

Space, Place, and the Changing American Mediascape

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It has become fashionable in some quarters to proclaim the disappearance of space and place. Observing the spread of satellite television and subsequently internet technologies, Marshall McLuhan and his successors (see, e.g., Levinson 2001) insist that the world has become a single "global village." Similarly, Paul Virilio (cited in Couldry 2001: 30) has argued that places have become essentially interchangeable, and cultural anthropologists like Marc Auge (1995) insist that more and more places, like airports and shopping malls, have become "non-places." The problem with these theories, however, is their all-or-nothing quality. With Couldry, we share the conviction that space and place matter not in some binary fashion but through the myriad and sometimes contradictory ways that they interact with processes of human communication. In this essay, we argue that the way forward consists in exploring variations in spatial relations and historically-contingent places, and how such variations make a difference in circuits of cultural production and reception.

Our use of the term space is meant in a rather precise sense. Spatial metaphors have become common in social theorizing. For instance, Jürgen Habermas ([1989]) writes of a "public sphere," while Manuel Castells (1997) refers to a "media space" and Pierre Bourdieu has analyzed the journalistic and other cultural "fields" (1998, 2005). Yet as Silber (1995: 324–325) notes, "this increasing use of spatial metaphors ... has remained ... rather implicit and underconceptualized." In these instances, spatial terms are used to help explain complex class and other social relations. Our use of "space," however, is restricted to the geographical, and though often discussed in tandem, space is not equivalent to place. As Gieryn (2000: 465) argues, space is "abstract geometries – distance, direction, size, shape, volume – detached from material form and cultural interpretation" whereas "place is space filled up by people, practices, objects, and representations." By this defi-

dition, Gieryn argues that cyberspace is not a place: "Websites on the internet are not places in the same way that the room, building, campus, and city that house and locate a certain server is a place" (ibid.). Nevertheless, cyberspace environments continue to be constructed by human beings occupying places, whether in Silicon Valley, California, or Redmond, Washington, or elsewhere, and these places – as they have gradually assumed distinctive social forms – have in turn shaped the character of cyberspace.

Projects linking media, space, cities, and architecture, as with MediaCity, are tailor-made for this kind of intellectual inquiry into space and place. Against the cacophony of pronouncements heralding the revolutionary, democratic and liberating new potential of wireless communication, attention to built space promotes a more grounded analysis, rooted in the political, economic and material consequences of new technology. As William Mitchell (1995: 5) has so eloquently written:

... the emerging civic structures and spatial arrangements of the digital era will profoundly affect our access to economic opportunities and public services, the character and content of public discourse, the forms of cultural activity, the enaction of power, and the experiences that give shape and texture to our daily routines.

In this essay, we explore the complex intersections between generalized space and concrete, contextualized place in two "nodes" (Couldry 2000: 27, Janelle 1991) which arguably represent opposite Weberian ideal types in the contemporary American „mediascape" (Appadurai 1990): the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times*.

The *New York Times*, of course, is the most prestigious and influential newspaper in the United States, and this status owes in no small part to its unusual century-long stewardship by its owning family. But for our purposes, the *New York Times* is also significant, because it occupies a central position – both geographically and symbolically – in the most economically and culturally powerful city in America, which is also, for the United States, the most atypically concentrated urban and media complex. The *Los Angeles Times*, vies from the opposite coast with the *New York Times* for national journalistic influence. At the same time, it is representative in many ways of the typical American newspaper company – owned from a distance (since 2000, by the multi-media Tribune Company in Chicago), aggressively managed to maximize profit, and lacking any significant local newspaper competition for readers or advertisers. Los Angeles, as a city, also represents the antithesis in many ways of New York – sprawling, frag-

mented, devoid of any real center, it has been seen by many urban scholars as the model of late twentieth and twenty-first century urban organization (e.g., Dear et al. 1996, Scott and Soja 1996, Davis 1990).

From these two case studies, we can begin to explore the different ways that space and place are organized in relation to media. Implicit in Mitchell's programmatic statement quoted above, however, are claims about why place and space matter, such as the quality of "public discourse" or "the enaction of power." In the next section, we consider some of the specific ways that space and place might matter for media production and consumption. We then draw on these theories to explore our two case studies. In the final section, we draw some preliminary conclusions and suggest directions for future research.

Theorizing Space and Place

Media studies has always been concerned with space, if not always overtly or visibly. Some of the most prominent early researchers were preoccupied with the inherently spatial pursuits of transportation and geography, and the technological imperative to overcome them. Electronic communication, as Harold Innis (1951) and James Carey (1989) amply demonstrated, severed the geographical determination of communication by allowing messages to move faster than the best available mode of transportation. Likewise, variable questions of locale or place are always implied in media studies, even if we do not recognize them as such.¹ Indeed it is often through media marketing that we are reminded of the primacy of place in our field, for example; AT&T's slogan reminder that we could "reach out and touch someone;" or the *New York Times* "putting the world at our fingertips." We can no longer be satisfied with claims that geography has been rendered irrelevant in the digital age, or the belief in "news from nowhere." We need look no further than *Times Square*, with its skyscraper monuments to the communications industry on the most expensive real estate in the country, to understand implicitly that place matters.

In urban studies, spatial organization is believed to matter because it affects the economic and political vitality, as well as sense of community, of the city (see, e.g. Sennett 1992; Logan and Molotch 1987; Jacobs 1961). One of the most basic dynamics of space lies in the tension between centralization and decentralization, between concentration and fragmentation, as expressed in two major schools

of urban studies, that of the (centralizing) Chicago School and the (decentralizing) L. A. School (see, e.g., Gottdiener 2002). Likewise, media theorists are beginning to pay attention to dynamics of centralization and decentralization, though their competing and sometimes contradictory claims have not yet been brought together into anything like a coherent school or theory.

One claim is that centralization promotes greater state social control – or that conversely, decentralization fosters greater freedom of expression. Paul Starr (2005) argues that during the nineteenth century, the United States' decentralized media system fostered greater freedom of expression than European centralized systems. Another claim is that centralization fosters more sensationalistic, dramatized political discourse. Along these lines Frank Esser (1999) shows that the more centralized British media system produces more sensationalized, dramatized political discourse than the much more decentralized news media in Germany (see also Benson and Saguy 2005, comparing the centralized French and decentralized U.S. "journalistic fields"). Finally, Barnhurst and Nerone (2001) argue that centralization fosters ideological differentiation among directly competing media outlets (increased pluralism).

How then does "place" enter the equation? It is a commonplace that the character of a literary oeuvre may often be explained in relation to a particular place – the American West of Zane Grey, the New York of Henry James or Paul Auster, the Dublin of James Joyce. Likewise, place looms large in many an editor's or publisher's memoirs (e.g., Gelb 2004, Graham 2001). In studies such as these, place stresses the particular over the general (see also Massey 1984), and rightly so – according to some analysts. Using places only as "the testing grounds for concepts or hypotheses with presumed general or universal significance ... denies the distinctive social and historical characteristics of places" (Agnew 1987: 2).

Is there a way, however, to theorize place without losing sight of its particularities? Gieryn (2000: 464-65) suggests that place has three "necessary and sufficient" features: (1) geographic location ("a unique spot in the universe"), (2) material form ("physicality ... stuff ... assemblages of things"; see also Latour 1996), and (3) investment with meaning and value (or simply "sense of place", see Agnew 1987: 28). Of this third element, Gieryn (p. 465) explains:

Places are doubly constructed: most are built or in some way physically carved out. They are also interpreted, narrated, perceived, felt, understood, and imagined. A spot in the universe, with a gat hering

of physical stuff there, becomes a place only when it encompasses history or utopia, danger or security, identity or memory.

These three elements of place certainly add "local knowledge" (Geertz 1983) to any analysis of media. At minimum, place concretely situates and contextualizes abstract spatial relations. A stronger argument, however, would insist that place matters in its own right – that "place is not merely a setting or backdrop, but an agentic player in the game – a force with detectable and independent effects on social life." Among such effects of place, Gieryn argues, are the stabilization of social structural hierarchies, the patterning of face-to-face interactions, and the embodiment of "otherwise intangible cultural norms" (466, 473).

For media studies, place has long been central (if not expressly theorized) in research on the social organization of newsrooms and news work (Schudson 2003; cf. Esser 1998). Place can also lead us to examine more closely such questions as: To what extent does the "built environment" of the contemporary media company serve the symbolic and public relations functions of the corporation (Wallace 2006)? How does location or a historical sense of place shape how media workers perform or perceive their roles? And, vice versa, how do media also transform the places which they "serve"? These and other aspects of space and place will now be explored in our two case studies of media in New York and Los Angeles.

Two 'Nodes' in the American Mediascape

New York and the 'New York Times'

A true anomaly in the media landscape of the United States, New York stands apart in both scale and kind. As an early news leader, New York in the nineteenth century was home to several dozen different newspapers in many languages. This was due largely to its dramatic population growth, both by newly arrived immigrants and by formerly rural Americans. By the mid-1800s New York had outgrown Boston and Philadelphia as the largest urban center, and was rapidly outpacing them in media production as well, becoming a major center of printing and publishing. By 1925 it had a larger population than London, its only other media capital rival. Newsworthy information, by definition, either emanated from or passed through New York City: 75 percent of the newspapers moving between the U.S. and the rest of the world were sent through New York (Pred 1980).

The history of media in New York City is also partly the history of the media generally, as many of its most important developments occurred there. New York is where John Peter Zenger, the publisher of the *New York Weekly Journal* in the 1730s, established that truth was a reasonable defense in libel cases. It was where newspapers first began to be sold on the street rather than by subscription in the 1830s. It was where some of the most colorful and outrageous experiments in circulation building – from the Sun's Moon Hoax to the World's Statue of Liberty pedestal campaign, from Pulitzer and Hearst's yellow journalism to the *News*, *Mirror* and *Graphic's* tabloid photography – all took place. Because they happened in New York, the city has seemed at times to be synonymous with the papers it produces. Indeed the city and its papers have such a symbiotic relationship that the direction of influence is often difficult to parse.

The tight grid of the Manhattan street map finds its natural corollary in the layout of news columns on a page. Just as industrial concentration has produced the flower district, the diamond district, the carpet district, the restaurant supply store district and the lighting district, so too does the newspaper group thematically similar stories and advertisements into sections. Seeing the paper as an index to urban form, McLuhan (1951) saw the front page of the *New York Times* – which he referred to as the "daily book of industrial man," – as a cubist masterpiece. The multiple and contradictory perspectives of city life were represented in newspaper layouts, and as he wrote to Innis, "the discontinuous juxtaposition of unrelated items made necessary by the influx of news stories from every quarter of the world created a symbolic landscape of great power and importance" (cited in Zingrone 1996). Just as the newspaper represents all facets of public life and demonstrates their interrelation through the juxtaposition of stories on the page, the spatial relationship among buildings in cities like New York are concrete manifestations of structures of power, influence and communication. New York owes a great deal of this concentration of newspapers to the era in which the industry was formed. In the pre-telegraph nineteenth century, news could either be from elsewhere and out of date, or it could be local and current (e.g., Brooker-Gross 1985). As a result, an intense focus on the city resulted, and was exacerbated by the number of competing papers. When competitors were known for lifting items from each others' pages, and for their newsboys hawking headlines next to each other on the same street, competition was stiffer than it was when newspapers were sent through the mail to annual subscribers.

The newspaper industry in New York is also significant for how it is organized spatially, and its pattern of development shows the mutually reinforcing relationship it has had with the city. New York's first penny presses were concentrated in lower Manhattan to take advantage of proximity to boats arriving with foreign news in the New York harbor, police headquarters, courthouses, jails, the post office, and later, Western Union's telegraph office. Photographs from the turn of the century display a tangled web of connecting wires so thick that one can barely make out the individual buildings. These first shops were located along Park Row, also known as Printing House square, where many odd jobbers turned their presses to newspapering when not printing bulletins and flyers. As more papers opened, they occupied various plots of land cheek by jowl with each other, with the park in front providing a deep pool of writers and cartoonists "between jobs." While the industry itself was not concentrated – there were almost as many owners as there were properties in the early period – it was concentrated geographically. The whole industry was confined to a few downtown blocks, allowing for economies of scale not only in labor but also for the delivery of newsprint and the dispatch of finished product.

One might be prompted to ask whether the *New York Times'* status stems entirely from its efforts as a newspaper, or whether some of it was just the lucky consequence of being located in New York. To this point it should be noted that some of what makes New York „New York" is a result of the efforts of the *New York Times*. This is demonstrated no more plainly than in the paper's location throughout the twentieth century at the "Crossroads of the World" – Times Square. When Adolph Ochs bought the land for a new headquarters at the intersection of Broadway, 7th Avenue and 42nd Street, he was constructing a new node in the urban transportation (as well as media) infrastructure of the city. Whereas Los Angeles has more or less forsaken the idea of public transportation, the subway system functions as New York's bedrock, and its most important hub was in the basement of the Times' 1904 skyscraper. At the geographical center of Manhattan, the *New York Times* had built the city's second tallest tower in the middle of everything, and the paper helped to establish the square as a new core of news production. The ball drop from the Times building became an instant tradition in the celebration of the New Year, and the Motograph News Bulletin on the building announced some of the most important news events of the twentieth century, including election results, the end of WWI, Pearl

Harbor and Japanese surrender. Through the 1920s and 1930s, the area of midtown near the *Times* brought many other newspapers and magazines, including the *Herald Tribune* and the *New Yorker*, acting as what William Taylor (1996: 215) has called "a beacon of journalistic metropolitanism."

The *New York Times* is distinguished by its proximity to capital, both financial and cultural. When it was located downtown, it was nearby to the brokerage houses of Wall Street, and later in midtown it has done business alongside Morgan Stanley (one of its largest investors), UBS and Lehman Brothers. The *Times* is an elite paper not only for its news reporting; it is made elite in part because of its physical closeness to other elites who use the paper as their forum. Because New York enjoys a high concentration of power and wealth, its influence in the news field is reflective of this.

The *New York Times* continues to lead the industry in agenda-setting if not in circulation. It gained its international reputation by focusing on in-depth foreign news and by establishing itself as the "newspaper of record," printing the full text of documents such as the Treaty of Versailles as well as most U.S. presidential conferences and major Supreme Court decisions. It has the highest circulation of all seven-day newspapers in the U.S., but this is a qualified first place ranking, given that its competitors, *USA Today* and the *Wall Street Journal*, do not publish on Sunday. The *Times'* print circulation is 1.14 million on weekdays and Saturdays and 1.68 million on Sundays, and readership is estimated to be about 5 million on weekdays and 7 million on Sundays (Annual Report 2005).

Monday through Saturday half of the *Times'* circulation comes from the greater New York area, while on Sundays close to 57 percent of the circulation comes from outside New York and surrounding areas. Ironically, it was as a result of pressure from the New York edition of *Newsday* (owned by the *Los Angeles Times* company *Times Mirror*) that the *New York Times* initially sought to improve their local coverage by expanding its Metro section. (Doyle 1991: 11) The *Times* was designated as a "national newspaper" by a media reporting firm in 1998, after it launched a \$20 million campaign ("Expect the World") and expanded home delivery to 171 markets. (Annual Report 2005) Customized New England and Washington editions allow for the insertion of more tailored content for those areas, with later news deadlines. Perhaps as a response to the ubiquitous *USA Today*, found in hotels and airports around the world, in 2000 the *New York Times* became the only national newspaper sold through the Starbucks coffee

chain in the United States. While expanding across the country and indeed in the rest of world, it has struggled to maintain readers in the five boroughs of New York City. Between 2001 and 2006, local circulation dropped 19 percent (Boston Herald 2006: 34).

For most of the twentieth century, the paper was written at 43rd street in Times Square and printed at facilities in Edison (New Jersey) and Flushing (Queens borough). Nineteen other remote printing sites, including one in Toronto, Canada, help to distribute the printed edition across the continent. Soon, however, the *Times* will move to its new headquarters, a Renzo Piano-designed skyscraper at 8th Avenue and 41st Street. The evident symbolic motivation for this move cannot be overlooked, especially given shareholder displeasure with the cost of the new structure, estimated at \$600 million. (Sloan 2006: D2) To ensure that the building will be an appropriate tribute to the paper inside, photographer Annie Leibowitz was hired to document each phase of its construction, just as Berenice Abbott turned the buildings she photographed in the 1930s into instant icons. In a time when pronouncements of the death of print are reaching a crescendo, the *New York Times* is unambiguously asserting itself on the skyline once again, hoping that the massive architectural investment will signal a solid and prosperous future for the paper.

Los Angeles and the 'LA Times'

Los Angeles is nearly 3,000 miles away from the east coast media centers in New York, Washington, D.C., and Boston. The city itself comprises 467 square miles, large enough to fit within its bounds the combined areas of San Francisco, St. Louis, Cleveland, Minneapolis, Milwaukee, Pittsburgh – as well as Boston and Manhattan (Howe 2006: 32). As such, Los Angeles represents one of the most far-flung and fragmented nodes in the already fragmented American mediascape. Entertainment, of course, looms larger here, and the Latino audience is so dominant that the most watched-TV stations in the „L.A.“ region are the Spanish-only stations owned by the Mexican corporation Univision (Hudson 2004). With nearly 90 percent of all workers driving by car to work, it also shouldn't be surprising that Angelenos are more likely to spend their time listening to radio (both "talk" and music) than Americans in other parts of the country (Dunaway 1999). Conversely, they are somewhat less likely to watch television news (even with 11 local broadcast stations competing intensely for audiences) or to read newspapers (ibid.).

Anchoring this media system is a newspaper with long-standing local roots and more recent national aspirations: the *Los Angeles Times*. From the roof of the Times building, reporters look out at both the 28 story white granite City Hall (completed in 1928), symbolic anchor of the downtown business district, and the buzzing cross-town freeway, gateway to the sprawl of the „Valley" to the north and Orange County's Disneyland to the south. If there is a center in L.A., and this is certainly debatable,² the *L.A. Times* – like its east coast namesake – comes as close to occupying it as anyone else.

The *Los Angeles Times* is a prime example of how media serve to organize space and create a distinctive sense of place. Joan Didion (1992: 222–26; see also Davis 1992) goes so far as to argue that *The Times*' owners, the Otis's and the Chandler's, „literally invented" modern Los Angeles:

At the time Harrison Gray Otis bought his paper there were only some five thousand people living in Los Angeles. ... The Los Angeles River was capable of providing ditch water for a population of two or three thousand, but there was little other ground water to speak of. Los Angeles has water today because Harrison Gray Otis and his son-in-law Harry Chandler wanted it, and fought a series of out-right water wars to get it. ... What was construed by people in the rest of the country as accidental – the sprawl of the city, the apparent absence of a cohesive center – was in fact purposeful, the scheme itself ... That the Chandlers had been sufficiently prescient to buy up hundreds of thousands of acres on the far reaches of the expanding cloud ... was only what might be expected of any provident citizen: „The best interests of Los Angeles are paramount to the *Times*," Harry Chandler wrote in 1934, and it had been, historically, the *Times* that defined what those best interests were.

In many ways, the *Los Angeles Times* is still marked by its local boosterism. As one observer noted of the atmosphere inside the *Los Angeles Times*, „It was an article of faith at the *Los Angeles Times* that L.A. as [one] mayor ... had put it, 'stood at the brink of a great destiny'" (Rieff 1991). Yet since the 1960s, under the tutelage of the last of the Chandler publishers, Otis, the *Los Angeles Times* has aspired to a different kind of power – the power that derives from national professional prestige and excellence (or „cultural" as well as „economic" capital; see Bourdieu 2005). Otis Chandler pledged to make the *Los Angeles Times* a world-class newspaper on par with the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*.³ By 1970, the *Los Angeles Times* had vastly expanded its overseas news-gathering operation and establis-

hed one of the nation's top-ranked Washington, D.C. bureaus (Hynds 1980: 321); today, after a period of retrenchment in the 1990s, its Washington bureau and overseas bureaus (24 in all) remain second in size only to those of the *New York Times* (Auletta 2005).

Even today, journalists at the *L.A. Times* – often having arrived from the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post*, or headed there eventually – seem to have retained this sense that their only real peers are the media located thousands of miles away. During editorial meetings and informal conversations, *Los Angeles Times* reporters often spoke of the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*. Yet competition with these newspapers is mostly a "matter of professional pride" and has „little to do with business," as a *Los Angeles Times* managing editor told one of the authors (Benson 2000/2001).

The *L.A. Times*' national aspirations in combination with its actual geographic (and ensuing social) distance from east-coast power help explain the paper's penchant for long-form, analytical reporting. Despite its many Pulitzer prizes for excellence in journalism, the *L.A. Times* has long suffered from a lingering east coast prejudice against "the vast weirdness called LA" (Grossberger 1992). As Didion (1992: 233–34), again, notes, "this kind of detail was sometimes dismissed by reporters at other papers as 'L.A. color', but really it was something different: the details gave the tone of the situation, the subtext without which the text could not be understood, and sharing this subtext with the reader was the natural tendency of reporters who, because of the nature of both the paper on which they worked and the city in which it was published, tended not to think of themselves as insiders."

Since Otis Chandler's pledge to put the *Los Angeles Times* on the "national" map, there has been an ongoing tension between the paper's national and local aspirations. During the 1990s, the *Los Angeles Times* competed intensively with the Orange County Register over who could provide more "local" news. In 1992, the *Times* conducted a "More Local News Sweepstakes" promotion in Orange County, in which participants were required to go over the newspaper's Orange County edition and circle with an orange crayon all the local news in the newspaper. The Register responded proudly in its own counter-promotion, "To circle all the local news in the Register, you'd need a whole box" (Stein 1992).

Since 2000, the *Los Angeles Times*' "place" in the American mediascape has been further complicated by its takeover by the Tribune Company of Chicago. Unlike the Sulzbergers, the Chandler family long

ago gave up its exclusive ownership stake in its newspaper. Times-Mirror, the parent company of the *Los Angeles Times* was one of the first U.S. newspaper companies to "go public" – in 1964 – and allow Wall Street investors to share ownership in the paper (Hart 1981: 187). By the early 1970s, the Chandler family's share had dipped well below fifty percent, sowing the seeds of the eventual buying up of Time-Mirror by the Tribune Company of Chicago in 2000. Tribune management's relationship with the *Los Angeles Times*, has been tender, to say the least (Auletta 2005), and there is growing concern that the paper's commitment to high-quality journalism is waning. John Carroll, the first editor appointed by Tribune Co., purposely set out to raise the paper's national profile. After the *Los Angeles Times* won five Pulitzer prizes in 2004, Tribune management sent no words of congratulations, and not only because this award-winning journalism seemed to come at the expense of the bottom line (or at least did nothing to improve profits). Long-standing intra-city rivalries were also clearly at play. Carroll recalls: "Every time I mentioned the idea that the *Los Angeles Times* should be among the four best [U.S.] papers [along with the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Wall Street Journal*], I had the feeling it made [the Tribune] people uncomfortable. Nobody ever said we shouldn't do it. But nobody ever said, Yes, that's a good idea." (Auletta 2005). In short, not only Wall Street demands for profit maximization, but also Tribune Co's "wounded" sense of place likely contributed to hundreds of journalist layoffs inside the *Los Angeles Times*.

Conclusion

This essay has attempted to point out some of the ways that closer consideration of space and place help us understand processes of media production, using two of America's most prominent newspaper (and now multi-media) companies as case studies. For instance, spatial distance from east coast power centers has helped enable at the *Los Angeles Times* an in-depth reporting that challenges assumptions "taken-for-granted" by more insider reporters. At both the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times*, relationship to a particular place has also crucially shaped the character of these media outlets – and in turn, the economic and political goals of the media organizations have transformed the places in which they were located.

Future research should also examine how space and place are being transformed in the era of „online“ media. What are the conse-

quences for cities when advertising shifts from being primarily local to primarily national? For the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times*, their elite status helps to secure advertisers seeking the most demographically desirable readers: luxury consumer brands, investment banks, and so on. In large cities like New York and Los Angeles, the advertised goods are likely to be available, and therefore supportive of the local economy. But what happens when the paper's readers are found online, and do not consume where the paper is published?

Newspapers formerly secure in their local monopolies are competing economically as well as professionally with newspapers in far-flung locales, e.g., the online *New York Times* competes for readers with the online *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, even the *London Guardian*. Building on Barnhurst and Nerone's argument (2001) about the direct relationship between centralized competition and ideological differentiation, what are the likely effects of this spatial transformation? Whereas the rise of U.S. "newspaper monopolies" during the early twentieth-century led to ideological homogenization across cities, today widespread access to online media is breaking down these same local information monopolies.

Similarly, to what extent are place and space important for a new media company like Google? On the one hand, far more than the "old" media of the *New York Times* or *Los Angeles Times*, Google's search engine helps make possible the de-centered "network society" (Castells 2000) supposedly emblematic of the contemporary media order. Google's content consists of gathered, amalgamated and re-ordered bits from other sources; it is not produced the way newspaper content is. Its online price comparison service "Froogle" helps to separate consumers from the place of consumption even further, displacing revenues and taxes away from the buyer's immediate community. On the other hand, Google is also a place – a series of buildings housing thousands of computers and thousands of people – headquartered in Mountainview, California, in the heart of the computer industry's "Silicon Valley." Google has been heralded as the harbinger of a new era of "placelessness," but we should not be so quick to dismiss the ways in which Google, just as with all other human activities, is shaped by concrete, particular places.

Finally, while we believe a careful attention to space and place may add significantly to social structural models in the sociology of media, and media stories more generally (see, e.g., Hallin and Mancini 2004, Benson 2004), it is also important that we keep in mind that all structures are the products of human agency. Space and place

act on social agents, while at the same time being the product of social struggles (Lefebvre 1991, Harvey 1985, Lawrence and Low 1990). Likewise, in relation to new technologies, Raymond Williams (1973) reminds us of the variable ways in which technologies may be developed depending on the "social intentions" of powerful actors, while at the point of reception, Fischer (1992) emphasizes the ways in which users take up new technologies in unexpected ways. This "social constructionist" literature also leads us to be skeptical of claims about the effects of new technologies: the telephone, no less than the internet today, was predicted to radically transform the typical geographical scope of social relations. In fact, Fischer (1992) shows that mostly the telephone was used to reinforce previously established face-to-face relationships in the same or nearby communities. Just as economic globalization has affected German cities such as Berlin in an "indirect manner" (Eckardt 2005), it is to date far from clear that global media have significantly displaced long-standing locally rooted media in two of America's most "global" cities.

In sum, as with social theory in general (Soja 1989) a closer consideration of space and place offers potentially rich dividends to studies of media previously primarily focused on social structural and historical factors. As intimated by William Mitchell, the actual social stakes in such a project are high, involving no less than the "character and content" of public debate, and the "shape and texture" of our daily lives. Put another way, it is a problematic that could be usefully reframed in Habermasian terms: How do place and space shape the media's capacity to act as a public sphere, and in turn, how do differently situated media serve to reorganize space and anchor, or dislocate, place, in ways that move us closer or further from this democratic ideal.

Annotations:

- 1 For example, in the earliest American studies of media influence, small group samples were chosen from demographically representative small towns such as Decatur, Ill. Isolated enough, it was believed, to allow for perfect test conditions of the media's influence. Such early studies were critiqued for the narrow focus of their questions and the immediacy with which they assumed that "effects" could be produced and measured. But the element of place was taken as a given. Were we to repeat such studies now, we would want to know a great deal more about Decatur, its people, its history, its customs, and its specificity than Katz and Lazarsfeld provided.

- 2 Architectural writers Charles Moore, Peter Becker, and Regula Campbell (1984) observe, "If there has come to us a single image of L.A., it is doubtless the tower of City Hall, with the world's first four-level freeway interchange nearby, dripping vines like a Piranesi view of ancient Rome." However, in a closing chapter of his provocative overview of Los Angeles architecture "A Note on Downtown ... because that is all downtown Los Angeles deserves" (1971: 201-208), Reyner Banham counters: "On a straightforward catalogue of representative monuments, downtown does sound like a true urban centre; it has City Hall and law courts [etc.] ... But like everything else in downtown it stands as an unintegrated fragment in a downtown scene that began to disintegrate long ago - out of sheer irrelevance as far as one can see."
- 3 For histories of changes at the Los Angeles Times since the 1960s, see Gottlieb and Wolt (1977), Hart (1981), and McDougal (2001).

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Medien, Architektur und Stadt: Perspektiven der Stadtsoziologie

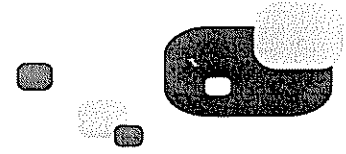
Monika de Frantz

„Mediacity“ – Interdisziplinarität als ‚work in progress‘

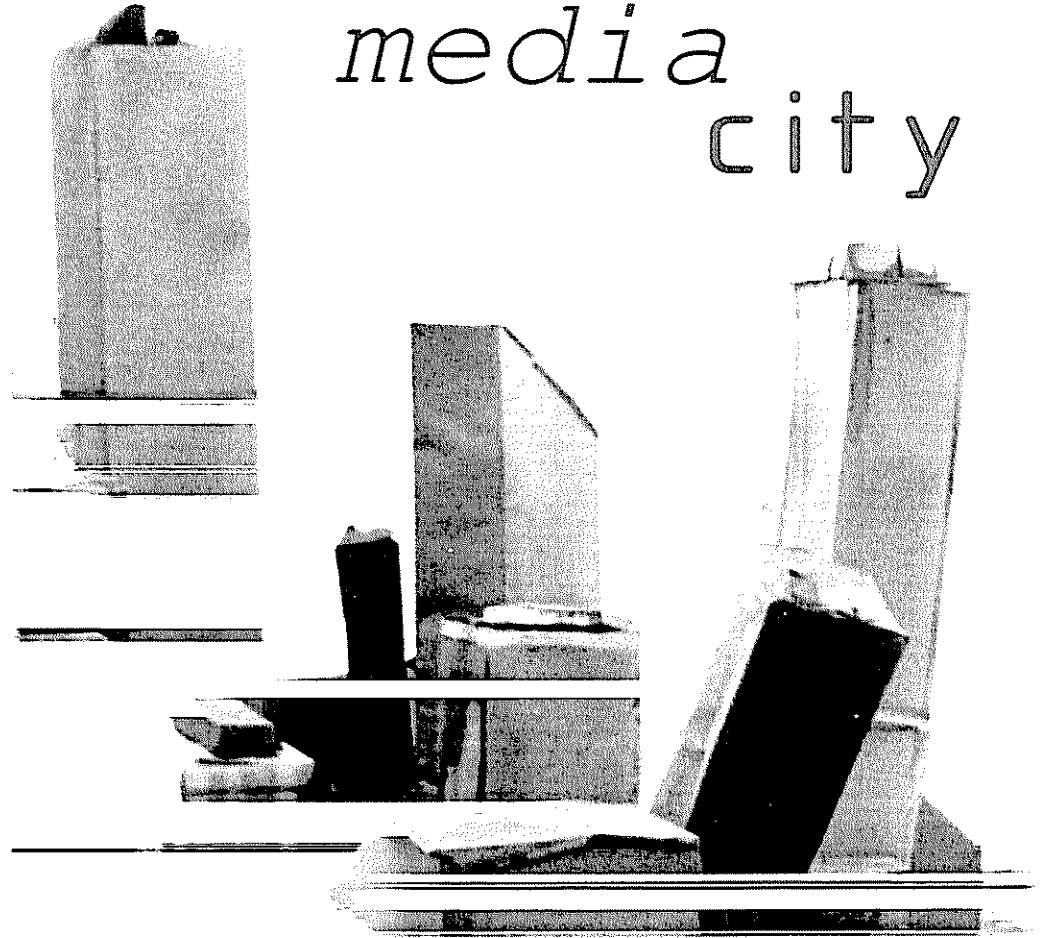
Der Titel ‚Mediacity‘ vermittelt ein Konzept oder zumindest einen bestehenden normativen Anspruch an die Stadtentwicklung auf Basis der Zusammenführung unterschiedlicher, in der Praxis interagierender Disziplinen. Doch handelt es sich dabei nicht nur um unterschiedliche wissenschaftliche Fachrichtungen mit entsprechend verschiedenen Fragestellungen und Methoden, sondern um grundsätzlich entgegengesetzte Zielsetzungen der Wissensverarbeitung. Die Stadtsoziologie mit dem sozialwissenschaftlichen Anspruch der auf Empirie basierenden Theoriebildung, die Medientechnologien mit dem Anspruch der anwendungsorientierten Forschung und Entwicklung sowie die auf künstlerisch-kreatives Schaffen ausgerichtete Architektur konstituieren unterschiedliche epistemologische Systeme. Allerdings basieren diese Disziplinen nicht auf in sich geschlossenen Wissensblöcken, sondern auf diskursiven Prozessen, die aufgrund ihrer Pluralität auch für neue interdisziplinäre Einflüsse offen sind.

Hinter dem Schlagwort ‚Mediacity‘ steht also ein Forschungsprojekt, das es sich zum Ziel gesetzt hat, Ansätze für eine interdisziplinäre Kooperation zwischen Architektur, neuen Medientechnologien und Stadtforschung zu erarbeiten. Weit entfernt von der Definition eines neuen Konzepts, einer Hypothese, einer Theorie, eines Forschungsfelds oder gar einer neuen Disziplin, gehen wir von sehr unterschiedlichen Arbeitsfeldern aus und tasten uns langsam zu Berührungspunkten vor. Idealerweise besteht dieser Prozess darin, die Sichtweisen und Forschungsansätze, Fragestellungen und Methoden der anderen fachlichen Disziplinen kennenzulernen. In der vorliegenden Edition stellt dieser Artikel die Perspektive der gegenwärtigen Stadtsoziologie auf Medien und Architektur dar. Allerdings ist die stadtsoziologische Debatte an

Frank Eckardt / Martina Zschocke (eds.)



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