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Media, Flows and Places

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MEDIA, FLOWS AND PLACES

Shaun Moores

Abstract

Two key questions for media and cultural studies are posed in this paper. How are we to conceptualize place in a world of flows, including those information flows that are facilitated by modern media of communication? What role do the media play, alongside other institutions and technologies, in transforming experiences of locality and in creating new sorts of social situation for interaction? In attempting to provide answers to these questions, the author presents a critical discussion of ideas put forward by various social and communication theorists (principally by Castells, Urry, Massey, Meyrowitz and Scannell). It is argued that place should be seen as constituted at the interface with flows, as multiplex and open, and as doubled, virtually instantaneously, through practices of electronic media use.

Introduction

In the context of arguments about 'the rise of the network society' (Castells, 1996) and the need for a twenty-first century 'sociology of fluids' (Urry, 2000), I want to focus in this paper on the character and significance of places, and on the relations between places, in contemporary social life.¹ How are we to conceptualize place, then, in a world of flows, including those information flows that are facilitated by modern media of communication? What role do the media play, alongside other institutions and technologies, in transforming experiences of locality and in creating new sorts of social situation for interaction? Attempting to answer these questions will involve us in a critical discussion of ideas put forward by various social and communication theorists. To begin with, it is appropriate to consider certain aspects of work done by Manuel Castells and John Urry (the two theorists cited in the opening sentence of my paper), since each of them raises important issues to do with media, flows and places in their accounts of global social change. I will then be looking back at work done by Doreen Massey (see especially Massey, 1995), Joshua Meyrowitz (1985, 1994) and Paddy Scannell (1996), who have reflected, respectively, on place as permeable, marginalized or pluralized.

Castells: Space of Flows and Space of Places

There is much to say about Castells' wide-ranging account of what he names the network society (Castells, 1996)², but for the specific purposes of this paper my main interest is in his social theory of space, and particularly in the distinction that he draws between the 'space of flows' and the 'space of places'. I should state at the outset that, while Castells' work seems to me to be helpful in making sense of current social transformations, his understanding of space is not without its problems. As I will try to show, those problems have to do with an apparent contradiction in the way in which place is conceptualized.

Space is defined by Castells (1996: 411), in general terms, as 'the material support of time-sharing social practices', although he is keen to stress that time-sharing practices today do not necessarily rely on the 'physical contiguity' of participants in social interaction. Indeed, in his view, 'it is fundamental that we separate the basic concept of material support of simultaneous practices from the notion of contiguity' (Castells, 1996: 411; and see Thompson, 1995: 32, on the altered 'experience of simultaneity' or 'sense of "now"' in modern life). This is because there is 'a new spatial form' (Castells calls it the space of flows) that is characteristic of the network society³, which facilitates relationships across physical distances in 'simultaneous time'. He (1996: 412) tells us that 'our society is constructed around flows: flows of capital, flows of information ... flows of organizational interaction, flows of images, sounds, and symbols'. In turn, these flows are made possible by the social development of technologies such as 'microelectronics', 'telecommunications' and 'broadcasting systems'.

It is at the point where Castells advances his ideas on the space of flows that he first deals with the fate of place in the network society. Here it is proposed that, while the 'structural logic' of the space of flows might be 'placeless', in fact 'places do not disappear', rather they 'become absorbed in the network', in which 'no place exists by itself' since its position and meaning are 'defined by flows' (Castells, 1996: 412-13). In my view, this conception of places in relation to flows, as well as to other places, is generally a productive one. As will become clear later in the paper, it is potentially compatible with Urry's perspective on places as 'multiplex' and with Massey's discussion of the 'openness' of places. However, when Castells moves on to present a more detailed analysis of the space of places, offering a specific

example to illustrate his case, I believe there are certain difficulties that arise as a result of him seeing the space of flows as constructed in opposition to the space of places (so that these 'two forms of space' may eventually constitute 'parallel universes' (Castells, 1996: 428)).

Having initially understood place in relational terms, Castells (1996: 423) proceeds to assert that: 'A place is a locale whose form, function and meaning are self-contained within the boundaries of physical contiguity'. What puzzles me about this assertion, given the way in which he previously spoke of places as being defined by flows, is the notion that a place can be 'self-contained'. His claim becomes even more puzzling when he refers to the example chosen to illustrate his discussion of the space of places, the district of Paris known as Belleville. He explains that his knowledge of this place originated when he arrived in France as a political exile in the early 1960s and was 'given shelter' there by a Spanish immigrant worker who introduced him to the 'tradition' of the neighbourhood. Years later, in the 1990s, he observes how 'new immigrants (Asians, Yugoslavs) have joined a long-established stream of Tunisian Jews, Maghrebian Muslims, and Southern Europeans, themselves the successors of the intra-urban exiles pushed into Belleville in the nineteenth century' (Castells, 1996: 423). In addition, the district has been 'hit by several waves of urban renewal', whilst in recent years 'middle-class households, generally young, have joined the neighbourhood because of its urban vitality' (Castells, 1996: 424).

Judging by Castells' account, Belleville is surely far from being self-contained. I have no difficulty at all in seeing that this district of Paris is a physical location with its own distinctive character, but every one of the factors mentioned in the description, including the circumstances of his own arrival there many years ago, involves a connection with somewhere else and with forces from beyond the locale. Indeed, we could say that the place's distinctive character has been moulded precisely out of these links that stretch across the city and out across various parts of the globe. As he recognises: 'Cultures and histories, in a truly plural urbanity, interact in the space, giving meaning to it' (Castells, 1996: 424). Curiously, despite writing about a 'stream' of people moving into Belleville, this does not register with Castells as a kind of 'flow' (it would count for Urry, though, whose broader definition of a flow will be discussed shortly).

Castells appears to choose Belleville as an example of the space of places because, according to the interpretation he makes of this place, it is 'socially interactive and spatially rich' (Castells, 1996: 425). Of course, his value judgement presupposes the existence of other places that must be considered less well off in 'physical/symbolic' terms. Drawing on the writing of Allan Jacobs (1993), Castells (1996: 425) points to 'the difference in urban quality between Barcelona and Irvine (the epitome of suburban Southern California)', arguing that whilst Irvine 'is indeed a place', it is a spatially impoverished one in which 'experience shrinks inward toward the home, as flows take over increasing shares of time and space'. No doubt lay individuals (not just academic authors like Jacobs and Castells) make value judgements about places too, some of them presumably preferring a quiet suburban life to the 'urban vitality' of a Belleville or a city such as Barcelona, but in my view there are further problems that arise as a consequence of this type of place-discrimination in Castells' work. There is evidently an assumption here that staying home to watch television, say, is necessarily a worse or less valid cultural experience than going out and encountering people in the street, that physical co-presence in public contexts is somehow better or more authentic than media use in private, domestic settings. In addition, there is no mention of the fact that, even for most residents of urban places like Belleville and Barcelona, experience of the social world will still be constituted, at least in part, by technologically mediated flows of images, sounds and symbols.

To sum up this section of the paper, then, I am suggesting that Castells is quite right to begin by identifying the relation between flows and places as central to any social theory of space in the network society, but quite wrong to think of the space of flows and the space of places as diametrically opposed forms with completely separate 'logics'.⁴ As he goes on to acknowledge in his subsequent reflections on space, 'the geography of the new history will not be made, after all, of the separation between places and flows, but out of the interface between places and flows' (Castells, 2000: 27), and as the detailed portrait he paints of Belleville seems to indicate, a place can be thought of as a distinctive location, the significance of which is actively produced at the site of multiple and complex connections with a wider world beyond that place.

Urry: Social as Mobility and Places as Multiplex

Pursuing a line of argument that overlaps in some respects with Castells' commentary on the rise of the network society, Urry (2000) sets out a bold manifesto

for sociology in the twenty-first century, the main emphasis of which would be on the study of various transnational (and translocal) flows or 'global fluids', 'upon heterogeneous, uneven and unpredictable mobilities' (Urry, 2000: 38).⁵ One way in which his work differs from Castells', though, is that this proposed emphasis on the 'social as mobility' leads him to question the 'central concept' of his own academic discipline to date, interrogating the whole idea of the 'social as society' (Urry, 2000: 2), including, presumably, even the idea of a 'network society'. For Urry (2000: 5-6), the concept of 'society' in sociological discourse is too closely tied up with 'notions of nation-state, citizenship and national society' to be usefully deployed in the analysis of flows that now criss-cross the 'porous borders' of nations. Instead, he advocates 'sociology beyond societies'. Whether or not we agree with him on this matter of terminology (quite frankly, I find myself wondering why he rules out any possibility of rearticulating the sign of society to suit contemporary circumstances), his general call for social theory to focus in future on various sorts of mobility does merit serious consideration here.

To the kinds of flow listed by Castells, Urry adds others. He talks, for instance, about flows of 'waste products' that bring with them 'new risks', 'the mobilities of objects' such as consumer goods and, crucially, flows consisting of people on the move (not just 'the social actors who operate the networks', in their 'global corridors of social segregation' (Castells, 2000: 20), but the movements of many ordinary individuals too). In his discussion of modern forms of 'corporeal travel', he observes that: 'The scale of such travelling is awesome. There are over 600 million international passenger arrivals each year. ... International travel now accounts for over one-twelfth of world trade' (Urry, 2000: 50). These figures are indeed awesome, although we need to remember that, for the vast majority of people making journeys abroad, there will be a return home, where day-to-day life will continue to be lived in and around their local places of work and residence. For this reason, John Tomlinson (1999) is correct to criticize Urry for an overly bold assertion, made in a book co-authored with Lash (see Lash and Urry, 1994: 253), 'that the paradigmatic modern experience is that of rapid mobility [understood as physical movement] across often long distances'. Instead, Tomlinson (1999: 9) proposes 'that the paradigmatic experience of global modernity for most people ... is that of staying in one place', where they experience what global modernity 'brings to them' (and see Giddens, 1990: 19, on place as 'increasingly phantasmagoric'). This case is also put by David Morley (2000: 14), who, having quoted statistics indicating that over half the adults in Britain still live within five miles of their place of birth, states that it is 'in the

transformation of localities, rather than in the increase of physical mobility (significant though that may be for some groups), that the process of globalisation perhaps has its most important expression'.

The arguments made by Tomlinson and Morley point us usefully, in my view, away from any 'generalised nomadology' (Morley, 2000: 13) and towards a consideration of how places are changing today as part of those broader transformations that are often referred to as 'globalization'. However, I think Urry's account of the social as mobility can be defended in two main ways. Firstly, his later book does not seek to privilege the experience of corporeal travel over that of other fluids or mobilities, rather it situates physical mobility in relation to, for example, forms of 'imaginative' and 'virtual' travel. Secondly, far from ignoring place, he offers an enabling conceptualization of places as multiplex. Let me try to explain these aspects of his work in turn.

By imaginative and virtual travel, Urry means the instantaneous mobilities that are facilitated by broadcasting and computer-mediated communication, which media users can experience 'without physically moving' (Urry, 2000: 70). Providing specific examples of instantaneous mobilities made possible by television, he writes: 'We imaginatively travel and are at Princess Diana's funeral, in war-torn Bosnia, seeing the world record being broken, with Mandela being released from jail and so on' (Urry, 2000: 67-8). His employment of 'travel' as a metaphor for the experience of watching television (he goes on to speak of private consumers being 'thrown into the public world' by radio and television) suggests that viewers can feel transported elsewhere by the medium, not just on big occasions like the ones in his list of examples but in their routine viewing practices too (see Larsen, 1999, for empirical evidence that some viewers do feel this sense of transportation). On the other hand, Urry (2000: 69) also employs language that is closer to Tomlinson's, talking about how 'distant events, personalities and happenings' are constantly 'brought into the living room' by television, helping to 'transform everyday life'. Either way, whether it is better thought of as the viewer 'going places' or as the medium 'bringing it all back home' (Moore, 2000), Urry is raising important issues to do with broadcasting's role in connecting the local and the global.

When he discusses instances of virtual travel via the computer screen, Urry's most interesting observation is that, while the Internet is evidently used to create and sustain relationships across physical distances (providing participants with a 'virtual

co-presence'), members of 'virtual communities' may occasionally feel the need to meet up physically.⁶ The reason I am particularly interested in this observation is that it indicates the potential links between corporeal and non-corporeal travel, the fact that physical and other mobilities can sometimes be closely connected. Perhaps the best examples of such links are provided by contemporary 'diasporic' cultures (see also Morley, 2000). Referring to James Clifford (1997: 247), Urry (2000: 155) points to how 'dispersed peoples', who have made their homes away from 'homelands', live in a cultural context of intense 'to-and-fro' cross-border connections made possible by modern technologies of transportation and communication (and see Appadurai, 1996, on relations between global 'ethnoscapes' and 'mediascapes').

Despite his strong emphasis on global fluids, Urry does not neglect the issue of 'the transformation of localities' raised by Tomlinson and Morley. Indeed, we might say that he sees flows and places as parts of the same issue, contending that local places 'can be loosely understood ... as multiplex, as a set of spaces where ranges of relational networks and flows coalesce, interconnect and fragment' (Urry, 2000: 140). A place, for Urry (2000: 140), is a 'particular nexus' between 'propinquity characterised by ... co-present interaction' and 'fast flowing webs and networks'. It is at this nexus that the meanings of place are constructed and these meanings will be multiple. Taking the example of a city like Edinburgh, then, Karen Qureshi (forthcoming) names one of its multiplex spaces 'Pakistani Edinburgh'. Her ethnography, which focuses on the reflexive negotiation of identities among young people who were born and brought up in Scotland, but whose parents migrated there from the Punjab, makes it clear that Pakistani Edinburgh is not a self-contained unit. It is characterized by specific kinds of physical contiguity or propinquity, and yet it has highly permeable boundaries, being formed through physical, imaginative and virtual 'travellings' in and out of it, whilst overlapping with what Qureshi terms 'mainstream' Edinburgh.

Massey: The Openness of Places

When he outlines his understanding of places as multiplex, Urry acknowledges a debt to the work of Massey, a geographer who has written extensively on place (see Massey, 1993, 1994, 1995), partly as a consequence of her engagement with debates in that discipline about the value and purpose of 'locality studies'. She confirms that places should be thought of as 'not so much bounded areas', but rather

as 'open and porous', 'constructed through the specificity of their interaction with other places' and having multiple significances, 'since the various social groups in a place will be differently located' (that is, differently located 'in terms of the spatial reorganization of social relations') (Massey, 1994: 121). In her view, each place has its own 'uniqueness'. However, this special quality is not simply the outcome of 'some long internalized history' (Massey, 1993: 66). What defines the uniqueness of any place has to do with the particular 'mix of links and interconnections' to a 'beyond', 'the global as part of what constitutes the local, the outside as part of the inside' (Massey, 1994: 5).⁷

Massey's concern, therefore, is with what she calls 'the openness of places' (Massey, 1995: 59) in 'global times', although she is careful to qualify her remarks about the permeability of localities in the contemporary period. To begin with, this openness is 'not a new phenomenon, just as globalization itself is not' (Massey, 1995: 61). Like Stuart Hall (1991: 20), Massey asks us to guard against 'historical amnesia' when it comes to thinking about the globalizing process, pointing to the case of a port city such as Liverpool, which has formed its own distinctive character out of links with other places through trade and migration over the past three centuries. What is new about globalization in its current phase, she suggests, is that 'the speed of it all – and its intensity – have increased dramatically in recent years' (Massey, 1995: 46). A further qualification is related to her more general argument about 'the power-geometry of it all' (Massey, 1993: 61), by which she means the inequalities associated with global (and local) social change. Experiences of locality and interconnectedness are highly uneven, even among people who are living in the same place. This leads her to see place and its multiple meanings as a matter of political, as well as geographical and cultural, importance.

Having briefly set out Massey's theoretical and political position on place, I now want to spend some time looking at empirical evidence that she provides, which arises out of research into specific localities. This research was designed to map the spatial locations and connections, which Massey (1995: 54-5) refers to as 'activity spaces', of members of different social groups inhabiting a number of small country villages in Cambridgeshire. As we will see, the 'reach' of these groups' activities varies enormously.

At one extreme, then, there are 'high-tech scientists, mainly men, whose work is based in Cambridge, though they often have computers with modem links at home

as well', who are 'in constant contact with, and physically travelling between, colleagues and customers all around the world' (Massey, 1995: 59). The activity spaces that they move in, both physically and virtually, are 'thoroughly multinational'. 'At the other extreme', Massey (1995: 59) reports, 'are people who have never been to London and only rarely have made it as far as Cambridge ... in order to go to the shops or maybe to the hospital.' Members of this group are known as the 'locals', and most of them work on farms or in village shops and services. Other people in these villages work 'more or less locally', but are employed 'as cleaners or caterers' by multinational firms for which 'this is just one group of workers among many scattered over the globe' (Massey, 1995: 60). Finally, there are women who are the partners of the 'high-tech men', several of whom are 'occupied in a daily round of nurseries and child-minders, often being the heart and soul of local meetings and charities' (Massey, 1995: 60). They tend to drive into Cambridge to do their shopping, maintain contacts with extended family outside the local area and like to go on holiday 'somewhere exotic'.

Clearly, Massey's account of the different social groups shows how place is far more permeable for some (in this case, the middle-class incomers and out-goers) than it is for others. In addition, within that middle-class group, there are gender differences in the shaping of activity spaces. Still, even the more 'rooted', less 'routed' (Clifford, 1997), working-class people here are increasingly 'touched by wider events'. Farm workers, for example, are subject to agricultural policy decisions made in London or Brussels, and the cleaners and caterers who work for multinational firms in the area might well feel the force of global economics if those companies were to cut back on jobs.

Meyrowitz: No Sense of Place

In what remains of this paper, my focus shifts more fully onto the role of media (or, to be precise, 'patterns of information flow') in the constitution of what Meyrowitz (1985: 6) productively terms 'the "situational geography" of social life'. It should be evident, given the ground covered so far, that I am not advocating a media-centred approach to the study of global social change. My preference is for that change to be 'understood as a multifaceted ... differentiated social phenomenon' (Held et al., 1999: 27). However, media use does play an important part in what Massey calls the 'spatial reorganization of social relations', and I would argue that Meyrowitz's theory

of 'situations as information-systems' (Meyrowitz, 1985: 35-8; Meyrowitz, 1994: 59) goes some way towards enabling us to appreciate this particular aspect of contemporary spatial (and temporal) transformations. As with my earlier reading of Castells' work on flows and places, though, I will be appropriating Meyrowitz's ideas critically and selectively, taking serious issue with his assertion that, in today's 'electronic society', people increasingly have 'no sense of place'.

Making a seemingly improbable link between Erving Goffman's sociology, which is mainly concerned with situations of face-to-face interaction where 'individuals are physically in one another's response presence' (Goffman, 1983: 2), and Marshall McLuhan's version of 'medium theory', which relates developments in media technology to time-space transformations (see especially McLuhan, 1964), Meyrowitz (1985: 7) argues that electronic media are altering our situational geography by undermining 'the traditional relationship between physical setting and social situation'. He is interested, broadly speaking, in how information flows serve to create and define situations. This concern by no means invalidates the work done by Goffman on co-present encounters in physical settings, but it does extend the study of situations to include a range of interactions, and 'quasi-interactions' (Thompson, 1995: 84-5), in and with 'media "settings"'.

The best way of illustrating Meyrowitz's theory of situations as information-systems, which might appear from my commentary to be highly abstract, is by referring to a concrete instance of communication discussed in his book on electronic media. He takes the example of two friends who are speaking to one another on the telephone, noting that 'the situation they are "in" is only marginally related to their respective physical locations', before adding that 'the telephone tends to bring two people closer ... in some respects, than they are to other people in their physical environments' (to the extent that those in the same room sometimes respond jealously by asking: "Who is it?" "What's she saying?" "What's so funny?") (Meyrowitz, 1985: 117). In his example, the telephone is a medium that helps its users to 'override' their physical separation and engage in an instantaneous 'mediated encounter' in which there is a sort of closeness at a distance. It has been suggested, in fact, that the telephone has the capacity to be an especially 'intimate' means of communication, given the voice of the person on the other end of the line is electronically proximate, 'next to the ear' (Gumpert, 1990: 148; see also Hutchby, 2001: 31, on how intimacy at a distance 'is afforded by the telephone'). While this is undoubtedly the case, a caller's immediate physical context is still significant in the shaping of any telephone conversation.⁸

What the two friends in Meyrowitz's example say, then, is likely to depend in part on whether, and if so by whom, the talk is being overheard. For that reason, I think telephone use, and electronic media use more generally, is best seen as pluralizing 'setting' as opposed to removing somebody from one situation, which becomes marginal, and putting them in another. We will be returning to this point in the following section of the paper.

Like Massey, Meyrowitz recognizes the permeability of localities, emphasizing the role of electronically mediated information flows in weakening the power of physical boundaries to segregate different spheres of social life: 'Electronic messages seep through walls and leap across great distances' (Meyrowitz, 1985: 117). He writes, for instance, about the changing character and significance of the domestic sphere: 'The walls of the family home ... no longer wholly isolate the home from the outside ... Children may still be sheltered at home, but television now takes them across the globe before parents give them permission to cross the street' (Meyrowitz, 1994: 67) (this is strikingly similar to Urry's observations on the instantaneous mobilities of imaginative travel). Meyrowitz (1985: 117-18) even goes so far as to suggest that the 'meaning of a "prison" ... has been changed as a result of electronic media of communication', since 'those prisoners with access to electronic media are no longer completely segregated from society'. In his terms, 'physical incarceration' no longer necessarily implies 'informational isolation'.

Let me come now to what I believe to be the main problem with Meyrowitz's thesis on media and social change, namely the way in which he conceptualizes place. The use of the word 'place' in the title of his book, he explains, is intended as part of a 'serious pun' in which it is supposed to signify 'both social position and physical location' (Meyrowitz, 1985: 308). Running those two meanings together, his key argument is that social roles and hierarchies, through which people have traditionally come to 'know their place', are transformed as electronic communication transcends the limits of physical settings. He offers us a dramatic (though problematic) example of this process at work, stating that: 'A telephone or computer in a ghetto tenement or in a suburban teenager's bedroom is potentially as effective as a telephone or computer in a corporate suite' (Meyrowitz, 1985: 169-70). His statement is rightly questioned by Andrew Leyshon (1995: 33), who asks if the technology is 'really as effective in the way that Meyrowitz suggests', for while 'the inner-city resident, the suburban teenager and the corporate executive may all be able to telephone a bank ... they would not all necessarily enjoy the privilege of being granted an audience with the

bank manager'. Meyrowitz's perspective on the transformation of place as 'social position' is, therefore, rather too optimistic about the prospects for challenging established social hierarchies.

My difficulty with Meyrowitz's ideas, however, has more to do with his proposal that the relevance of place (understood as 'physical location') is being increasingly marginalized in contemporary social life. We live a 'relatively placeless' existence today, he contends, and so it is necessary to move 'beyond place' when theorizing communication and culture.⁹ Whilst I would agree, of course, that many places have a greater degree of openness or permeability than they had in the past, and whilst I have also made a case here for considering the flows that connect places, this should not lead us to assume that people are experiencing a loss of the 'sense of place'. On the contrary, my position is that, through practices of electronic media use, place is instantaneously pluralized (and see Moores, in press).

Scannell: The Doubling of Place

I am borrowing (and extending) the idea of 'the doubling of place' from the work of Scannell (1996), a theorist and historian of broadcasting, who believes one of the remarkable yet now largely taken-for-granted consequences of radio or television use is that it serves to "double" reality' (Scannell, 1996: 172-3). He develops this line of thought in his analysis of public events, and of the changing experiences of 'being-in-public', in modern life: 'Public events now occur, simultaneously, in two different places: the place of the event itself and that in which it is watched and heard. Broadcasting mediates between these two sites' (Scannell, 1996: 76). In proposing a 'phenomenological approach' to the study of radio and television (see also Scannell, 1995), which is concerned with the 'ways of being in the world' that have been created for viewers and listeners, Scannell (1996: 91) goes on to argue that, for the audience members in their multiple, dispersed local settings, there are transformed 'possibilities of being: of being in two places at once'. Of course, it is only ever possible for any individual to be in one place at a time physically, but broadcasting nevertheless permits a live witnessing of remote happenings that can bring these happenings experientially 'close' or 'within range', thereby removing the 'farness' (Scannell, 1996: 91; and see Heidegger, 1962: 140, on the 'conquest of remoteness' and the 'de-severance of the "world"').

My feeling is that Scannell's conception of the doubling of place and the reflections he offers on the altered 'possibilities of being' for media users, while they appear in a book devoted to the study of broadcasting, might also be applied more generally in the analysis of those electronic media, such as the Internet and telephone, which share with radio and television a capacity for the virtually instantaneous transmission of information across sometimes vast distances. Broadcasting, as Scannell has shown in his historical investigations (see especially Scannell and Cardiff, 1991), has its own distinctive communicative features, which mark it out in various ways from computer-mediated or telephone communication. However, I want to contend that radio and television can be considered alongside the Internet and telephone precisely because of the common potential that all these media have for helping to construct experiences of simultaneity and liveness in what have been called 'non-localized' (Thompson, 1995: 246) (I prefer translocalized) spaces and encounters.¹⁰

In order to try to illustrate my argument about extending the application of Scannell's writing on the doubling of place, I will discuss a couple of examples of electronic media use, each of which is drawn from recently published research. The first is taken from Kendall's ethnography of an Internet forum or 'multi-user domain' (Kendall, 2002), and is a personal reflection by the author on her day-to-day practices of computer use. 'Online interactions can at times become intensely engrossing', Kendall (2002: 7) comments, but if 'the text appearing on my screen slows to a crawl or the conversation ceases to interest me, I may cast about for something else offline to engage me.' That 'something else' may involve 'picking up the day's mail', 'flipping through a magazine', leaving the computer 'to get food' or talking 'to someone in the physical room in which I'm sitting' (Kendall, 2002: 7).¹¹

Kendall's account is clearly about a pluralizing of place (and of social relationships). Indeed, she notes that 'although the mud [the multi-user domain] provides for me a feeling of being in a place, that place in some sense overlays the physical place in which my body resides' (Kendall, 2002: 7-8). While 'hanging out' with others in a virtual place¹², then, her corporeal presence is in a physical setting. This is a simple yet crucial point that needs to be recognized when studying global Internet cultures, because as Daniel Miller and Don Slater (2000: 4-7) assert, much of the early academic literature in this area has tended to focus on the constitution of 'spaces or places apart from the rest of social life', rather than treating the Internet 'as continuous with ... other social spaces' and 'as part of everyday life' (see also Wellman and Haythornthwaite, 2002). As in the analysis of television cultures, our

attention must be given both to the 'presencing' (Scannell, 1996: 92) of places on the screen and to those places in which the screen is viewed and interacted with, including a modern public context such as the 'Internet café' (Wakeford, 1999; and see McCarthy, 2001, on television viewing in various locales 'outside the home').

The second example of electronic media use to be discussed here comes from the work of a conversation analyst, Emanuel Schegloff (2002). He relates a story, told to him by an old friend, which is set on a train carriage travelling through New York. At the centre of this narrative is a 'young woman ... talking on the cell phone, apparently to her boyfriend, with whom she is in something of a crisis' (Schegloff, 2002: 285). Other people in the carriage, we are told, busy themselves 'doing "not overhearing this conversation"': 'Except for one passenger. And when the protagonist of this tale has her eyes intersect this fellow-passenger's gaze, she calls out in outraged protest, "Do you mind?! This is a private conversation!"' (Schegloff, 2002: 286)

A further echo of Scannell's writing on the doubling of place is to be found in Schegloff's own commentary on that story of mobile phone use (Americans tend to refer to it as a 'cell phone'). The young woman in the tale is, in his words, 'in two places at the same time – and the railroad car is only one of them' (Schegloff, 2002: 286). 'The other place that she is is "on the telephone"', Schegloff (2002: 286-7) adds, stating that 'there are two "theres" there.' We are not accustomed to thinking of speaking on the telephone as an instance of what philosopher Edward Casey (1993: xv) calls 'being-in-place', and yet the participants in this telephone conversation (at least one of whom is physically 'moving-between-places' (Casey, 1993: 280)) share an occasion of 'talk-in-interaction', in which there is a simulated co-presence rather like that created by synchronous Internet chat.

Although Schegloff does not say so explicitly, the story is, in my view, one in which there are plural and competing information flows, and therefore plural and competing definitions of the situation. The protagonist whose body resides in the physical place of the 'railroad car' is, she protests, having a 'private conversation' (see also Sussex Technology Group, 2001, on mobile phones as technologies for private talk 'in the company of strangers'). This claim is something of a surprise, given that her voice is loud enough to be clearly audible to other people in the same carriage. She appears not to care about being overheard. Nevertheless, Schegloff (2002: 286) still identifies certain features of the talk that could support her indignant expression: 'this young woman is talking to her boyfriend, about intimate matters, in the usual conversational

manner – except for the argumentative mode, and this also, perhaps especially, makes it a private conversation’. Indeed, almost all of the fellow passengers collaborate to support this woman’s interpretation. They cannot help overhear the argument (one side of it, that is) but pretend not to hear, looking down at their reading materials or else out of the carriage windows, avoiding eye contact with the mobile phone user so as not to intrude openly on ‘intimate matters’. There is a single passenger, though, who refuses to accept the performed pretence, perhaps as a result of being irritated by the intrusion of private talk into a public setting. What I am suggesting is that, at the precise moment when eye contact with the protagonist is made, the two ‘theres’ there end up colliding.

Conclusion

Readers of this paper will no doubt notice that it has a cumulative narrative, consisting of a series of related sections on the work of relevant social and communication theorists. That narrative implies a conclusion, which I am now ready to state explicitly. In marked contrast to the view that contemporary social life is increasingly ‘placeless’ (a view expressed in Meyrowitz’s analysis of the ‘impact’ of electronic media), my preference is to see place as constituted at the ‘interface’ with flows (Castells), as multiplex (Urry) and open (Massey), and as doubled (Scannell), virtually instantaneously, in the process of using radio, television, the Internet and telephone. Of course, in recounting this narrative, I realize that there is a certain amount of slippage in my use of the term place. At different stages of the paper, then, the emphasis shifts between the material and the symbolic or the experiential dimensions of place, and between place as physical setting and as virtual or simulated location. If we are adequately to conceptualize place in a world of flows, though, it is necessary for us to recognize and synthesize these multiple aspects, engaging in a cross-disciplinary dialogue of the sort that can only be suggested here.

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Notes

1. An initial version of this paper was prepared for a workshop held in Erfurt, Germany, on 'Network Society and Media Communication', organized by the Media Sociology Section of the German Communication Association. This revised version is based on a presentation to the research seminar of the Interdepartmental Programme in Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science. Much of the material in the paper has also been discussed with staff and students in the Department of Sociology and Communication at La Sapienza University in Rome, during my stay there as Visiting Professor of Communication in 2002-3. I am grateful to Andreas Hepp, Nick Couldry and Mario Morcellini, respectively, for inviting me to speak on those occasions.
2. For a general discussion of the concept of 'network' as 'a set of interconnected nodes', and for some concrete examples of networks, including 'the global network of the new media', see Castells (1996: 470-1).
3. It is worth remembering that there are those who would have their doubts about the newness of some of the developments identified by Castells, contending that the principle of networking has a long history (see especially Standage, 1998; Mattelart, 2000).
4. Castells' thinking here is based on a distinction between places that serve as 'nodes' in networks associated with 'dominant functions' in contemporary society (such as 'stock exchange markets, and their ancillary advanced services centers, in the network of global financial flows' (Castells, 1996: 470)) and the sorts of place inhabited by subordinate social groups, which, he concludes, are 'increasingly segregated and disconnected from each other' (Castells, 1996: 476). Whilst I can see the value of his distinction as part of an attempt to deal with dimensions of power and inequality in social change (see also my commentary on

Massey), it makes little sense to me to conceive of 'the multiple space of places' as more 'disconnected' than hitherto. Having said that, there are certain places, particularly in rural regions of the so-called 'developing world', which are relatively excluded from contact with what Castells terms the space of flows. This point has been well made by geographers interested in the non-uniform or uneven process of 'time-space convergence' (Janelle, 1991; Leyshon, 1995).

5. An earlier version of this thesis on the need to understand fluidity or mobility as increasingly constitutive of modern life is to be found in Scott Lash and John Urry (1994).

6. This point is developed further in Urry (2002). For a recent ethnographic study of an Internet forum in which some of the participants interact face-to-face as well as online, see Lori Kendall (2002).

7. Implicit here is a rejection of the idea that globalization necessarily leads to greater cultural homogeneity, and a proposal that the heterogeneity of places may actually be intensified by the globalizing process. A complementary perspective on the ways in which 'transnational connections' give rise to distinctive cultural 'mixes' or 'confluences' in local settings is offered by Ulf Hannerz (1996).

8. For instance, if the telephone users are supervised workers in a 'call centre', they are required to make a certain number of calls per hour, often operating with a script or prompt sheet (Cameron, 2000).

9. To be fair to him, he does concede, ultimately, that modern life is not completely placeless, acknowledging the fact that 'regardless of media access, living in a ghetto, a prison cell, and a middle class suburb are certainly not "equivalent" social experiences' (Meyrowitz, 1985: 312).

10. Film and print media could be seen to facilitate a doubling of place for their users, too, although these media do not have the potential for instantaneous communication across large distances, and therefore do not afford the same senses of simultaneity and liveness that are available from radio, television, the Internet and telephone.

11. Interestingly, Kendall's description could easily be an account of routine, distracted television viewing in the home, if we were to substitute the references to computer use with ones to glancing at a television screen.

12. It is worth noting that a virtual place is often known as a 'room'. This word, traditionally employed to describe a local physical setting, is being used there in an effort to contextualize social relations between participants who are physically separated (to simulate what John Thompson (1995: 32) calls 'the spatial condition of common locality').

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