', or more localised scales, such as the home. Moreover, in correspondence some were quite surprised to be invited to an event with this sort of cities-media focus. This latter point was even more the case with invited geographers and urbanists, many of whom responded (some only initially) with responses along the lines of 'I don't do media', 'I am not an expert on media' and 'I'm not sure I can talk about the media'. This perhaps reflects an understanding of 'the media' as a discrete set of practices (the sorts of thing that can have 'effects' or one sort of other), practices which are reserved as objects of analysis for specific disciplinary fields. In order to draw media studies and urban studies together, then, it might be helpful to shift perspective,

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<sup>3</sup> It is arguably here that geographers have most effectively engaged in media studies debates, by drawing attention to the urban and regional geographies of media production and cultural innovation (see Scott, 2000; Pratt, 2002; Coe, 2001; Krätke and Taylor, 2004).

by trying to think of the ways in which what we tend to think of as discrete 'media' are in fact embedded in practices that they in turn help to constitute as such; practices such as 'politics', which we propose to consider here through the lens of urban life.

### Media practices

What does it mean, then, to suggest an approach to the urban-media interface around the concept of practice, and how does this in turn help to rethink how politics ordinarily works? While we do not want to provide an ironclad definition of practices, at the same time, we do not simply mean its common-sense usage. Instead, we draw on a broadly Wittgensteinian sense of practices which, following Schatzki (1996), are understood as activities composed of 'doings' (understandings of how to do things) and 'sayings' (or 'rules', meaning explicit statements setting out how to do something or that a state of affairs is the case). Reckwitz (2002: 249) defines practice as "a routinised type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge". The most relevant bit of this definition is the part that *things* play in practices. There is a tendency to think of 'the media' as a range of distinct practices, to do producing and distributing, and watching, listening or reading various media forms – bibles, newspapers, 45s, or soap operas. In this sense, media is easily offset against other dimensions of social life as a discrete set of domains, ones which can have various sorts of effects. It might, however, be more interesting to think of media as not a distinct set of practices, but rather as aspects of every practice. This thought follows from the distinction in recent practice theory between integrative and dispersed practices (Schatzki 2002: 88): *dispersed practices* are the features of many activities, such as describing, rule following, interpreting, explaining and so on; *integrated practices* are bundles of activities that make up particular domains or activities, such as cooking, motoring, being a football fan, and they contain particular combinations of dispersed practices<sup>4</sup>. In these terms, much of what we think of as 'the media' might be rethought as so many dispersed practices that help constitute any number of more integrated practices. The print/literacy/reading assemblage is an obvious example here, but one might also think of 'television' in the same way: not as single practice but as a variable component of any number of practices; practices of informed citizenship, of childcare, of friendship and hospitality, and so on.

This practice-based lens implies an open-ended approach that asks the basic questions: what do people *do* in relation to media; and what do people *say* in relation to media (Couldry, 2004). It also implies resisting the constant temptation to think in terms of the effects that media have on other domains, however sophisticated such understandings might be (Barnett 2008). One benefit of approaching media as practice is that it reframes the political nature of media, by diverting attention away from the widespread tendency to think that media are political primarily because they distribute mediated representations that help to construct subjectivities. In such accounts, all forms of media – be it a novel, a song, a film or a newspaper column – are political, since each can be claimed to affect how subjects perceive or interpret the world, and therefore can form the basis of theories about the formation of longer-term or deeper subjectivities. A focus on the place of media in practices, by contrast, directs attention to *how* media constitute different fields of communicative activity. In terms of the focus here, for example, it directs attention to the place of mediated communicative practices in the variable formation of the field of

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<sup>4</sup> Integrative practices are also distinct from dispersed practices because they rely on a shared sense of certain teleological and affective ends and mobilizations, as well as knowledge about the past and present nature, conduct and common situation of the practice (see Schatzki 1996, 2002).



'politics'<sup>5</sup>; and it also draws attention to how this relationship might in turn be shaped by the embeddedness of media practices in a variety of integrated practices that help up make urban life – work practices, transportation processes, socio-cultural practices of social reproduction in the home and neighbourhood, and so on. In other words, it is a perspective through which it becomes possible to distinguish how certain media practices might be understood to be more *explicitly* political than others. This is one important reason that we asked participants to consider their work in relation to two more specific areas of media practices, these being broadly journalistic practices (from professional to emerging forms of do-it-yourself journalism) and the ways journalistic media enter into and are used through a diverse range of everyday practices and organised activities. One thing that sets journalistic practices apart is that they rest on some distinctive commitment to factuality, objectivity and truth<sup>6</sup>. While all sorts of media practices might help constitute the world as a field of public concern (Scannell, 1996), journalism practices are distinguishable because they divide up this public world into normatively differentiated fields of, for example, politics, entertainment, sport, defined in no small part by the degree to which they are presented as fields requiring not just public interest but concerted public action.

## Conclusion

It must be emphasized here that the aim in convening this workshop is not to create a vision of cities, media and politics as some hermetically sealed intersection. Rather, it provides a set of juxtapositions to ask a series of new questions around the relations of three – admittedly very fuzzy – concepts. Building upon the above-noted points for discussion – on contrasting uses and conceptualizations of core concepts such as space, place, cities, communication, 'the urban' and 'the media' and their political implications – a number of additional (non-exhaustive) questions leading from our focus on practices might be:

- Does thinking in terms of 'practices' (i.e. performed, or pragmatic activities) mark a distinctive approach to exploring the intersections of media, politics and cities?
- How are radical changes in media practices and technologies remaking the social and political life of cities? How are such changes haunted by historically longstanding practices and technologies of media communication and urban life?
- How do media respond to and amplify the political remit of significant events (such as violence, conflict, demonstrations, crises, etc) that become connected in some way to cities?
- How are claims of urban citizenship, belonging, identity and difference made through the practices related to media?
- How does the geographically- and historically-specific manifestation of media practices make for distinctive forms of politics in, and in relation to, cities in different parts of the world?

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<sup>5</sup> We imply politics here in a very ordinary sense (rather than the much more widely-defined 'cultural politics' where politics tends to be identified through scholarly analyses and theorizing), as simply the variously-sited practices of claiming and negotiating who gets what, when, where and why. For some examples of how such an understanding has been variously connected to cities, see: Amin and Thrift (2002); Cochrane (2007); Dikeç (2007); and Judge *et al.* (1995).

<sup>6</sup> Note that this does not necessarily mean that all such practices involve an explicitly deliberative or rational expression, since they could also, for example, be emotive, theatrical, or satirical yet be taken as claiming some truth or state of affairs.

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# I. Theorizing Media/Urban Spaces

# Where is public space?

Clive Barnett  
The Open University

There is one concept that is both spatial, if only implicitly, and which seems to link together 'the urban' and 'the media' around a concern with politics. This is the concept of the public sphere. Accounts of the public sphere bear on democratic theory in a particular way: "Democratic theory focuses on accountability and responsiveness in the decision-making process; theories of the public sphere focus on the role of public communication in facilitating or hindering this process" (Ferree *et al* 2002, 289). The concept of public sphere has been important in both urban studies and human geography, and in media and communication studies and cultural studies, in reorienting the normative frameworks of research around issues of citizenship, democracy, and participation. It enables researchers to claim that the particular sorts of spaces they focus upon (urban spaces and scales; or communications networks and media spaces) are the paradigms of the public sphere.

Both these fields draw on their own, distinctive traditions of spatial theory (see Barnett 2004a). Urban theorists and human geographers, however, often ignore this, and admonish communication and media studies' approach to theorising the public sphere a lack of attention to 'real', 'material' spaces (see Barnett 2004b). Urbanists tend to argue that the city is a privileged scene for modern public life: sometimes this argument is made with reference to arguments about urbanism as a space of encounter; more recently, rolling together the urban and the media, it is related to an argument about urban space becoming one huge screen-scape. Both arguments might have something in them, but neither is very convincing in making the case for the urban, on its own, being the privileged space in which the relationship between the public sphere and democracy is worked through in practice. There is no good reason to suppose that publicness, in these terms, inheres in any given spatial configuration (Barnett 2008). There is more than a hint of nostalgia in urbanists' insistence that the urban is a privileged site of publicness, indicative of a hankering after a sense of the public as an embodied collective subject, and of a continuing difficulty when it comes to thinking about publicness in relation to absence, representation, and withdrawal. The self-consciously materialist insistence on grounding the public in urban spaces of co-presence stands in contrast to the implicit spatiality at work in Habermas' (1989) original account of the public sphere, in which publics are formed through the circulation of communicative materials; an emphasis drawn out in his more recent insistence that the public sphere must be thought of in terms of 'subjectless flows of communication' (Habermas 1996). Habermas provides us with an image of the public sphere as a circulatory space of communication. We do not need to 'ground' this image in 'real' or 'material' spaces. Quite the contrary, this gesture detracts from the really important insight in Habermas' work, which draws our attention to the degree to which a public sphere is all about the process of discoursing. But, in order to think about the spatialities of discoursing, we do need to suspend the presumption in Habermas' original account that circulation is contained within circuits of face-to-face dialogue. It might be better thought of as a process of *scattering*, *dispersal*, and *dissemination*. We are likely to find much better understandings of the spatialities that matter, publicly and democratically, in the work of communication theorists or literary theorists. They help us to see that publics are not gathered or even assembled, but are queer formations strung out in time (Warner 2002) and formed through processes of dissemination (Peters 1999). Or, to put it another way, the problem with metaphors like the public *sphere*, the public *realm*, public *domain*, or

the public sector is not that these are spatial *metaphors*. It is that they are *spatial metaphors*.

The project of theorising 'space' and 'spatiality' has exhausted itself, always doomed as it seems to be to return to the same style of theorising by ontological assertion. Where does this leave us, in trying to think about the relationship between the urban and the media politically, with the help of the concept of the public sphere. Well, maybe we should just theorise more *ordinarily*, by listening to what concepts actually seem to mean in practice. If we take seriously the idea that the medium of publicness is discourse, then we should also take seriously the degree to which publicness is a process: it's something people *do*, rather than a space they inhabit. I want to suggest that we subordinate the question of what sort of spaces are public spaces to the task of discerning the sorts of doings which are involved in public action. We might, for example, think of publicness as emerging through combinations of certain sorts of objects, subjects and mediums of action (Barnett 2008). Or we could get a little Wittgensteinian, and focus awhile on the differential grammar of public-talk: where *the public* can be a type of actor (the who of publicness); a temporal moment, a decision to *go public* (the when); a scene in which action takes place, as in *acting in public*; and an attribution given to some actions, as in *acting publicly*. It might be interesting to think in terms of acts of publicness, and then ask what sorts of spaces and times are enacted through these actions.

The advantage of this sort of approach to theorising publicness, in terms of thinking about the relationship between the urban and the media, is that it opens up various areas of investigation without overselling any single dimension as the singularly important essence of urban-media-politics interface. There are various spatialities that are enacted which throw into relief relationships between the urban, media, and politics. These might include the kind of spatiality implied by thinking in terms of backgrounds, infrastructures, and mediums of coordination. Another spatiality disclosed by thinking about the media as a space of politics is the space of domesticity. Modern communications constitute 'private' spaces as always already public, if not quite political, and herein lies an important reminder to urbanists not to suppose that the space of urban publicity is exemplified by those sociable spaces of the street, café, or mall at all.<sup>7</sup> Then there is the McLuhanite insight that new media don't replace old media so much as embed themselves in them, and perhaps displace them into new locations. This draws into focus the extent to which the space-times of urban living are the parasitic conditions of possibility for new forms of communicative action, whether this is the automobilised time-spaces of talk-radio and pop music, the mass transit time-spaces of metropolitan newspapers, the domesticated time-spaces of the evening TV news, or the office and/or home-working time-spaces of internet media. Then there are the more obvious ways in which urban space functions as the dramaturgical stage for various forms of contemporary political mobilisation – the spatial site through which media attention is sustained and projected.

This is not meant to be an exhaustive list of the fields in which a relationship between the urban, media, and politics can be established by thinking in terms of the spatio-temporal enactment of publicity. It is just meant to illustrate that this relationship is best approached pragmatically, rather than supposing that one can come up with a singular understanding of the spatiality which can politically articulate the urban and the media.

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<sup>7</sup> The only reason that it could possibly still be interesting to spend time on the representational frames through which political issues are circulated is not, as is assumed by most extant cultural theory, because of some magical process of subject-formation pulled off by 'the media'. The reason why it might still be interesting to spend time elaborating on the ways in which news discourse, for example, is anchored around certain sorts of topics of mundane urbanity (house prices, local travel information, local weather, local sport, sports news) and around certain sorts of figures (heroes and villains, personalities and talking-heads) is because it might help in understanding the distinctive phenomenologies of various media (after Paddy Scannell) or (after Stanley Cavell), their distinctive ontologies.

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# Public address and the city (or, what's wrong with outdoor advertising?)<sup>1</sup>

Kurt Iveson  
University of Sydney

As the organisers of this workshop point out, different ways of thinking about the city and the media suggest different critical and political priorities. In this paper, I draw on previous research (Iveson 2007) to outline a way of thinking about the public life of cities which dispenses with the popular attachment to 'unmediated' forms of publicness. The approach I outline places emphasis instead on the interaction between cities and media, and is hopefully suggestive of a different set of priorities for critical analysis of contemporary urbanisation.

## The city versus the media?

In the urban studies literature on public space, the forms of publicness associated with 'the city' and 'the media' are often presented as quite distinct, even incompatible. The city is frequently characterised as a space of embodied co-presence, which (ideally, if not in reality) enables *unmediated* forms of public interaction. Newspapers, radio, television or the internet, on the other hand, are characterised as disembodied spaces which enable *mediated* forms of public interaction.

From this position, one's perspective on the importance of the city for politics depends on how one values unmediated forms of publicness. For some, the unmediated public interaction associated with cities is what makes their public spaces vital for a healthy public sphere. For others, the co-presence associated with the city's public spaces is what makes them increasingly irrelevant – the 'new media' have become the 'new town square'.

By associating urban forms of public address with unmediated co-presence, both sides of this debate fail to adequately take account of the dynamic geographies of public life. As such, the city/media opposition is a particularly unhelpful one for those who are concerned with developing critical perspectives on how different forms of urbanisation and urban governance impact upon public life.

## Public address and the city

To explain why I think it is wrong to conceptualise the city's contribution to the public sphere as the provision of spaces of unmediated public address, let me briefly outline my approach to the spatiality of public address.

To address a public is to address a horizon of strangers. This practice, in all its many forms, requires a capacity to imagine 'venues of indefinite address' through which one might access members of a public *en masse*, rather than having to address each member of the public individually (Warner 2002). Those who engage in different kinds of public address know that there are different spaces through which they might access their public. So, the calculations involved in practising different forms of public address,

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<sup>1</sup> Not for citation – comment welcome!



such as knowing 'whom to speak to and when and how, *carry an implicit map of social space*, of what kinds of people we can associate with in what ways and in what circumstances' (Taylor 2004: 25-6, my italics). A public social imaginary, then, is also a spatial imaginary.

This spatial imaginary has at least three inter-connected urban dimensions. As well shall see, each of these is fundamentally related to (rather than opposed to) media practices:

### 1. Urban places as venues of public address

Certainly, streets and squares and other sites in cities act as venues of public address. This may involve co-presence (think of a speaker addressing a rally or a discussion in a town hall), or it may not (think of urban media such as posters or graffiti). But even where public address does involve co-presence, it is mediated nonetheless. For one thing, many instances of co-present public address in city spaces are designed to reach a wider public through subsequent mediation (think again of the staging of rallies in ways designed to achieve media coverage). Furthermore, encounters between people in public spaces are mediated by the knowledge or expectations that people bring to these encounters. Think here of how media representations of particular places as 'dangerous' may influence (if not determine) the way in which people regard others in those spaces.

### 2. Urban places as objects of public address

The places in cities which might act as venues of public address also become *objects* of public address, as their identities and norms are debated. The media is crucial here. Public discussions about what counts as 'proper' behaviour in a given space take place through a range of different venues of public address. Think of how the streets become an object of public address in newspaper, radio and television debates about 'anti-social behaviour'.

### 3. The city as 'the public'

Finally, different groups frequently claim to address, or act in the best interests of, 'the city'. The city as a public or political community is imagined through mediated discussions – indeed, it could not possibly be imagined in any other way. This is frequently reflected in the very structures of the media – with newspapers, radio stations, television stations and even the internet being imaginatively and materially linked to a particular city as an imagined community. In Sydney, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2WS FM (the 'WS' stands for 'Western Sydney') and the *Sydney Indymedia* website are all examples.

## **Critically interrogating the urban media landscape: outdoor advertising**

What kinds of intellectual and critical commitments are suggested by this approach to the urban dimensions of publicness?

Rather than critically interrogating changes to contemporary cities with reference to some unrealised ideal of unmediated, co-present public interaction, I suggest that we can instead usefully assess such changes with reference to the multiple urban dimensions of public address outlined above.

To illustrate, let me conclude by briefly discussing my current research into the outdoor advertising industry.

Surprisingly, given the decline of advertising revenues in most traditional media relative to new digital media, outdoor advertising is growing as percentage of total advertising

spend in many countries. Why? The outdoor media industry argues it is because outdoor media are a very effective way of capturing attention in an increasingly fragmented media market (you can't turn off a billboard, as the saying goes).



*APN, an outdoor media company, uses an outdoor advertisement to advertise ... outdoor advertising*

However, there is another explanation. Most of the growth in outdoor advertising is not in traditional outdoor media such as billboards, but rather in new media affixed to 'street furniture'. Global outdoor media companies such as Adshell and JC Decaux are competing to sign street furniture contracts with urban authorities the world over. A typical example of such a contract is one in which a company provides and maintains bus shelters or telephone booths 'for free', in return for third party advertising rights which are then sold to advertisers – a textbook public-private partnership.



*JC Decaux Street Furniture Maintenance Team, Sydney (note the nice Australian flags on the van...)*

Now, if the city is primarily valued as a space of unmediated interaction, the incursion of advertising *per se* would be viewed as yet another problematic example of the privatisation of public space.

However, from my perspective, such a critique is not particularly useful. If anything, I would argue that the problem is that this new form of outdoor media is *reducing* the scope of cities to sustain a healthy level of advertising.

Many musicians, activists, artists, authors and others continue to make use of urban media for advertising. They do so because these media remain among the most accessible and cheaply available in comparison to other media. This advertising is a form of public address which is crucial to the production of a variety of publics.



*I've even done some outdoor advertising myself...*

But all this is changing in cities where outdoor media companies have entered into contracts with urban authorities. The posting of bills, political notices, notes about lost cats ... all these urban media practices and more are a threat to the monetisation strategies of outdoor media companies, which are premised on their ability to secure monopoly rights to the city as 'advertising space' (how can they charge some for advertising space if it is freely available for others?). And so, maintenance workers employed by these companies remove this material from 'their' furniture, and urban authorities actively clamp down on unauthorised urban media as part of their contractual obligations...



*Of course, they don't have things  
all their own way ... hacked APEC  
advertisement, Sydney 2007*

From my perspective on the city, then, it is not the growth of advertising *per se* that is the problem. Rather, the problem is that the growing monopolisation of the outdoor media landscape potentially curtails others kinds of 'advertising' practices which I think are necessary for a vital public sphere.

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# Reflections on power topologies, media and communication

John Allen  
The Open University

In a recent piece published by Manuel Castells in the *International Journal of Communication* (2007, 1) entitled 'Communication, Power and Counterpower in the Network Society', he foregrounds the importance of communications media as it extends its reach into all domains of public life through networks that are simultaneously local and global. The scenario of the network society, in which the power of flows takes precedence over the flows of power, is a familiar one since Castells first expounded it in the late 1990s, where the power of connection trumps that of institutional power and its entrenched hierarchies. Now, it would seem, the power of circulating codes and information has been reconfigured as a *new space of communications* in which the power to influence, to shape collective minds, is played out between political actors in this new media space.

In terms of power plays, there is, according to Castells, an ongoing struggle for social domination and counter-domination in this communications space in which new forms of mass self communication – horizontally networked rather than hierarchical – unsettle the interests of institutional elites and reach more effectively into mainstream, everyday life. In doing so, the likes of NGOs, social movements and grassroots activists aim to create a new form of 'public space' which challenges and undermines the dominant media elites.

Versions of this top-down bottom-up view of the exercise of power are not particularly novel, as much of the social movement literature testifies, but what struck me was how surprisingly conventional the analysis of *power* and *space* was, given Castells' explicit aim to open up questions of *media power* and its *reach* into urban 'publics'.

Whilst he argues that the networked space of communications now constitutes the arena through which power relations are contested and shaped, the only significant actors engaged in this contestation of power are the dominant political and corporate elites and those who oppose them; that is, individual and collective actors of all different political hues and colours. Institutional power and counterpower, domination and counter domination, are the only significant practices involved in this play of forces as each side battles to win minds and influence outcomes.

On this account, there is little sense that those opposing the dominant media elites are powerful in their own way, capable of mobilizing quite different assets and resources from those with economic muscle to press their respective claims and interests. More power, in the shape of economic dominance, does not necessarily prevail over what is perceived as less: the resources of NGOs, for instance, to press their information-advantage by turning far-away tragedies into immediate concerns through targeted connections to 'publics' closer to home. Pragmatic and expedient, the ability of NGOs and campaign groups to gauge what works best to tailor specific media campaigns to their advantage is a way of doing politics differently to that of the institutional elites. What such practices and tactics lack in terms of political sustainability, they gain in terms of their experimental ways of mobilizing pluralized and dispersed publics on the basis of 'connected' experience.

Nor do grassroots activists simply 'oppose' or resist the dominant media politics through some mirror practice of counter domination'; rather, they themselves are more than capable of manipulation, persuasion and the deployment of authority to achieve their political objectives. Likewise, in the new media spaces, the corporate media may attempt to dominate channels of communication by closing down choices and constraining possibilities, but they also engage in manipulation, authority and inducement every bit as much as NGOs do. In that respect, a simple domination/resistance framework trivializes the interplay of forces that characterises much of what is taken to be media power.

Much the same trivialization appears to be evident in Castells' understanding of networked space, and the sense that the more or less extensive reach of powerful media is something that can be measured in a straightforward topographical manner. The more pervasive the network, the greater is the assumed reach, as if distance itself were a barrier to contact. That Castells knows otherwise is plainly evident through his understanding of the role of simultaneity and real-time connections in the networks, yet there is little sense in his work that the power of networked connections amounts to more than just lines on a map or a series of conduits through which power 'flows'.

In fact, Castells' sense that public space is largely defined in the contested spaces of communication pushes up against a *topological* world which calls into question the very idea that power can be simply distributed or extended through the networks. The loosening of defined times and distances that topological accounts suggest draw attention to the cross-cutting mix of distanced and real-time connections that social movements in particular engage in to make 'publics' present across a range of global political issues.

The ability, for instance, of NGOs and campaigning groups to link the actions of governments or corporations *directly* to abuse elsewhere in the world or to issues faced collectively such as climate change, ecological disasters, food risks or sweatshop exploitation, is, in practice, a topological tactic. In a number of media campaigns, activists have been able to *draw within reach* events such as sweatshop exploitation in far off locations by fixing directly on company logos and linking the actions of branded retailers in the high street to abuse overseas. In doing so, they establish an immediate connection between exploitation 'over there' and corporate decisions taken 'back home'. More pointedly, the ability to manipulate 'publics' by erasing from view the majority of global supply chain connections – buyers and suppliers, trading companies and sourcing agents, subcontractors and subassembly firms – which separate factory workers from consumers, effectively dissolved the gap between 'near' and 'far' and re-embedded the exploitation among those affluent consumers who benefit most from it.

The relative success of this *mediated* exercise of power, whereby NGOs enrolled consumers to confront retail corporations directly with the consequences of their (indirect) actions, has however less to do with solidarities produced through the new communication spaces and rather more to do with the ability of social movements to persuade, manipulate and influence action at-a-distance. Moreover, what can be drawn within reach can also be put *out of reach* as those actors targeted, corporations in the main in this instance, use the networked media to distance themselves from abuses elsewhere. The displacement of responsibility onto others, as economic liabilities are offset or labour obligations contracted out, can have the effect of extending events in time and space, pushing them further away rather than drawing them closer. Again, there is little here that speaks of network domination and much that foregrounds the different registers of power that topological shifts in media architecture have increasingly made possible.

The powers of reach, which arguably the new media spaces have enabled, has given rise to the possibility of political demands being more or less present in the here and now. If that is so, then on this view a simple zero-sum game of media power misses much of the *mediated* nature of power today and how it exercises us.

## II. Urban Histories, Media Histories



# The 'local rag' and urban histories

*Nick Hayes*  
*Nottingham Trent University*

We can constitute towns and cities as points of exchange for people, goods and information, where linkage remains the major urban function (Lees, 2001). Yet Daniel Monti, accepting that 'we are and must be storytellers', argues that 'the secret of great cities, quite simply, is found in what we do there and how we explain it to ourselves'; that is in the stories 'about how all of us fill those streets and buildings (Monti, 1999). In social and political terms urban space resonates beyond one, or a series of, these moment(s) of interaction to provide context. Thus, city spaces acquire 'human' meaning through the agency and association of such narratives written on a canvass of unspoken 'values and norms ... the patterns of doing, thinking and feeling ... a shared sense of identity'; those meanings that human beings attribute to actions, objects, and to other people. If we want to understand the city, we need to understand this civic culture and its promotion, and the acceptance or rejection of such shared attitudinal values, symbols and understandings that relate spatially to the identity of towns and cities (Zijderveld, 1998; Morris, 2001). Clearly also a hierarchy of order was present: certain norms and ideas – what Zijderveld usefully labels a city's symbolic infrastructure – carried greater resonance with key groups, was more mutually reflective of dominant economic and social structures, and/or the population at large.

This leads to questions of who defines those dominant local meanings/ideas and to what end (Calhoun, 1980; Rose, 1990; Pearson, 1993). The press, as institutions, maintained and promoted agendas of both self-interest and real or imagined public interest. Beyond the walkable city, it was the primary means through which urbanites understood and communicated with each other in the sense that they could think about the same things at the same time, presenting the opportunity for a common vision of social reality (Nord, 1986). It was also the purveyor of the dominant urban narrative. Yet ambiguity still surrounds its role in the twentieth century. Was it simply a local 'rag', driven by commercial pressures to banality, as orthodoxy holds, and the reflector of consensual 'good news' stories that underpinned the status quo, or, as might be suggested, a local media organ capable of impacting significantly on the municipal decision-making process, and offering a positive pivotal mediation around which local identity(s) could be constructed (Bromley and Hayes, 2002). The interface between journalism and history is not one that has been widely explored. Too many historians frequently fail to consider how the media functioned, but instead use such sources largely unquestioningly (Darnton, 1990; O'Malley, 2002). Yet noticeably, for urban historians it remains the principle narrative through which we can access the local, as opposed to a national, past. It holds the secret of who we are as city dwellers, so that what was important to us – what differences we made or did not make – is 'locked up in the civic diary we call newspapers'. The press, quite simply, was the teller of the best 'community stories', which makes it of central importance to the urban historian (Monti, 1999, Gunn, 2000).

Newspapers were not only transmitters of positive images of community. They were an effective means of extending a 'civilised gaze' over the urban landscape, acting as a piece of 'surveillance technology' and also as a 'shaming machine' (Croll, 2000). They, therefore, acted as an integral part of the urban network, and as community signifiers of positive and negative values. In the act of reporting they transferred and initiated values, in terms of what was reported and how. The local press was a complex array of more or less mediated interactions (editorial, reportage, correspondence, advertising) constitutive of civic entities through publicising and juxtaposing voices – civic, business, popular –

and these interactions were themselves part of the notion of civiness (i.e. the local news and views), where frequency and prominence of display of key ideas and promotions relates directly to perceived and understood importance (Kaniss, 1991). Newspapers function as an agenda setting mechanism because they provide shared public spaces, in which authorship and readership overlap symbiotically, for initiating and conducting debate and for promoting common understandings (Kaniss, 1991). The analysis of narrative and space carry greater significance once we consider that civic engagement can be 'engendered'. (Youniss and McLennan, 1997), and that an understanding of contemporary portrayals of the past depended heavily on an appreciation of the modes of communication through which knowledge and values were transmitted (Anderson, 1983).

If civic spectacle- mayor-making ceremonies, for example - were frequently physically exclusive, strictly structured and controlled in terms of access, the press provided open access to all. Not only did 'rituals' and other expressions of the civic occupy physical space: they transcended this space through rhetoric, ideas, values and memory (Little, 2000). Central here is such meaning and reception: for arguably civic spectacles, rituals and symbols were 'not just the *expression*' of a sense of community; perhaps 'they were' the 'sense of community.' (Cannadine, 1982). In a more physical sense, Meller argues that through from 1900 onwards 'quality of life' became a dominant urban concern: 'new ways had to be found of offering all the citizens more satisfying ways of living and ever more social opportunities' (Meller, 1995). For example, the provision of the new public and private suburban housing estate from 1918 onwards was one such manifestation of this political and social discourse, with its expected conformity to a 'modern' and 'civilised' identity (Hayes, 2000). Yet certain civic expenditures in the inter and post-war period which were offered as symbols of 'pride' also provided new foci for sectional opposition and for discourses promoting exclusion: the frequent antagonisms between municipal and private housing tenancy exemplify this phenomena (Olechnowicz, 1997). In all these arenas the press brought the social, political and the public together, and provided us with a prism through which to subsequently to view these events.

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# News architecture and the telautograph on Park Row

Aurora Wallace  
New York University

As David Henkin reminds us in *City Reading*, “Cities were built, in part, of words, words that took material form in public space.”(5) Beyond this materiality of words, this paper considers important convergences in sound and motion in the delivery of news that presages more contemporary valences of multi-media. As Henkin argues, “The metropolitan press organized a community (and a public) around metaphors of space as well as metaphors of time.” (129) In the triangular plot of land that faced Park Row in New York, space and time are no mere metaphors; news was tangibly spatial, temporal and often live.

During major announcements at the turn of the last century in New York, news could come in the form of words on paper, extras shouted by newsboys, or projected onto large canvases draped from the fronts of newspaper buildings along Park Row. Anticipating later developments in news tickers, zippers, and digital screens, these “live” uses of architectural facades move the site of news off the page and outside of the newsroom, and help us to see news as a spatial construct. Beyond the geometric symmetry of the page, the circulation patterns of newsgathering and delivery, this more ephemeral form reveals a triangulation of news, audiences, and event that encourages a review of the modern concepts of interactivity and multimedia.

Park Row, also known as Printing House Square and Newspaper Row, was a few blocks in lower Manhattan, facing City Hall Park that was home to many newspaper offices. The park was bound by the post office, the Western Union building, and City Hall, and as such it was the center of public information dissemination in New York. The ascendant power of the press was clearly communicated by the skyscraper spectacle of ever-taller towers designed as emblems of modern urban communications and capitalist media. But the space in front of these buildings was just as significant to the development of modern communication as a newly up-to-the-minute, immersive, phenomenon.

Newspapers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century could be extremely responsive to the immediacy of events, with the capacity to insert news flashes into an edition running on the presses in two minutes. This, combined with the printing of several updated editions per day, and in both morning and evening form, contributed to a near constant production news. Yet even with this massive outpouring of paper, building facades were used to fill in the gaps between editions. Election nights were especially busy, but so were New Year’s Eves, boxing matches, boat races, shipping news, natural and man-made disasters, war news or any other announcements with temporal reveals.

What makes news bulletins so important is their construction of a space of and for news; a geography of information that exists independently of the vicissitudes of news, animated by eager news consumers in a moment of reception that resists easy classification. With each building issuing simultaneous and competing messages, depending on the political persuasion of the paper and the efficiency of their telegraph operation, readers had a full menu to choose from in selecting their information input. If they were not loyal to one paper’s boards over another, then the noise of the crowd in front of one board would effectively direct their attention there. These reactions to the posted news were rambunctious, to say the least, instantly registering approval or

disapproval of what was being shown. The crowd was not only receiving news; it was by turns requesting and rejecting it. In a manner suggestive of early news customization, gatherers could select, filter and discard their information just by moving between boards.

The earliest bulletin boards used chalk against slate, prefabricated block letters, and handwritten messages on paper to post updates. Later, stereopticons projected spectacular messages, photographs, cartoons, maps and anything else that could be drawn on glass and illuminated against a canvas screen. Crushed crowds gathered to read the bulletins held back by rows of police on horseback, attempting to keep passages open for traffic. But there is more to this early interactive multimedia moment than the presence of a live audience in front of moving words and pictures. Another layer was provided by Elisha Gray's short-lived but nonetheless influential invention of the telautograph, which later morphed into the fax machine. The telautograph was "an instrument designed for reproducing writing, pictures, drawings or any other product of the pen by transmission over a telegraph wire."<sup>1</sup> Its first public demonstration was at the Chicago World's Fair of 1893, where it captured the attention of scientists, journalists and fair-goers alike. It allowed anyone to be their own telegrapher, because it reproduced handwriting as it was written, obviating the need for a telegraph operator or Morse code. Because it delivered a message in the same hand as it had been sent, and left a copy of the message with both sender and receiver, it was considered superior to the telephone, and thought likely to dominate business transactions.

Despite being lauded for its capacity for private message transmission, it was in these very public demonstrations along Newspaper Row that it found fame. And as with so many other defunct media technologies, its use tells us a great deal about the function of writing and inscription at the turn of the century. Fusing words, numbers, photographs, maps, cartoons and spontaneous doodling, these different representational systems acting together satisfy many criteria of new media.

The postings on newspaper office facades were as much advertisements for the papers as their celebrated architecture. But the tall buildings along Park Row must be seen not only as the manifestations of an increasingly powerful media industry, but also as a group or ensemble that together constructed an important public space before them. The visibility of the buildings was a clear sign of the commercial power of the press, but they also enabled a tangible space in which the public was constituted. The aggregation of newspaper buildings functioned to establish the media as the producers of a town square and commons, and the writing on its architecture ensured that the public sphere was no mere abstraction.

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<sup>1</sup> **PROF. ELISHA GRAY DEAD.** *Chicago Daily Tribune* Jan 22, 1901, pg. 3

# Public spaces of discourse: innovations and interventions in colonial India

Gurpreet Bhasin  
The Open University

The early 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the growth of nationalist political activity all over India and this activity was manifested in a variety of ways in an ever burgeoning public sphere. In one chapter of my PHD thesis, I examine the strategies employed by Indians to create and mediate public spaces of discourse, and to engage in social and political exchanges through newspapers, pamphlets and public meetings. I describe how political activists in the city of Delhi created and became involved in national networks of activities through various public media, in response to the proposed partition of Bengal in 1905. At the same time, I uncover the practices by the colonial state to regulate these evolving spaces of public discourse. I look at how the colonial state defined certain Indian practices as 'seditious' and how it employed the laws of sedition as well as various press acts to set the terms and conditions of access to public arenas of discourse.

Newspapers emerged as an important medium for the construction and communication of Indian public opinion. The earliest newspapers printed in India were British owned and catered largely to the British community and to the English educated Indian elite. Indian newspapers, owned and edited by Indians, were not produced in any significant number in most parts of India until the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A professional middle class soon emerged that was keen to participate in and initiate public commentary and debate through literary spaces. Newspapers and pamphlets were not only spaces of discourse, but they were materials that, through their circulation, created important connections and facilitated the continual reformulation of nationalist practices. The colonial state became very concerned with regulating these mediums of Indian public opinion. During a period when more Indians than ever were coming together through the press and public meetings in order to promote nationalist causes, the state created a deliberately broad yet comprehensive definition of sedition in order to vilify and sensationalise these activities, thereby attempting to deny Indians access to their own public spaces of discourse. However, when the state's practices reached across colonial spaces, they were often challenged, thwarted and rendered ineffective.

In another chapter of my thesis, I focus specifically on the initiatives of Mohamed Ali, a journalist and political activist in Delhi, to create national and global networks of concern and support for Muslim causes through his newspaper, the *Comrade*. Mohamed Ali edited and published the *Comrade* between 1911 and 1914, before it was shut down by the colonial state. He wrote and published several articles that focused on the plight of Muslim countries and peoples. He wrote about the Balkan Wars, the occupation of Egypt by the British and, during the First World War, he discussed Turkey's role in the War. After becoming involved in the First World War, the British were very keen to ensure that the Indians were loyal to the Allies cause. The Delhi government was especially concerned about Muslim public opinion and related Pan-Islamic activity because of Turkey's involvement against Britain in the War. The colonial authorities in Delhi singled out Mohamed Ali and his newspapers for galvanising Muslim sentiment and opinion in support of Turkey and against the British and the Allies during the early period of the First World War.

I discuss how Mohamed Ali used the *Comrade*, not only to establish links between Muslims in India and beyond, but also as a medium to convey Muslim concerns to the

colonial government. Ali believed that Muslim newspapers had a responsibility to support their Muslim brethren by reporting on causes that affected them. He believed that the establishment of Pan-Islamic networks and connections was the responsibility of all Muslims. However, Ali also tried to negotiate his identity as a Muslim who was Indian as well as a British subject. While he criticised certain British actions and the European invasions of Muslim territories, he was usually careful to balance his criticism with professions of support for the colonial state. He also made concerted efforts to encourage cooperation with Hindus. Attempts by Ali to try and reconcile his attachment to Muslim causes with his allegiance to the British did not work in his favour.

The British intensified their campaign to police Delhi's public spheres with a specific emphasis on the Muslim press and Mohamed Ali's activities. Mohamed Ali's efforts to create Pan-Islamic networks of support were often vilified and blamed for inciting Muslims against Christians and the British. As a result, several newspapers were penalised or closed down entirely under the 1910 Press Act. In my case study, I read several articles from the *Comrade*, including the ones that had been singled out by the Delhi government as objectionable, in order to draw my own conclusions about Mohamed Ali's motives for holding together local, national and global Muslim causes. I found that, in most cases, certain passages or statements in his articles had been taken out of context in order to portray them as seditious. Mohamed Ali was a charismatic and articulate journalist and activist who was a threat to the colonial state's campaign to manipulate Indian public opinion in its favour.

Through my case studies, I aim to show that negotiations and competitions between the Indians and the colonial state over access to public spaces of discourse were an enduring feature of the political landscapes of Delhi and India. The constitution and boundaries of public media where citizens engaged in social and political exchanges were fluid and constantly being negotiated. I hope to show that emerging forms of Indian journalism such as newspapers and more informal media like pamphlets ushered in distinctive forms of nationalist politics as well as new forms of colonial governmentality. These new media practices made public spaces matters of politics and they created important links between colonial spaces. Newspapers like the *Comrade* made Muslim causes and events like the First World War matters for public concern and they were also important mediums through which colonised peoples communicated with the colonial state and with each other.

### III. Journalistic Practices: Emerging Politics and Urban Geographies



# The death of the city paper? Neglected trends in urban journalistic practices

*Karin Wahl-Jorgensen  
Cardiff University*

Today's discussions of journalism seem to be abuzz with celebrations of new forms of politics and participation, emerging with the help of new technologies. Practices and genres such as citizen journalism, user-generated content and blogging are singled out among observers who see them as evidence of a newly empowered audience of citizens/consumers, and as hopeful indicators of a brighter future for community engagement and wider political participation. Certainly these developments have created broader opportunities for engagement through a dazzling plethora of public forums, and they have challenged conventional and long-standing hierarchical relationships between news producers and audiences, journalists and readers, and between and among experts, elites and "ordinary people." Here, however, I would like to suggest that while the excitement over the emancipatory potential of new technologies is certainly warranted, our infatuation with electronic utopias has tended to blind us to a host of more troubling developments in the journalistic practices that both shape and are shaped by our urban geographies. In particular, I want to highlight the beleaguered state of city newspaper, whether it takes the form of a regional daily or a local weekly. I would like to discuss why these papers are rapidly becoming undermined as the result of a series of interconnected trends. My argument is based on interviews with journalists conducted over the past four years (e.g. Wahl-Jorgensen, 2005; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2006).

## **Challenges to the local press**

For most people, the local paper is the only source of information about the small and large events that shape their communities – council policies, births, marriages and deaths, new building projects, farmers' markets, and the state of traffic lights and post offices. Local and regional papers – in cities and beyond – are central to participation in communities, and as such they are also crucial to the very existence of these communities. It is therefore not surprising that they have such wide readership – 83.6% of the British population regularly reads local and regional papers, contrasted with a national newspaper readership of 69.6% (Aldridge, 2007: 14) . Today, there are 1276 regional and local newspapers in the UK, including 111 dailies (94 paid, and 17 free), 511 paid weeklies, and 637 free weekly newspapers (<http://www.newspapersoc.org.uk>, accessed August 15, 2007).

However, the role of these papers is continually contested and changing. Circulation has been in steep decline since the late 1980s. This decline has been particularly marked for regional evening newspapers and paid-for weeklies (Franklin, 2005). Regional evening newspapers are particularly central to the life of cities: They are the papers that once dominated the urban news landscape, providing the shared stories that created and maintained communities. Now, they are threatened by a combination of political economic and technological trends.

First, ownership of the regional daily and local weekly press is increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few large companies: the largest 20 newspaper groups in Britain own 85 per cent of regional titles and control 96 per cent of the weekly circulation, while the five largest groups own 76 per cent of newspapers by circulation (Franklin, 2005: 141).

The drive for efficiency characteristic combines with ownership patterns to reduce the amount of truly local news. For the large corporate groups that dominate the British press, one of the advantages of chain ownership is that resources can be more efficiently used. This applies not only to technical aspects of news production, such as sub-editing and printing, but also to the content of the papers. It means that job cuts and savings are the order of the day in a profession which is already resource-starved (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2005).

While paid-for newspapers have struggled for decades, the period between 1970 and 1990 saw the meteoric rise of the free newspaper. Between 1977 and 1986, the number of titles went from 201 to 886, and has since remained more or less stable (Franklin, 2005). Franklin argues that the rise of free sheets with limited editorial content has affected the substance and quality of local journalism more broadly (Franklin, 1998: 124). As a further threat to what some observers see as the traditional “serious news” role of regional dailies, evening newspapers responded to the loss of readers by converting from broadsheet to tabloid format – a swift change that occurred in the mid-1990s and also meant a turn to tabloid subject matter which is seen as more commercially viable (Franklin, 2005).

Threats to city dailies have gained force on the back of a strong new entrant on the free newspaper market: The national daily *Metro*, which contains small amounts of content specific to the 16 cities in which it circulates, and is distributed in busy urban settings and on public transportation. Today “some 1.3 million copies are distributed across the UK making *Metro* the world's largest free newspaper and the fourth biggest newspaper in the UK” (<http://www.metro.co.uk/about>, accessed April 24, 2008).

City newspaper editors also fear competition from the provision of local news and information resources on the websites of public service broadcasters, especially BBC's Where I Live sites, and from online classified advertising venues like Craig's List and Gumtree. It has meant that the type of information for which these papers were once the sole providers is now shared across varieties of media. In the eyes of editors, the fragmentation of information sources threatens their readership and advertising income and hence their financial basis.

### **Concluding thoughts**

Here, I've sketched out a few key threats to regional and local newspapers, representing perhaps the most traditional of urban journalism practices. I would like to suggest that the health of local journalism is inextricably tied to the health of local communities. As a journalistic practice it is often forgotten by scholars who turn to more cutting-edge developments. But quality local and regional papers remain crucial to the public life of cities, and the clear and present danger of their extinction ought to be a matter of grave concern.

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# New communication technologies and the phenomenology of journalism

Tim Markham  
Birkbeck, University of London

This paper assesses the implications of new communication technologies for journalistic cultures of practice. Its theoretical premise is a simultaneous rejection of technological determinism and professional voluntarism, asserting instead that new media should be regarded as historical and political in origin, and 'genetically structuring' in their effects. This means that instead of focussing on the direct or linear impact of new technologies at the macro-level, I will look instead at the ways in which they are embedded in everyday practice, and systematically forgotten as contingent forms. It will be seen that aside from overt shifts in professional journalism (which have been well documented elsewhere), new media forms influence in a phenomenological sense the way journalists inhabit their professional, epistemological and physical worlds. These influences, insofar as they help to structure processes of individuation and the constitution of collective professional identity and shared culture, are largely misrecognised as unremarkable or natural developments, but can in fact be regarded as politically implicated. The upshot is that while the democratic potential of new technologies is widely emphasised, they can also be seen as introducing new criteria by which positions of power in the journalistic field are established and occupied, and as subjecting (admittedly problematic) news values to further marketisation. This is not to suggest that such trends are inexorably negative, but rather than there are new symbolic economies in play, the rules and implications of which are not well understood.

The broad political aspects of new technologies in journalism are relatively straightforward to sketch. Nick Davies wrote in his recent book *Flat Earth News* that it is becoming increasingly standard journalistic practice to conduct one's research from a desk – he found that in only 12% of the news articles he sampled was there evidence of 'primary' or on-the-ground sourcing. While deeming this development problematic per se may potentially rest on a suspect substantialist or instrumentalist premise, Davies argues that by relying on existing media stories and hearsay for generating and developing stories journalists are increasingly engaging in groupthink, which is demonstrably problematic in terms of accountability, transparency and agency. It could also be said that the new technologies available to journalists – more precisely, technologies with which journalists are expected to be proficient – are related to changing professional structures: the growing prevalence of freelance contracts, the expectation that journalists will perform supplementary tasks such as layout, photography and editing, and the 'rationalisation' of journalistic output, in which a single item is packaged in a variety of formats. (Bob Franklin has also observed that new communication technologies are one of the factors behind the increasing tendency for journalists to perform single tasks across a group of regional newspapers). Without going into detail, I would suggest that such trends contribute to increasing job insecurity in the news media (which in turn leads to a more conservative, risk-averse culture of professional practice), and that the commoditisation associated with multi-platforming potentially leads to the homogenisation of news, since predictability of novelty and continuity of narrative form are both necessary ingredients of marketability.

The other well-documented change seen over the past decade has been the dissolution of the boundary between news producer and consumer. While public involvement in the practice of journalism – whether in the form of user-generated content or post-hoc

interaction – is broadly welcomed on democratic grounds, it can alternatively be characterised as the importing of exogenous principles of differentiation (namely, ones based on popular mandate) into journalism. This might be regarded as no bad thing, and I have argued elsewhere that the internal misrecognised ‘rules’ of the journalistic game have little to do with ethics per se and much to do with the reproduction of the field’s hierarchies and gatekeeping structures. However, it is only with the continued relative autonomy of the field that certain types of cultural production are possible – investigative journalism is one – and the popularisation of news production criteria risks casting in political terms what is in fact better described as a cultural shift towards maximal dissemination or an economic shift towards profitability as dominant signifiers of news value.

I would contend that there is another dimension to the dissolution of the producer/consumer separation which is often overlooked. While journalists have always been renowned as news junkies, traditionally a journalist’s production and consumption of news has been temporally if not spatially distinct. It seems notable that a new set of cultures have become established as normal, in which constant, intimate practices of news consumption have become embedded throughout a journalist’s work cycle. This sort of fluidity and mobility of access to news undoubtedly provides access to valuable sources of information and other resources, and the consistent presence of the consumer mindset could presumably lead to greater sensitivity to audience interests. It could also, however, lead to the same problem mentioned above – an over-sensitivity to the anticipation of what will sell or go down well with an audience. While not wishing to defend a hallowed productive realm isolated from its audience, I would suggest that the implications of this close intertwining of production and consumption needs to be researched further.

It would be misleading to suggest that a material geography of journalism has been replaced by a virtual one. Deborah Chambers has researched the one-to-one epistemology through which journalists often characterise their work, and it seems convincing that the prioritisation of this view of news gathering as instrumentalist is more a matter of strategy – serving as symbolic capital which enhances the perceived value of specific journalistic practices – than objectivity as such. Similarly, I would argue that it is misplaced to suggest that journalists have always inhabited a wholly symbolic realm in which what counts as newsworthy or even factual is determined exclusively according to the arbitrary principles of a culture detached from its material context. But for each of these approaches there is at least a well-established awareness of the political implications of their contingent criteria. In the latter case, it is possible to establish dominant signifiers of authority, which may be essentially arbitrary (in the absence of universal journalistic principles) but associated with power relations in the field. It is fair to say that new ICTs mean that the multi-stage, often contested yet normatively established process of mediation of information has been altered. This, again, does not mean the replacement of an idealised object-subject pairing with something purely intersubjective or circular: if we were to posit that news is increasingly produced in a virtual space, that space is no less structured or determined than its ‘physical’ other. Critics such as Hassan claim write of an excess of mediation; it could also be said that the immediacy of new technological forms leads instead to a short-circuited mediation of knowledge. What is perhaps more important to consider is how these new forms of mediation, or more concretely how modes of journalistic production become established as normal, and part of the individual’s phenomenal experience of the everyday, including the negotiation of lived spaces.

Traditionally, the dominant engine of production and reproduction of cultures of journalistic practice has been ‘the newsroom’. While the term’s ambiguous use as shorthand for a variety of symbolic forms extends to the mythical, romantic and nostalgic,

the physicality of the newsroom has always been central to such mythologies – and it has historically been characterised in a particularly urban fashion: smoky, sweaty, chaotic, febrile, warren-like, claustrophobic, and with a news cycle whose peaks and troughs in activity mirror the temporal metaphors associated with urban life. Further, this muscular, intense environment provides the context for the institution not only of news values and norms of professional practice, but also professional ideologies and identities. After Weber, a practitioner’s capability is perceived not through the deployment of professional skills but rather their embodiment: if someone appears to naturally belong or thrive in the newsroom culture, this is in fact the end product of a process (as political as it is usually nonconscious) involving naturalisation, anticipation, reorientation, realignment, personalisation and projection. In our context this is important because the individuation of the journalist entails the incorporation not only of techniques, but of symbolic capital producing a ‘perfect fit’ with a phenomenal world which is, among other things, distinctly urbanised. Of course, the newsroom model is overused, and only applies to particular subfields of journalism. I have noted elsewhere that war correspondents lack the sort of ‘cauldron’ conducive to the consistent reiteration of structured, structuring practices which provide the political underpinnings of professional identities and ideologies. This potentially means that war reporters are less susceptible to systematic professional inculturation, though the evidence suggests that autonomy from such forces itself becomes a strategic arena.

How have recent developments in ICTs transformed the newsroom as a vehicle for political reproduction? Perhaps obviously, flexibility of hours and location of work would be expected to undermine the structuring capacity of a more insular environment, though it is worth stressing that since journalism by definition involves interaction with non-journalists it is likely that the newsroom culture has always been porous. Further, temporal flexibility and spatial mobility should not be understood as the destructuring of professional life, but rather the substitution of new structures for old – and these structures are no less determined and determining, nor necessarily less urban. Second, demographic profiles suggest that the rise of user-generated content in news media might be thought to represent a ‘suburbanisation’ of journalistic production. This is certainly plausible (though as yet undocumented in terms of how such a process might impact on cultures of practice and identity), though I would emphasise the influence of performative expectation in such news-making. That is, norms of practice amongst ‘citizen’ or public news producers are not under-determined, but structured according to, among other things, historically naturalised perceptions of the way that news is done – a ‘haunting’ of newly emerging practices by durable, transposable historic forms. Third, it has been observed in the past decade that, ironically enough, those branches of journalism characterised by (and valued for) their independence spend increasing amounts of time in communication with colleagues and competitors. War and foreign correspondence may increasingly provide fertile ground for newly political forms of professionalisation and inculturation, though perhaps more likely is a systematic renegotiation of existing dominant principles of differentiation, and the symbolic economy which regulates their production, appropriation and embodiment – and by extension the lived experience of the media professional. I would suggest that in all of these cases we are not yet in a position to determine the new ‘rules of the game’, but that we should continue to unpack the determinants of new cultures of practice and processes of individuation, in particular those which are experienced as natural or benign developments.

# Media change, urban publics and urban politics

Scott Rodgers  
The Open University

Many of the presentations in this workshop will undoubtedly point to a connection between newspaper journalism and the politics of cities. There is something about newspapers, perhaps, when one considers its apparent interest for so many writers in both urban studies and those in media studies concerned with urban politics. Many in the former camp tend to affirm newspaper journalism as a kind of urban political force, or even institution; the latter camp have more often taken newspapers to be a withering political force in cities, whether because of the declining resources and rationalizing tendencies of the newspaper industry, or because of uncertain futures in the face of proliferating new media practices and technologies. There is no doubt good evidence that would support either account. What I would like to do here, however, is offer some thoughts on how media change – as seen through the lens of a particular city newspaper – and its connections to a politics of cities might be understood without necessarily needing to black-box specific media as mediums. Via this one particular example, I would like to outline a contrasting view of media organization and media change: of heterogeneous assembly, constant becoming, and therefore uneven geographies and temporalities. In other words, a practice-led view of organization, whereby media organizations are not opposed to change, but rather are formations constituted *through* change (cf. Cooper, 1986; Linstead and Thanem, 2007).

The development of this line of thinking is closely connected to my PhD research, an ethnographic study of the *Toronto Star* – a major Canadian metropolitan newspaper – and its entanglements in a politics connected to Toronto. The *Toronto Star* was – at least for editorial management, one group focused upon in my study – an organization with deep historical connections to, and impacts upon, the politics and public life of its city (and being Canada's most read newspaper, something of a national political force). At the same time, editors faced a transforming city region, where the time-space constellation of work, family and leisure on which the newspaper had long depended was increasingly becoming ruptured. A growing and spatially dispersed city-region, readers living far-flung, pressed for time, working longer hours, and often making long commutes. Editors worried about two-income families, single-parent families, and later-forming families. They worried about the youth and their apparent disinterest in newspaper reading. And they worried about a city of burgeoning cultural diversity, and the sticky questions this posed around local attachment and language. What is more, this multifaceted, shifting montage of urban life was increasingly seen as engaging a range of newer-news media: drive-to-work and drive home radio, 24-hour news, cable television, free commuter newspapers, magazines, news websites and web blogs. At the *Toronto Star*, editors saw themselves as confronting a differentiated and mobile 'instant news' environment for a city region of increasing diversity and variable mobilities.

Together, these emerging realities made for a threat to the journalistic authority and democratic role most working at the *Toronto Star* presumed vis-à-vis the newspaper's urban publics. And this was, moreover, the main foreground for a series of efforts to align the futures of the *Toronto Star* with those imagined for Toronto as public and media market. I can only gesture here to three examples I will further illuminate in my remarks at the workshop. The first of these was attending to a sense that audiences, particularly youth, have developed a sophisticated visual acumen and expectation for good design. A major response to this 'magazine sensibility' was a range of different experiments with visual presentation – photography, graphics, innovative page design – that often seized

on the techniques as well as the professionals of magazines. Second there was a sense of inevitability about migration to internet-based platforms, despite its apparent problems for the temporal circulation, spatial form and editorial authority traditionally deployed by newspapers. Although initially reluctant, the *Toronto Star* significantly reorganized work flow around its most recent web redesign, using advanced web architecture, extensive photos and video, and RSS feed and tagging compatibilities. Lastly, there have been myriad attempts to organize journalism work so as to make its outputs more likely to align or connect with what might be called the various subjectivities and practices of urban audiences. Of many initiatives, the most notable was a reorganization of the newspaper's City Department along thematic teams, in an attempt to flatten organizational hierarchies and encourage journalists to become more interdisciplinary, visually-minded, and creative.

These examples hopefully at least indicate my claim that media organization is change. I would suggest, in turn, that this points to the need for a broader approach to understanding how the transforming geographies of journalism and news media connect to a politics of cities. This might be comprised by greater attention to at least four areas. First, as I have already noted, media should be considered less in terms of different black-boxed mediums (such as the newspaper) and more so as different time-space articulations of journalism practices and news media organization. Following Schatzki (2002), we might think in terms of the changing *sites* – as in, nexuses of practices and material arrangements – that compose the various relations of journalism and urban spaces. Such material arrangements, secondly, might be understood as not only the changing technologies at-hand for, and physical settings of, journalism work, but also in terms of the arrangements of *news form*. As the exemplary work of Nerone and Barnhurst (Barnhurst and Nerone, 2002; Nerone and Barnhurst, 2001, 2003a, 2003b) has argued, the 'representational environment' of news form (e.g. the classic social diorama offered in newspaper pages) is not merely an outcome of writing or graphic design, but bound up in a variety of *material* relationships, from the organization of journalism work practices to anticipations around how such news artifacts are practically used and understood by different audiences (cf. Scannell, 1996). Third, such sites might furthermore be seen as variably folding in, actualizing, or enacting various forms of circulation (Lee and LiPulma, 2002), such as professional journalism ethics, media business rationalities, and certain ideas about organizational and other histories. This might be seen as a more heuristic version of Pierre Bourdieu's 'fields' (a concept prolifically applied to journalism of late – e.g. Benson and Neveu, 2005) that is better attuned to a relational and geographical imagination (see Couldry, 2007; Cresswell, 2002; Painter, 2000). Finally, and although already hinted at above, central to understanding journalism practices is recognizing its implicit and explicit assumptions about how news is circulated to various social and political bodies that are understood, for example, as (potentially fragmented) audiences, markets, publics, residents, or citizens.

There is of course a far more complex discussion buried in what I have outlined above. But in light of these summative points, I would underline that one important task in apprehending an urban politics is the performance and entanglement of such politics through sites of journalism, and how these sites connect to the formation of media organizations, the circulation of media artifacts, and the addressing of various publics. To return to the starting point of this short paper, it should be clear that, in bringing forth the example of the *Toronto Star*, my intent was not to suggest any sort of special connection between newspapers and urban politics. Rather, my broader suggestion has been that urban studies would be best off neither holding to certain mediums as 'urban institutions', nor completely fixating on what seem to be the newest and most groundbreaking media practices and technologies. The actualization of various forms of power in relation to cities through media will, as already suggested, be made of uneven geographies and temporalities. I might also end here by stating this in a rather bald and



empirical way: the *Toronto Star* is for many a media artifact and organization that is near-synonymous with being in and identifying with Toronto; it is also the primary holding of a media company worth more than CAD\$1 billion. It is quite possible, if not likely, that in the medium- to long-term the changing practices and circulations composing this so-called old media organization will be able to marshal some significant interventions in relation to the city-region treated as its market and public.

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## IV. Mediating Difference and Conflict in the City

# Mediating the cosmo-polis: close encounters in cities of difference

Myria Georgiou  
University of Leeds

The western global city is an intensely cosmopolitan location. Possibly more than any other location, the global city brings people, technologies, economic relations, and communication practices into unforeseen constellations and intense juxtapositions of difference (Benjamin, 1997). The intense urban juxtapositions of difference in the unglamorous, and often marginalised and deprived, quarters of the global cities are usually invisible in tourist brochures; they are however locations where the potential of communication technologies to connect people in the locale and across boundaries, in shared attempts to seek citizenship, to find a location in the city and the world, and to shape identity in the global cosmopolis are revealed in intensity rarely observed elsewhere. These are also locations that reveal the limitations of communication in solving problems of inequality, cultural and geographical divides and lack of representation in the national political scene. In this brief paper, I would like to touch upon three themes where the meeting of the cosmo-polis and communication becomes culturally and politically important. I can only introduce these three areas as headings which will hopefully be relevant to the workshop discussions. The first theme addresses **cultural citizenship** in the city vis-à-vis the restrictive and excluding political citizenship of the nation. The second theme focuses on **urban mediated imagination** as a tool that individuals and groups use to locate themselves in the city and in the world. The third theme explores **cosmopolitan identities** and urban dwellers' attempt to root themselves in urban and transnational locations, often through appropriations of media and communications.

**Cultural citizenship** Nation-states' focus on a specific set of political rights and obligations defined by territoriality and exclusivity have failed to recognise the significance of migrant and diasporic hybridity and transnationalism as elements of a cosmopolitan citizenship. In this context, *the cultural* (diversity) has become an area of contestation rather than of recognition. Many western nation-states now see creativity and media production by groups characterised by intense transnationality as threats rather than as potentials for democratic representation. Next to the nation-state's scepticism -or even hostility in many cases- towards recognition of cultural citizenship, comes the celebration of a consumerist cultural citizenship by corporate ideologies. The corporate approach to cultural citizenship tends to strip it from its political significance and celebrates it as a synonym of the unprincipled, classless, ageless and raceless consumer (Miller, 2007).

Outside -and often in contrast- to the national and corporate reactions to cultural citizenship, the city becomes a space where creativity and media production turn into cultural and political strategies for seeking recognition, especially among those excluded from other forms of representation in political and cultural life. Some of the tensions observed in the relations between the culturally diverse urban dwellers are the outcome of the conflict between cultural belonging in transnational worlds and the demands to comply with exclusive regimes of citizenship. In acknowledging the limitations of the political (and nationally-defined) citizenship and its distinction from stronger variants of cultural citizenship, we need to locate the role of both communication and the city as frames, tools and agents in shaping cultural citizenship. Urban creativity becomes particularly interesting in this case. Often attached to the tactics of seeking representation outside the restrictive national framework, urban (mediated) cultural

production includes various forms of expression on city walls, in local radio stations, in urban music and nightlife cultures. Excluded from citizenship rights, education and Eurocentric and corporate cultures, migrants and members of diasporic groups (especially young people) often engage in alternative forms of (mediated) expression and self-representation. Some of these creative practices are initiated as political acts of opposition to the state or to excluding politics of representation. For example, as graffiti, software piracy and radio piracy are illegal acts, the meanings of such practices are shaped in the context of illegality, opposition or rejection of the politics of the state. The cultural and social locations of such acts and the enactment of these practices by young, usually disenfranchised and minority youth, reflects -if not singularly, at least partly- processes of active opposition to state and corporate cultures that provide them no space for representation or respect. Such creative practices sometimes allow urban dwellers to develop a common (plebeian) cosmopolitan language of communication in the locale and across global spaces.

**Urban imaginaries in 'other' media** The city is a location of difference and a host of 'media imaginings which activate and boost the imagination but also channel and limit it, precisely through the spread and utilization of the media in everyday life' (Amin and Thrift, 2002, p. 116). The cosmopolitan city takes a privileged position in global media culture, as it hosts large numbers of media and even larger numbers of media consumers. There is an element of the media industry, which tends to be less celebrated and less welcome -this is the area of media production (and consumption) by urban diasporic and migrant dwellers. Such production is extensive and usually rooted in the same urban hubs as the major national and transnational commercial media. Even more so, these *other* media gain ground in terms of their consumption in those urban locations and among consumers who are also consumers of national and transnational mainstream media. The diversification of urban mediascapes is dealt with unease and concern by politicians and policy makers on local, national and transnational level as there are many misunderstandings about their role as mechanism for promoting imagined belonging and loyalties to distant *homelands*.

Unlike the fears of authorities as regards the diversity of urban media production and consumption that gives rise to a threatening imagination locked into *another* exclusive and foreign imagined community, research shows that urban communication practices increasingly shift imagination away from exclusive national communities and reveal qualities of multiple and multipositioned imaginings (Aksoy and Robins, 2000; Georgiou, 2006).

**Cosmopolitan identities** In the culturally diverse locations of the city, loud and contesting musical themes coming out of cars, multilingual signs on high streets, competing religious symbols in neighbouring places of worship, and exchanges of products, including music, film, and computer programmes, all reveal the multiplicity of possibilities for belonging *here* (and as a consequence *there* as well). The top-down ideologies that dominate the locations of the city representing the centres of power (e.g. around Parliament houses and tourist sights) promote a shared and common identity, resting upon similar aesthetics and practices that respect privacy, national liberal democracy and global consumer culture. But culturally diverse neighbourhoods challenge this national imagination on a daily basis. Urban pockets become spaces for performative identities, which take their shape around struggles for representation of various cultures, cacophonous aesthetics and diverse interpretations and practices of global popular culture, democracy, law and order (even in their direct violation). Such performative identities are often excluded from the mainstream media and the imaginary of national cohesion; they are often treated by the state with uncomfortable inability to understand or as potential threats to the ideology of the nation and western modernity.

Performative urban identities increasingly move away from the national imaginary and media and communications become experimental tools in this process. This does not mean that urban appropriations of media and technologies are always safe, democratic and dialogic. The cases when media are used as effective systems to compete with and to contest other cultures, to spread political and religious propaganda and to undermine dialogical communication that takes place in the street exist next to emancipating and democratic media projects. What all projects have in common is that they reflect elements of a dissident cosmopolitanism outside exclusive national zones. Importantly, what we increasingly observe among the newest forms of urban media production is a contestation of national frameworks of belonging, not only in relation to the country of settlement, but also in relation to the country of origin. Projects such as multicultural radio stations, urban art production and experimentations with technologies outside ethnically exclusive spaces reveal new forms of identities that have more to do with cosmopolitan life than with exclusive ethnic and national spheres of belonging.

# Thinking about domestic and other images in urban spaces

Gillian Rose  
The Open University

Although my work has never engaged specifically with the discipline of media studies, I do have a longstanding interest in questions of representation, difference and power. Over a period of time, however, along with many others, I've moved somewhat away from the notion of representation, and towards an approach more concerned with the practices through which the social field is constituted. (This shift, of course, underpins this workshop too.) 'Practices' are the doings and sayings that articulate social positions and relations as they are done, according to Theodore Schatzki, and my particular interest surrounds the doings and sayings that are produced in encounters with visual images. To be accurate then, I'm now not so much interested in visual images and the discursive fields that give them meaning than with, to quote Mieke Bal, "performing acts of seeing", or "visual event[s]". To quote Bal again, I'm interested in "what happens when people look, and what emerges from that act." For me, looking is a practice, an encounter between a subject and a visual object in which both are constituted in specific ways.

Empirically, I've been developing these arguments in two contexts. The first has been a series of studies of mothers and their family photographs. My arguments have been based on interviews with middle-class, white women with young children. I was interested in why photos were so important to them, and the interviews were intended to find out what the photos meant to these women as a way of answering that question. But as the interviews proceeded, I found that my interviewees were not very articulate about what the photos *meant*. Instead, they were far more expressive about what they *felt* about their photos and what they *did* with them. I've ended up arguing that family snaps are not best thought of as a certain kind of meaningful image. It is certainly the case that family photos only picture a certain range of subject matter, in a certain way. But their content is only part of what defines them as family photographs. Equally important is what is done with them. What is important in a family photograph is: who took it; who it shows; who made copies of it and sent them to other people; who those other people are; and how it gets looked at by those people. Family photos are photos that get taken by a member of a family, that show members of that family, and are viewed mostly by other members of that same family, and often by a few close friends. I've then gone on to argue that what happens with family photo things are done with family snaps is that specific visions of family life as 'togetherness' are displayed and performed, as is a particular, ambivalent, aspect of maternal subjectivity.

Not long after I'd started interviewing mothers about their family snaps, similar sorts of photographs started to make quite other sorts of appearances: not in houses, this time, but in a range of public spaces, often as an effort to find a missing person: after the attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York on 11 September 2001, for example; after the tsunami that devastated large areas around the Indian Ocean on 26 December 2004; and in the UK, after child abductions. I've paid particular attention to the photographs of the people missing and dead after the bombs in London on 7 July 2005 used by UK newspapers. Family photos of people missing were turned into posters by anxious friends and relatives, photographs of these posters were printed in newspapers, the papers carried many photographs of those feared missing, reprinting the same photos as the names of the dead were confirmed. I'm very interested in what happens

when family photos leave their usual domestic habitations and go public in such circumstances.

This interest dovetails, in theory at least, with my second current research strand, which is an ESRC-funded project on how people experience two 'ordinary' town centres. With Monica Degen and Begum Basdas, I've been trying to explore the ways in which ordinary practices, performed in conjunction with the built environment and other objects, constitute the the sociality of the town centres. The practice I'm particularly interested in is the visual, of course, visual practices (which are very rarely only visual). I've been looking at how people look, and finding that they look in all sorts of different ways, and also make images too, with cameras, of themselves in these spaces. That is, everyday sociality entails a complex range of visual practices, performed in conjunction with the affordances of corporeal and non-human things.

It's that understanding of practised urban space into which I'd like to place those family snaps that go public after disasters and disappearances. How do those images enter that visual field, how do they shift it? Does their domesticity meet the public halfway (to adopt a phrase from Benjamin)? Do they become hybrid objects, as Fred Myers suggests, neither domestic nor public, and if so, what happens?

However, my work so far on these public family photos has concentrated on their representational qualities. This is partly because I'm working with Michael Warner's productive and provocative understanding of the public as constituted by being addressed, I think. The mass media certainly addressed and thereby constituted, on Warner's logic, a public in July 2005, a public made to be emotional in part by the use of family snaps. They addressed a public by using other photos too, which carried very clearly gendered and racialised constructions of social difference, it seems to me. In particular, naturalised gendered difference was used to erase – even if fitfully and partially – the significance of racialised differences. Methodologically, I reached this conclusion by exploring the papers' textual and visual rhetoric of address by sitting in a library going through their back issues; which is also what Berlant and Warner do, presumably, with their own sources. But I'm not entirely comfortable with this as a method. It not only seems to return to that representational moment that I found fruitfully displaced when my methods were more focussed on practice: it also seems to return to an encoder/decoder model of cultural production that all too often ends up falling into a whole series of oppositions that don't get us very far in understanding how the media works in urban spaces now (eg producer/consumer, hegemonic/counter-hegemonic).

So that's why I'm at this workshop: to think and learn more about how media objects – newspaper photos, let's say – are practiced in urban public spaces, and how we can theorise their role without lapsing into critical languages either of representation or of reception.

# Security and difference in the mediapolis: towards a comparative analysis of city sensoria

Marie Gillespie  
The Open University

Ben O'Loughlin  
Royal Holloway, University of London

This presentation examines how issues of security and difference were conjoined, mediated and mobilised in UK cities after the 7/7 London bombings of July 2005. We base this preliminary analysis on data gathered for a three year collaborative media ethnography carried out in eight cities across the UK (2004-07).<sup>10</sup> The primary analytical emphasis is on place and mobility so that the social and spatial contexts in which difference comes to matter and generate social insecurities can be better understood. We argue that ethnic, religious and national differences are triggered by 'critical events' (Das) and identities are mobilised in response to those events and to the media and public debates that ensue. Analysis of interview and observational data highlighting frequent oscillations between involvement in and detachment from critical events, such as 7/7, are at once physical, affective, cultural and political. The dynamics of such 'distant proximities' (Rosenau) encompass the polarities of integrative and disintegrative social forces, and are particularly apparent and open to analysis following critical events in the 'mediapolis'. The UK mediapolis was divided between *London*, where the attacks, though shocking and traumatic, were not entirely unexpected, and evoked a strong resilient response and 'vigilant visualities' (Amoore), and residents of *other cities*, for whom the 7/7 bombings were a largely media event, distant from their immediate everyday public life, and yet all the more disturbing. The 'media sensorium' (Gillespie and Bennett) emerges as a useful conceptual tool for analysing the intersecting dynamics of social, media and sensory experiences and their implications for the politics of 'mediapolis'.

## 1. Shifting Securities

We analyse data from a recent ethnographic study of citizens' perceptions of security and their engagement with news and politics since the 2003 Iraq war. The study *Shifting Securities*<sup>11</sup>, ran from 2004-07, and involved collaborative audience ethnography, critical discourse analysis of news media images and narratives identified as salient to national and social security concerns by audiences, and interviews with security policy-makers and journalists. Through repeated, extended interviews with the same families, households, friendship groups and individuals in twelve cities over a 30-month period, the study illuminated how perceptions and feelings of security and difference, insecurity and identity shift in response to events, spaces and places and, and the role played in these shifting perceptions by particular political modes of address, policies, news events, or direct personal experiences in everyday urban settings. The convenors of this workshop noted Silverstone considered the 'mediapolis' as a space of appearance, a single discursive and judgemental space – a moral space – with differing patterns of inclusion and exclusion. To the extent that the UK can be considered a mediapolis,

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<sup>10</sup> [www.mediatingsecurity.com](http://www.mediatingsecurity.com)

<sup>11</sup> The *Shifting Securities* project was funded by the ESRC as part of its *New Security Challenges* research programme (Award Ref RES-223-25-0063). Full project details can be found at [www.mediatingsecurity.com](http://www.mediatingsecurity.com). For a list of publications from the project please contact the authors.



*Shifting Securities* illuminated how people in UK cities lived with it; their relations and identifications to and with appearances.

## **2. London after 7/7: watching (out for) each other**

Though few British Muslim respondents in the *Shifting Securities* study considered terrorism to be the primary threat to their security, the following account from a 26-year old British Muslim woman, Samira, suggests how she took seriously the threat of further terrorist attacks on London public transport:

Maybe even the Muslim community were being paranoid too, on the bus, I don't know whether I am being paranoid or something, but I feel that people are looking at me differently, maybe wondering whether I may be carrying a bomb. People wouldn't sit near the back of the bus, and any Asian especially male getting on the bus, people would be watching them more intently. I stopped taking a rucksack into work as a result. But then, I was the same to an extent. Unconsciously I was at the back of my mind a little suspicious of people on the bus on the tube as well. I hate to admit it but I was.

Visual culture is not just about visual or media images but encompasses everyday practices of seeing and being seen, visibility and invisibility (cf the paradoxical semiotics of the veil in the city) showing and being shown, recognition and misrecognition – the city enables multiple expressions of visual practice and in the securitisation following 7/7 we note time and again across our data the emergence of 'vigilant visualities' (Amoore), i.e. a watchful visuality. Sight becomes the 'sovereign sense'. We are urged to watch out for potential terrorists on the tube, moved to regard certain visible differences with suspicion – adopt an 'anticipatory gaze', waiting for the next attack (Hill) consistent with the precautionary principle of the 'war on terror'. Vigilant visualities become part of the extended apparatus of security policy.

Our study explored how sight intersected with touch and tactility through the issue of security. Looking at and being looked upon are part of the routine practices by which ontological security are achieved. To be looked at as a potential terrorist was to 'sense' the insecurity of others. Muslim interviewees reported the visceral discomfort their presence stimulated in others in public spaces. This created an ethical dilemma for both themselves and for those interviewees (like Samira above) who could not break this circuit of insecurity; some interviewees spoke of their own silence and avoidance tactics.

## **3. The emergence of a moral space**

The convenors of this workshop asked us to consider how media responded to and amplified the political remit of significant events connected to cities. Central to media coverage of 7/7 was the use of 'templates' (Kitzinger, 1999), interpreting breaking events through the prism of events past: in this case, either WW2 and the 'blitz spirit', or through the construction of a chain of Al-Qaeda attacks, from 9/11 and the Madrid bombings to imagined future attacks (Hoskins and O'Loughlin, 2007). For some weeks our data suggested the blitz template meshed with a multicultural ideal. Interviewees spoke of experiencing an imperative to fight for the values London represented, and in this case, these were taken to be multicultural values; a mobilising of integrative mentalities and centripetal social forces. Hence, alongside key speeches by political leaders (Ken, Tony), media inadvertently enabled a moral space, a mediapolis in which residents were willing to interrupt their vigilant watching and scanning of each other by showing hospitality, making the leap to speak out to reassure a (Muslim-looking)

stranger<sup>12</sup>. This resonates with Silverstone's considerations on Derrida's concept of the gift.

#### 4. Outside London after 7/7

Many respondents in London spoke of positive experiences, of people making an effort to act inclusively or hospitably to people they presumed to be Muslim. There are many accounts of acts of looking, of recognition and misrecognition, which require further analysis. Samira's profound sense of being under scrutiny, over exposed, visibly vulnerable and the sense that acts of looking and being seen generate modes of action and response in urban spaces is palpable. Anxiety surrounds local, mundane multiculturalism as mutual suspicions are generated because of inter-ocular, face-to-face, but also because of impressions gained from media consumption. The next account come from interviews in Swansea, where national and global 'war on terror' processes and discourses become manifest through local tensions concerning asylum seekers, welfare and public transport. An event such as 7/7 played out very differently here. In the next quote, Claire and Hayley, two white working class women in their twenties in Swansea, talk about not having any Muslim acquaintances and express their fear of Muslims on buses:

Claire: Well I don't really have a chance to meet that many [Muslims], and when I do there's always this instant mistrust there, I think like, it's stupid, but you know, you know they're not going to do anything, but there's always the fear that they might ... Especially on buses

Hayley: [...] I just notice them more, you know. And on trains, I'd be much more wary about where they are.

Hayley goes on to suggest that media play a role in demonising Muslims and that the latter may have valid claims and reason to 'lash out'. London and media coverage of the London bombings became a proxy configuration for the articulation of insecurity and political claims in other cities in the UK mediapolis. Interviewees in Edinburgh, Bradford, Swansea and elsewhere brought London into their relations and judgements, yet reported their own distance from the commercial, political and cultural centre that London represented to them. Indeed, London was a separate, dangerous place they would think twice about visiting.

#### Conclusion

We hope our methodology offers some possibilities for fleshing out empirically notions such as 'mediapolis'. The research is at an early stage of analysis and we've not begun systematic comparison between cities. Nevertheless, the example of city sensoria after 7/7 indicates how mediated and mediatized events trigger particular political claims and relations, and create spaces for ethical reflection and decision. Additionally, we think the sensorium concept can be useful for understanding how people live with the imperatives of vigilant visualities – of relentlessly looking at being looked at – since these sensory relations are part of the mechanisms through which identities and political claims are mobilised.

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<sup>12</sup> Studies also indicate this occurred in NYC in the weeks after 9/11, e.g. Abrams et al. 'Contesting the New York Community: From Liminality to the "New Normal" in the Wake of September 11', *City & Community*, Volume 3, Number 3, September 2004, pp. 189-220(32).

## V. **Publicity, Communication and Urban Politics**

# Reason in the city? Publicity, communication and urban politics

Gary Bridge  
University of Bristol

I'd like to add to this discussion with some reflections on various ideas of urban rationality and its relationship to publicity, communication and urban politics.

The rise of mass circulation newsheets was a critical component for Habermas in his understanding of the constitution of a public sphere. The coffee houses of 18<sup>th</sup> century London and Paris provided a social space in which the issues of the day gleaned from the newsheets could be openly discussed. Urban rationality here lay in the ability of speakers from different social backgrounds to situate their responses to these issues in an environment that allowed the responses to act as perspectives in a discourse that circulated in a social public space. The newsheet provided a common focus of substantive content, out from which different validity claims could extend.

Richard Sennett has sought to replace these assumed ties between the urban public and the rational by replacing it with a relationship between the public and the performative. The coffee house was significant for Sennett because it was a space of performance, rather like the urban theatres that were so well attended by all social classes at this time. Speakers could communicate across difference about the issues of the day, not because of calm and considered communication, but through emotional performance in which speakers of different classes and backgrounds all adopted the common convention of communication using theatrical styles. Emotional force and non-discursive communication centred on the gestures of the body were equally important as forms of communication. The validity claim in play here was credibility. Speakers transcended their own particular concerns and became a public, not through the circulation of validity claims and their rational examination but through losing themselves and communicating effectively in a wider performance. The newsheet provided the common script for the transformative performances.

For the purposes of our discussion Habermas and Sennett suggest, in a stylized way, how the media in the city can promote rational forms of deliberation or open up new performative spaces that may help constitute an urban public. On the other hand the media can be implicated in forms of what Habermas called 'distorted communication' that serve the capitalist and bureaucratic system through the use of strategic (means ends) rationality, or be part of dominating discourses that support elite power (not least of whom are the media owners themselves). Bent Flyvbjerg has demonstrated how this discursive power in the city can render rationality a poor consolation for those with less power. In these scenarios power co-opts or trumps rationality and closes off democratic possibilities.

In *Reason in the City of Difference* I tried to explore the possibilities of an understanding of rationality that acknowledges the constant pressures of discursive power but that also looks to democratic possibilities of a deeper form of communicative rationality (one that takes in non-discursive action as well as the linguistic action that concerns Habermas). Following the lead of contemporary pragmatist philosophers such as Lenore Langsdorf and Sandra Rosenthal this is an idea of communication and rationality that sees as a continuum the rational and the performative, the emotional and the rational, cognition and embodiment, discursive and non discursive communication. The inspiration is the

pragmatist philosopher John Dewey and his idea of rationality as the acknowledgement and management of diverse impulses both within the individual and social organism. This is a deeper idea of communicative rationality (what I have called transactional rationality), one that is fed by diverse impulses (from embodied emotion and embodied intelligence to reflective intelligence), via multiple relations (that Dewey called transactions) that involve media, technology as well as other non human actors. Rationality is a disposition towards difference and a way of institutionally and individually responding to ongoing agonistic relations. At its heart is the idea of communication as constitutive practice and practice as a form of ongoing enquiry. This opens up the terrain of just what might constitute communicative action that has a bearing on urban politics.

The idea of transactional rationality starts to connect all kinds of media practices to an understanding of urban rationality and democratic politics. Here are a few speculative suggestions. First the substantive content of news reporting can act as a platform for further deliberative debate on the street corner, on local radio phone-ins in the letter pages of local newspapers, for example. Second the emotional force of certain news stories or the way they are reported may resonate in an urban context. Sennett was rightly critical of the rise of the politics of intimacy replacing the public realm, however human interest stories with high emotional content can act as a spur to further communicative action or mobilisation over an issue (this has been especially true in the area of municipal public services). Other emotional responses can lead to parochial or prejudiced reactions but must eventually come into contact with other responses (Dewey's normative test here is to favour those responses that encourage human growth via the individual and the community). Emotional communication might also be revelatory and have the element of world-disclosure. Dewey did not make a strong distinction between rationality as reason giving or world disclosure (Duvenage 2003).

A third aspect of media and transactional rationality might be to consider the media as a transactional infrastructure - the way different media mediate relations. In his consideration of *The Public and Its Problems* Dewey had already realised the impact the increasing complexity of human relations that came with modern industrial society. That complexity makes it more difficult for a public to find itself. Equally the diversity of mediated relations over time and space may open up the possibilities of multiple publics and distanced interest groups. Cities are exemplary spaces of this kind of transactional porosity. The role of social networking sites, blogs and chatrooms can be significant in the formation of proto publics, or helping constitute what Nancy Fraser called subaltern counter publics. City media can also help connect discursive spaces or make wider examples of certain actions (such as Archon Fung's citizen participation examples of turning around a local school or improving neighbourhood policing in the south side of Chicago). As well as connecting diverse spaces media can also connect across time. Long running, or recurrent stories or investigations have the potential to serve an evaluative function in urban politics. Fung rightly points ongoing policy evaluation as an important component of deliberative democracy (that is, deliberation is not just about discussion and decision making).

A fourth consideration is media as a quality of transaction. Dewey used the term transaction rather than interaction to avoid the assumption of inter-relations between fully formed or finished off things, persons or objects - all are in process through their relations. Artistic communication is the consummate form of communication for Dewey in this regard. In *Art as Experience* he focuses on artwork - the communicative work done by the artist and the audience, rather than privileging the art object itself. Art should be taken out of the gallery where it tends to be the preserve of the critical habitus of an elite class and be re-insinuated in everyday life. The communicative and connective possibilities of various artistic or aesthetic media - street theatre, graffiti, music gigs, sculpture, photography, gardening - can act as points of connection that have proto

political possibilities. As Dewey argues democratic processes must always have an experimental edge and various artistic media in the city can be at this cutting edge.

In 1892 John Dewey and Robert Park were both involved in the abortive attempt to launch a newspaper *The Thought News* that, for Dewey, would break down the barriers between philosophy, social commentary and the investigation and analysis of social problems and would equally offer a style of journalistic investigation that was more scientific. Naïve as this may seem, and as it did to many at the time, this breaking down of barriers suggests how various media in the city can still have an impact as social/democratic commentary - in substantive terms, in terms of emotional force, technologies of connection and aesthetic resonance and be a vital component of a more dispersed communicative rationality.

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# New urban politics and the media: an overview

*Kevin Ward*  
*University of Manchester*

A newspaper's essential role is not to protect a given firm or industry ... but to bolster and maintain the predisposition for general growth (Logan and Molotch 1987: 72)

The metropolitan daily newspaper is ... a political institution of great importance (Banfield and Wilson 1963: 313)

## **1. Introduction**

According to K. Cox (1993: 433) 'urban development, for many scholars, is now what the study of urban politics is about'. Particularly in the UK and the US, the attention to what has been labelled as the New Urban Politics (NUP) gradually replaced what one might think of studies into the Old Urban Politics (OUP). For Cochrane (1999: 111), '[i]f the approach of the 1970s and the early 1980s encouraged a focus on struggles in and against the state, around issues of collective consumption and social reproduction, the late 1980s saw a shift towards an analysis that encouraged a focus on the local politics of business and the importance of local elites.' This tended to involve a sometimes explicit but more often than not implicit theoretical generalizing from the US. Urban growth coalition and urban regime theories that had been designed out of a particular spatial and temporal context were asked to do their explanatory work in the UK – and beyond – in order to assess what a local politics of growth might look like. It was in this intellectual context that I began my academic career.

This short paper provides an overview of 'my' urban politics literatures, the ones that I was socialized into all those years ago, and that remain of interest to me today. I set out how this particular set of literatures has dealt with the media, arguing that it has paid little attention to the ways in which different media types and practices might be constitutive elements of an urban politics of growth. It seems to me, and this is the argument I make here, that the role of the media in its entirety – rather than just local newspapers – remains something of a black-box. Opening it up and exploring the range of ways in which 'the media' plays a role in the performing of the urban politics of economic development would be a fruitful area for future theoretical and empirical intellectual endeavours. This conference may mark just such an occasion.

## **2. Conceptualizing the newspaper in the New Urban Politics**

In their classic study of US city politics Banfield and Wilson (1963) highlight the two functions of the metropolitan newspaper. On the one hand it performs as a political institution, involving itself in a myriad of ways in various aspects of local decision-making. On the other, it is a business that employs workers and has to manage a payroll, and in many cases it is accountable to shareholders. In their view, to understand the civic role played by the newspaper it is necessary to keep these two functions in mind. Not always do they work in harmony. In some cases tensions become apparent between the two functions.

This classic study is one of a number performed in the US that informed in the UK the 'renewed emphasis on economic development as a focus for the analysis of urban politics' (Cochrane 1999: 122). Others include Logan and Molotch (1987) and Swanstrom (1985). In general terms these works are bound together through a unity in



how they characterise the local media. As Thomas (1995: 315) argues, '[a]ll of these mention the media, give a general indication of their function, but do not explore their contribution, nor, ultimately provide convincing accounts of the forces which condition and shape media involvement in episodes of urban restructuring.' What this work has done is make a series of arguments over why local newspapers (and it is this narrow, there is next to no mention of other types of media) involve themselves in the urban politics of growth and the types of roles they perform through their involvement in the territorial coalitions that form to promote a pro-growth agenda. I will take each point in turn.

Local newspapers are *locally dependent*, according to K. Cox and Mair (1988: 307, original emphasis). By this they mean:

[t]he *idea* of local dependence ... signifies the dependence of various actors – capitalist firms, politicians, people – on the reproduction of certain social relations within a particular territory ... local dependence ... provides a basis for the suspension of conflict in favour of a solidarity within each locality: a solidarity that can then be turned against the locally dependent in other localities.

The notion of local dependence – or of a degree of spatial immobility – is argued to stem from a range of factors, from the relative immobility of built environment investments to the relative non-substitutability of localized exchange linkages. It provides the abstract underpinnings of both the urban growth coalition and urban regime theories, explaining why, in both cases, a range of actors come together to protect 'local' interests and values (Logan and Molotch 1987; Stone 1989). K. Cox and Mair (1988: 309) argue that:

[t]he local newspaper company, dependent on the brand loyalty of readers and advertisers and operating in a set territory, is one of the clearest cases of a firm that is locally dependent as a result of geographically limited and non-substitutable commodity exchanges

This sense of being territorially embedded is also advanced by Logan and Molotch (1987: 70). They argue that 'most newspapers ... profit primarily from increasing their circulation and therefore have a direct interest in growth' and that 'the newspaper's assets in physical plant, in "good will", and in advertising clients are, for the most part, immobile.' Although pre-dating much of the US work, the classic UK study of the nature of the relationships between local newspapers and city politics underscores the importance of local dependence. H. Cox and Morgan (1973: 135, original emphasis), drawing on their Liverpool fieldwork, conclude that '[b]ecause the papers are local, they are very much bound up with local social relationships, which exert powerful inhibiting pressures against any papers disposed to stir up controversy.' A range of economic factors behind the successful performance of the newspaper as a business are understood to be tied to the locality, as a result of which it is understood to play an important role in presenting a 'favourable image to outsiders' (Cox and Morgan 1973: 136). Within the territorial alliances that form to protect the interests of the locality, the involvement of the newspaper is argued to be like no other. Rather than being interested in the 'specific patterns of growth' (Logan and Molotch 1987: 70), the newspaper is understood to be motivated by growth *per se*. This is its only 'axe to grind', but one that, according to Logan and Molotch (1987: 71), 'holds the community elite together'. It supports in the words of Swanstrom (1985: 1985: 35) a 'growth ideology', through evoking notions of civic pride, passing off political issues as technical ones and focusing on symbolic rather than distributional issues (Logan and Molotch 1987; Thomas 1995).

If we move onto the second point and the type of roles local newspapers perform in territorial alliances, it is argued that due to their general interest in growth as opposed to being for or against particular patterns or types of growth they are afforded a 'statesman like position in the community' (Logan and Molotch 1987: 71). This involves the construction and maintenance of a set of stable, longer-term relationships to deliver 'more properly planned growth' (Logan and Molotch 1987: 71). The local newspaper also

plays a unique role vis-à-vis mediating between the growth strategy and the various publics. Particularly, it plays an 'invaluable role in coordinating strategy and selling growth to the public' (Logan and Molotch 1987: 72).

### 3. Conceptual limits and some thoughts

This way of treating 'the media' is not without its insights. It is also not without its limits. These are just worth noting here. It's a start. First, there is a need to acknowledge the range of types of media activities and practices that might inform the NUP. The local press may still be important but other media technologies may also play a role in a way that wasn't the case twenty five years ago. Second, while professional journalists have a privileged structural position, in terms of the nature of their relationships with powerful local decision-makers, nevertheless there are a range of DIY journalists who write through a range of mediums. Including these practices would provide a fuller account of the ways in which the urban politics of growth are enacted. Third, there is a need to be more specific about the causal mechanisms at work. It may not be the case that local newspapers always translate the objectives of the business elite into a set of public policies that would be supportable by the electorate. The transition from a general ideological commitment to copy may be more complicated and non-linear than much of this literature presupposes. Fourth, there has been little attention paid to the means and the mechanisms through which the notion of a 'growth ideology' is assembled. This process needs to be unpacked at the very least. Fifth, there is some intellectual mileage in a coming together of this literature on the politics of growth on the one hand, and that on the social production of news, on the other (Hall et al. 1981; Thomas 1995). This would provide a means of examining the means through which 'news' is manufactured and produced, as opposed to being assumed to be already in existence, waiting to be discovered. Sixth, while corporate geographies may seem rather dry to some, they may also be important. Writing about the US twenty one years ago Logan and Molotch (1987: 206) argue '[u]rban media, traditionally critical for growth coalitions, are being absorbed into ever larger corporate structures ... [l]ocal publishers and editors are becoming branch managers, weakening the daily newspaper as a force for integrating diverse elite groups and selling growth to the public.' Changes within the media industry have been dramatic in the last three decades. What changing ownership patterns in the newspaper industry mean for how 'local' managers in wider corporate networks relate to the place in which they are located has yet to be analysed. Seventh, and related to point six, the changing conditions under which professional journalists work cannot but have a number of consequences for the type of 'news' they produce, which again is likely to be bound up with changing definitions and understandings of what is newsworthy (Burgess 1985). The quote below from my PhD research is illustrative. The role for this individual was not simply to represent the news but rather to construct it:

To be as up-beat as I possibly can while obviously reflecting the news in the city ...I mean I cannot ignore the news but you do try and be up-beat as possible. People don't want to read about murder, rape, muggings on page one every day of the week ... We don't cover crime as much as we used to in the past (Media representative, Manchester, September 1996)

### 4. Conclusion

This short piece has highlighted the academic context out of which I work. It reveals how the literatures upon which I draw have conceived of the relationships between the media and urban politics, the theme of this workshop. The work has tended to emphasise a small aspect of both 'the media' and 'urban politics', that is the local newspaper and the politics of growth. And it has proved rather mechanistic at that, constructing 'the local press ... [as]... a mouthpiece for powerful elite, selling a development to a passive audience' (Thomas 1995: 330). A more nuanced account of the nature of the relationships between the local press and the politics around economic development

would be a starting point. This might yield some insights into why local newspapers behave in the way they do, and the kinds of relationships they have with different publics, from those who buy the newspaper to those who advertise in it. It might also provide evidence that in some cases the role of the newspaper is more complicated than that allowed for in the orthodox accounts. In addition, widening understandings of 'the media' beyond the local press, opening up for exploration the range of media practices involved in shaping the nature of urban economic development, would perhaps yield greater scope for appreciating the range of opinions that feed into and contribute to urban growth politics. It is not only professional journalism who are involved in enacting urban politics. A range of new media technologies authored and organized by a range of actors play a role in challenging, destabilizing, legitimizing and so on different economic development projects and their consequences.

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# Sensible evidences

*Mustafa Dikeç*  
*Royal Holloway, University of London*

## I.

Despite variations, the last three governments in France have been characterized by a commitment to a so-called ‘securitarian ideology’ (*idéologie sécuritaire*) – a term commonly used in the media and critical scholarship. And this ideology has a very precise spatial referent: ‘the banlieue’ (in the singular), a shorthand term to denote the inhabitants of social housing neighbourhoods in the peripheral areas of cities.

But what does it mean to talk about a ‘securitarian ideology’ as opposed to, say, a securitarian strategy or orientation? How is it materialized? In considering these questions, I will talk about ideology as an aesthetic affair, and will argue that ‘the banlieue’ is not the object of this ideology, but, first and foremost, its product.

## II.

There have been many media review studies that show the changing image of ‘the banlieue’ over the years. However, the current image of the banlieues is not simply the product of journalistic accounts. Many of the journalistic categories used to frame banlieues have been institutionalized by the state through its various practices of articulation – including spatial designations, descriptive names, categorisations, definitions, mappings, and statistics – what I call, drawing on the work of Jacques Rancière, as ‘sensible evidences’.

## III.

‘The police’, in its non-pejorative sense, is the name Rancière gives to orders of governance. It is based on a particular regime of representation, to which he refers to as ‘the partition of the sensible’, defined as ‘that system of sensible evidences that discloses at once the existence of a common [i.e., the whole to be governed] and the partitions that define the respective places and parts in it’. The partition of the sensible, as a system of sensible evidences, arranges the perceptive givens of a situation – what is in or out, central or peripheral, audible or inaudible, visible or invisible. The police, then, is not self-evident or naturally given, but rather a product of a particular regime of representation – of sensible evidences. It is exemplary in this sense that one of the first measures the then French Minister of the Interior Nicolas Sarkozy had proposed, when he first took office in 2002 with a stated aim to ‘restore the Republican order’, was to modify the periodicity of the publication of figures of delinquency, and to make them publicly available more frequently.

Rancière’s conceptualization of the police as consolidated through the putting in place of sensible evidences suggests a way of looking at state policies. State policies put in place certain sensible evidences (policy documents, spatial designations, mappings, categorisations, namings and statistics) that help to consolidate a particular spatial order and encourage a particular way to think about it. In the French case, the spatial order that state policies helped to consolidate with its designations of intervention areas (the banlieues) became officially so accepted that when the French Intelligence Service

decided to engage with the question of banlieues, it was the list of urban policy neighbourhoods that they took as a starting point. When the Ministry of Justice engaged with the issue with a stated aim to restore the law, its measures aimed at the same neighbourhoods. Similarly, other repressive measures (like security contracts, Sarkozy's flash-ball guns, etc.) and growing anxieties about the 'values of the republic' were all guided by the same spatial imaginary, which became the basis for the consolidation of what I call the 'republican penal state' from the 1990s onwards.

These, I would like to argue, are ideological achievements – the products of the so-called securitarian ideology. I define ideology, following Rancière, as a reconfiguration of a perceptive field through putting in place sensible evidences, which has real effects on ways of being, saying, and doing. It is in this sense that ideology is an aesthetic affair, aesthetics understood not as a theory of art or beauty, but as the framing of what is (made) available to the senses (what is visible, audible, inside, outside, excluded, included, and so on). This spatial configuration conditions perceptions of lack and surplus ('too many immigrants', 'not enough repression'), and in so doing, it reconfigures the thresholds of toleration, terms of recognition or reject, and perceptions of the 'whole' and its 'parts'. Ideological configuration of a perceptive field plays on sensibilities and may easily reify an identified lack or surplus as an object of fear and threat in the social imaginary, as the French case illustrates. It is remarkable that 'the banlieue' was listed as one of the 'major phobias' of the French in the new millennium by the daily paper Libération.

This, however, is not meant to imply that state policies provide us with a distorted version of 'reality', concealing the 'truth' under ideological distortion of one sort or another. Ideology, in the way I conceive it, has nothing to do with the truth-value of a statement, declaration, or policy. A claim may be true or false, but this does not make it less or more ideological. Ideological value of a particular claim, statement, policy, or representation, in other words, is not determined by its 'truthfulness' or 'falseness'. In other words, there is no assertion, in my conceptualization of ideology, about a relationship of truth to falsity. The 'non-ideological', however defined, has no mastery over 'truth'. Ideologies, indeed, speak to real conditions; they are about sensible evidences.

## VI. Mediapolis: Rethinking the Intersections of Media, Politics and Cities

*Joe Painter*  
*Durham University*

*Farida Vis*  
*The Open University*

*Joe Smith*  
*The Open University*

*Allan Cochrane*  
*The Open University*

**Notes:**