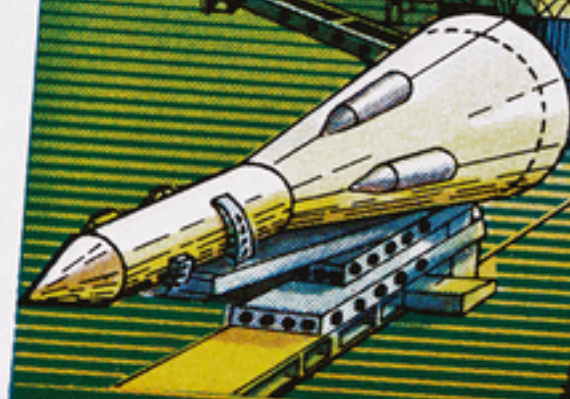


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ONLINE TERRITORIES

1977

GLOBALIZATION,
MEDIATED PRACTICE
AND SOCIAL SPACE



Introduction: Globalization, Mediated Practice and Social Space

Assessing the Means and Metaphysics
of Online Territories

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The purpose of this book is to bring together key research and writings in the interdisciplinary study of new media and society in order to address a number of questions arising from the ways in which online technologies are currently being envisioned, used and experienced. In doing so, our specific aim is to offer an up-to-date contextualization of online practices and to explore, from a variety of perspectives, the emergence of new experiences/routines in relation to, and new conceptions of, social space. A central rationale for this book is the need for further, research-based contextualization of preexisting theories related with, for example, globalization, mobility, citizenship and civic participation, socio-spatial dynamics and network society. This need is particularly acute considering the ever-growing popularity of online communications (due to new applications such as social network sites) and the diverse and complex shapes such practice takes.

Both the practical and scholarly conceptions *and* the very experience of media use and social space are shifting. However, in the totalizing rhetorics of globalization, late modernity and networked capitalism, too much has been made of the “disappearance of place” and “deterritorialization.” As many scholars have recently argued, territories—understood as socially produced spaces with certain rules for inclusion and exclusion—do not vanish or become less significant through the expansion of networked media and increasingly ephemeral flows of capital and information. Still, there is a clear need for explorations of what constitutes social territories today, and to what extent they reside within the “placelessness” of online

interaction. Our purpose here is situated within a wider concern for placing two specific, interlinked departure points at the heart of our exploration of online territories. The first is an understanding of online practices and spaces not as distinct and isolated pursuits, but as closely linked with the everyday and offline milieu. Thus, we construe online territories broadly to take into account not only relational spaces that are purely online, but also a variety of intersections between the online and the offline. This includes virtual spaces that are anchored offline, or extensions of offline entities, as well as those social territories that may emerge when online activities are “lived out” or re-enacted in other parts of everyday life. While the “social uses” of media are as old as the media themselves, and extensively explored in studies of media rituals, one of our ambitions is to capture the socio-spatial formations of community and practice under conditions of increased interactivity, mobility, and media convergence.

The second angle in our approach implies a consideration of online territories on multiple analytical levels. Recently, with the increased use of Web 2.0 applications, the-not-so-new shift from representation of the subject by the media to the self-presentation of and production by the subject her/himself (hence, the shift from *response* to *mediated practice*) has assumed a more accentuated and complex form. Thus, a complex understanding of online territories must account for the interplay between situated individual and social practice, and global processes. In this volume, we trace online territories in relation to three distinct *and* interrelated pathways—the *everyday*, the *civic* and the *public*; and the *transnational/translocal*—and we do so by taking mediation, communicative practice and social space as departure points.

The more specific implications of these three pathways will be delineated before each of the three parts of the book. Before reaching this far, however, we will engage more closely with the fundamental conceptualizations and theories that keep this project together. Our prime objective here is to anchor the key argument of (re)mediated extensions of more durable structures of social practice in a broader field of social, cultural and communication theory.

THE NEW MEANS OF TERRITORIALIZATION

As the title suggests, this book is about space, and more specifically about territory. Such a thrust may seem somehow one-sided, even conservative, in an era of ephemeral and boundless information flows. However, placing territory center-stage is not to deny the significance of deterritorialization, whether media-enhanced or not, but to bring the social logics of boundary making, maintenance and negotiation clearly into the vision of contemporary (online) media studies. As geograph-

er Doreen Massey (2005, p. 91) contends “the really serious question which is raised by speed-up, by ‘the communications revolution’ and by cyberspace, is not whether space will be annihilated but what kinds of multiplicities (patterning of uniqueness) and relations will be co-constructed with these new kinds of spatial configurations.” It is precisely these processes of co-construction, the interplay between structural forces and the social and cultural affordances of online media, that call for a critical re-examination of how territories are (re)produced and legitimized. Understanding the enduring role of such factors as the distribution of cultural and economic capital in society can open up for a more complex view of how global processes that in a certain light could be seen as deterritorialization may also entail, even depend upon, mutual processes of territorial struggle.

A decade ago David Morley (2000) in his book *Home Territories* highlighted this tension field, considering above all the ambivalent role of television. While transnational flows of programming in certain respects had displaced audiences’ cultural frames of reference and produced deterritorialized modes of sociability, they also implicated boundaries: “Sociability, by definition, can only ever be produced in some particular cultural (and linguistic) form—and only those with access to the relevant forms of cultural capital will feel interpellated by and at home within the particular form of sociability offered by a given programme” (ibid., p. 111). In this way, television and other media have for a long time exercised a soft but pervasive form of symbolic violence through their very conception and targeting of ‘audiences,’ which in turn integrate advanced forms of market research and monitoring. This is indeed a coercive form of territorialization. To be ‘at home’ with the media is not an ‘innocent’ or ‘natural’ sense of belonging, but embedded in symbolic struggles, in which common sense understandings of territorial borders (typically of a geopolitical kind) interweave with more abstract or imaginary territorial constructs, such as taste cultures, genres, consumer segments, fan and supporter communities, and so on.

This is an illustration of how the media operate as machineries of spatial production, or, to be more specific, as *means of territorialization*. This particular function of the media is far from unitary, however. Different media hold different affordances when it comes to sustaining and negotiating boundaries. Nor is it a one-sided process. As already pointed out, territorial arrangements and understandings emerge through the interplay between media circulation, material as well as cultural, and social agency (what is sometimes referred to as ‘audience activity’). If we turn to Morley’s *Media, Modernity and Technology* from 2007 we can gather a somewhat different view of the territorializing role of media technologies—in the midst of mobilized telecommunication patterns. Mobile telephone networks, as opposed to land lines, accentuate the role of the geographical imagination, precisely because communicators can not be sure of where the other person is without asking. Thus,

Morley argues, the mobile becomes “a device for dealing with our anxieties about the problems of distance created by our newly mobile lifestyles” (ibid., p. 223). At the very same time, the very same medium may also function as an enclosed space in itself, a protective cocoon or capsule, which on the one hand lifts the individual out of a particular local context, and on the other hand brings him or her into a new kind of representational territory where a sense of familiarity and ease can prevail (ibid., p. 221). If we in this way consider the many overlapping functions and meanings of a single medium, generalized understandings of deterritorialization fall short unless they take into account the parallel social gravitation towards closure, distinction and the hearth, which is integral to most life forms, as well as an operationalized category among media and culture industries.

The point of departure for reaching a complex understanding of territorial reconfiguration must thus be to regard space as a *multidimensional* and *processual* category. This is why we in this book consistently envision space as a *social space*, following the legacies of Henri Lefebvre (1974/1991) and Pierre Bourdieu (1979/1984). While it is indeed a complicated task to elaborate a finite analytical position that brings together Lefebvre’s and Bourdieu’s views of social space, the important point here is that their perspectives entail a possibility to critically *think space and communication together*. In Lefebvre, this possibility stems from his notion of a *triadic social space*—constituted by perceived space (spatial practice, material formations), conceived space (representations of space, e.g., media texts) and lived space (spaces of representation, e.g., myths and imageries)—where none of the three realms can be separated from the others. In Bourdieu, it is especially his view of *habitus* as the structuring mechanisms between the space of social positions and the space of classifying and classified tastes and lifestyles that is helpful. Altogether, Lefebvre and Bourdieu share a view of space as a processual realm of social and cultural struggle, and a view of communication as a structured practice that (re)produces social space as a cultural-material formation.

Accordingly, communicative action must be thoroughly contextualized; approached as a social practice among others. While a particular kind of activity is classified according to the dominant structure of classification, corresponding to Bourdieu’s hierarchies of social space, and thus associated with certain groups and their tastes, there is also a potential for slight variation and negotiation, which may gradually, albeit just very slowly, alter the structures themselves. As Bourdieu (ibid., pp. 209–11) points out in a discussion of sports, “[b]ecause agents apprehend objects through the schemes of perception and appreciation of their habitus, it would be naïve to suppose that all practioners of the same sport (or any other practice) confer the same meaning on their practice or even, strictly speaking, that they are practising the same practice.” This observation leads us back to Doreen Massey’s opening statement regarding spatial multiplicity, as well as to Morley’s examples of

mediated territories. Even though people in diverse spaces use similar media texts or genres, or interact through space-binding communication networks they do not merge into one entity. Rather, such globalizing processes generate new frontiers of social and symbolic struggle, in which issues of territorial belonging and control are inescapable.

Online territories are in this regard no different from other territories. If we by territory mean a bounded social space of individual or collective mastery, it follows that no territory can be understood as only material, only symbolic, or only imagined, but evolves through the triadic interplay suggested by Lefebvre. The mechanisms for inclusion and exclusion are anchored in material-economic realities, which in particular have to do with the very access to media and networking resources, as well as in cultural code systems and pre-understandings, which sometimes exclude entire social groups from making use of the media in a meaningful way. Typically these structures are intertwined with one another. The concept of online territory, then, does not refer to an exclusive realm of 'online practices' (especially since the latter notion is gravely problematic in itself). On the contrary, the concept highlights the extensions and reconfigurations of pre-existing means of territorialization, be they cultural, economic, or geopolitical, as well as the potential for new types of social territories to take shape, enabled by online connectivity and sociability.

If we, for instance, consider the form and content of a photo sharing site such as Flickr it may at first glance appear like an open-ended, deterritorialized realm of online interaction and appearance, where the boundaries between private and public are blurred, and where geographical distances are overcome. However, one must not underestimate the fact that pre-established territorial formations such as 'the home,' whether we regard such a category from the viewpoint of the nation-state or the domestic setting, still exist, and even resonate with the conceived space of online representations. It is an established conception that even mobile, networked media in most social groups function not as extensive 'technologies of cosmos,' but primarily as 'technologies of the hearth'; as "imperfect instruments by which people try, in conditions of mundane deterritorialization, to maintain something of the security of cultural location" (Tomlinson, 2008, p. 68). Here, we may envision not only the maintenance of social and cultural bonds among people on the move, whether commuters, tourists or migrant groups, but also a more general praxis of social reproduction.

What must be kept in mind too, is that territories are not sealed entities in the first place, but defined through the rules and resources through which socio-spatial control is exercised. Letting guests into our homes, or showing selected others pictures from our private lives, are integral parts of the production of 'home-territories.' But, again, such practices may be carried out in different ways, and mean dif-

ferent things to different groups. Online photo sharing is hence embraced by certain groups; detested and rejected by others, and to even others an inaccessible or alien phenomenon—which is why online spaces must be understood foremost as extensions of the symbolic struggles of social space, rather than as an exclusive realm of placeless interaction.

At the same time online media attain qualities that in their capacity of means of territorialization set them apart from for instance print media and broadcasting. This has to do with their socio-spatial quality as arenas for mutual cultural expression and networking, which at a general level means that people can engage, or indeed experiment, in a more unrestrained manner with a multiplicity of socio-cultural belongings. In this view, online spaces allow for the exploration and construction of liminal ‘elsewheres,’ more or less disembedded from the constraints of social space (see Hetherington, 1998, Ch 5). Such ‘elsewheres’ may for instance represent alternative tastes, lifestyles and ethical holdings, and are important sites of social imagination and reflexivity. For particular groups the availability of online social platforms may even mean that for the first time there is an actual opportunity to create a more enduring sense of identity, such as in the case of sexually alternative lifestyles, which have long been denied public access and appearance (see e.g. McGrath, 2004). The interaction and expressivity channeled through online media spaces may hence ignite the formation of new emancipatory territories—a potential that challenges the institutionalized exclusivity of most other parts of the public sphere.

We are here reminded of Roger Silverstone’s (2007) vision of *mediapolis*, a descriptive and normative concept for investigating the wholeness of media culture: “The mediapolis is, I intend, the mediated space of appearance in which the world appears and in which the world is constituted in its worldliness, and through which we learn about those who are and who are not like us” (ibid., p. 31). Although Silverstone is careful to point out that mediapolis is indeed, like the original Greek *polis*, an often elitist and exclusive space, he also asserts that mediapolis carries the promise of an extended *cosmopolitan realism*. This means that the people of mediapolis (which then includes the totality of media forms) are potentially aware that there are no entirely separate worlds, but that ‘the other’ is both different and the same. Our suggestion that online media operate as new means of territorialization does not contradict Silverstone’s view. On the contrary, it is precisely through the remediation of prevailing territories, and through the constitution of alternative ones, that the diversities and similarities of the world can be made to appear. In spite of the symbolic battles and social divisions that set different groups, communities and populations apart from one another, territorial representations (as an essential component of territorialization as such) can indeed contribute to the kind of ethic that Silverstone proclaims: “it is in the experienced dialectic of sameness and difference

that the possibility of a personal or communal ethics emerges, and it is in the mediated *representation* of that dialectic that the equivalent possibility of a media ethics emerges” (ibid., p. 16, italics original). In this regard *online territory* is not merely a socio-critical concept, but a concept that entails a utopian impetus as well. Of course, a recognition of such an impetus should in no way preclude a critical analysis of *dystopian* elements ever-present in materialities that shape social territories. But the fact that such territories are always marked by flux and the potentiality such instability brings is what maintains the possibility of social change.

POWER AND CONTROL IN SEE-THROUGH SPACES

While power inequalities are far from leveled merely by virtue of the penetration of technology into almost every domain of life, the shape technology takes, in conjunction with other social dynamics, has impacted power geometries and social relations in significant ways, making the distinction between the “real” and the “virtual” even more obsolete. For one, the very inequalities and socio-political gridlocks (such as the environmental crisis) that mark social space and territorial politics are mirrored in the materialities that govern the politics of the online. The fact that computer waste is transported to “lesser developed” national territories to be dumped, creating health hazards for their human communities; and, that two Google searches from a desktop computer allegedly leads to the release of the same amount of carbon dioxide as boiling a kettle (and the irony that such information can only be retrieved through an online search) are but only two examples of the impossibility of conceiving of power and politics as simply *online vs. offline*. Added to this should be the fact that many of us are using/abusing technology from the safety of our social space in the prosperous West, yet, as a direct consequence of centuries-old spatial politics, there are violent territorial struggles “elsewhere” fueled by corporate giants that manufacture that very same technology—those elsewheres being mostly bypassed by the “new media revolution.” As such, online and offline are spatial extensions of each other in reproducing power and social (dis)order.

A significant transformation that further makes such a distinction redundant has been the growing permeation of technologies that allow for both the pervasive monitoring of everyday life and the embedding of surveillance in networked sociality. Just as surveillance and administrative power through the collation of information and direct monitoring were, as Giddens (1985) famously argued, defining characteristics of modernity and the nation-state form, so a diffuse and complex entanglement of surveillant practice, resembling a rhizomatic whole (see Haggerty and Ericson, 2000 and Deleuze and Guattari, 1986) lies at the core of power and social relations in the late-modern era. In the face of digitization as Lyon discerns

(2007, p. 54), Giddens' distinction between supervision and coded information becomes obsolete (i.e. information collation becomes surveillance itself) and surveillance is no longer bound within the territory of the nation-state, but engaged in by an amalgamation of commercial, state, non-state and military entities, and used for a variety of governmental or non-governmental purposes.

The use of new applications such as online social networking and mobile communications is a case in point. Networked sociality leads to new experiences of community and community-building, new senses of security, control and freedom, and more vulnerability to the monitoring of communication and consumption habits, lifestyle choices and private lives. There is a dual dynamic at work: the global consumer culture feeds into and from such motives and their extensions in the form of new technological applications. The transformation of personal territory into public domain (and the accompanying commodification) is well accommodated by the architecture of online media. Consequently, places online continuously spatialize and publicize what formerly lay in the domain of the human and institutional selves. As such, online territories are governed by a transcending logic of social control and a multitude of power geometries of varying scale and form.

Furthermore, new modes of mediated sociality blur the boundaries between freedom/dependence and labor/leisure. There exists a social ambivalence between, on the one side, freedom and flexibility, and dependency and social control on the other. The increasing potential for freedom and flexibility can be found in, for example, the possibility of distance working, working while traveling, establishing professional contacts, marketing both products and oneself globally, and as taking care of "private" affairs while at work. These types of advantages are normally highlighted when new technologies are "sublime" (Mosco, 2004), and elevated to a dominant ideology.

METAPHYSICS OF THE ONLINE AND THE OFFLINE

Because what separates online media in their latest manifestation from earlier forms of new media is a marked switch from representation to presentation and produsage, to treat *online territory* as a conceptual framework also warrants discussion on the metaphysics of 'the online' and 'the offline.' Much of the enchantment related to "the online" (emancipation, connectivity, growth, etc.), can be translated into a form of ideologically fuelled metaphysic, as well as the opposite: the rejection of "the online" as a threat to stability, family values and even humanity as based on a metaphysic of the offline. In this respect, a particularly valuable and inspiring vein of thinking can be found in the writings of Cresswell (2002). Rooted in the work of scholars such as Relph (1976), Malkki (1992), Virilio (1986), Deleuze & Guattari (1986), and Clifford (1997), Cresswell outlines how the concepts of

“sedentarist” and “nomadic” metaphysics can be useful tools for the investigation and understanding of “intimately connected concepts” of “place, mobility, representation and practice” (Cresswell, 2002, p. 11).

For Cresswell, the *sedentarist metaphysic*—built upon the work of Heidegger—emphasizes the position that to be human is to both understand and know your place in the world; in short, to know one’s home. To have and understand one’s place and to know where one belongs are essential human needs, and “place as home is described as perhaps the most important significance-giving factor in human life.” Place and home, in this respect, are moral concepts that are closely linked to notions of authenticity. From the perspective of sedentary metaphysics, mobility, on the other hand, is a problem to be solved “with recourse to place and roots,” and marked by the absence of commitment, attachment and involvement, thus requiring us “to think of mobile people in wholly negative ways.” With the evolution of feminist, poststructuralist and postmodern theory, however, sedentarist metaphysics was replaced by what Cresswell calls a *nomadic metaphysics* in which place is marginalized, and travel, flow, flexibility and transgressions are celebrated.

The concepts of sedentarist and nomadic metaphysics, and the concomitant epistemological arguments associated with these positions, are reflected in a great deal of academic and popular discourse in relation to online and offline activities (more often than not reflecting the aforementioned “enchantment” with the online). A particularly salient example of this is the popular discourse on the use of social media that emerged before, during and after the Iranian presidential elections of June 2009 (Christensen, 2009). The (supposed) use of social networking media such as Twitter, Flickr and YouTube by anti-government, pro-Mousavi protesters in Tehran in the weeks following the disputed elections was held up as an example of the cosmopolitan nature of young, educated Iranians frustrated with decades of repression. The appropriation of “modern” communication technologies for the purposes of organizing protest, informing the global news media of events and interacting with users outside of Iran (in short, the nomadic metaphysical represented by the young Iranian protesters) was seen to be in stark contrast with the repressive, backward, sedentarist metaphysical represented by the guardians of the 1979 Iranian Revolution: individuals trapped—according to popular discourse—in outdated notions of home, tradition, place and space. This constructed dichotomy of *traditional-religious* (“offline”) versus *modern-secular* (“online”), in which the latter group is marked by technologically savvy, cosmopolitan sensibility and the production and reception of rapid flows of information, falls into line with what Sheller and Urry (2006) call the “grand narrative” of mobility, fluidity or liquidity” (p. 210). What the discourses surrounding the Iranian case—and other examples of popular and academic enchantment with the online—ignore, however, is the highly complex interplay between the online and the offline, and the ways in which even groups defined

as sedentary and traditional (such as the Iranian power elite) extend their offline power into the online realm.

As we have argued throughout, as a concept, we construe *online territories* as not exclusively what lies inside the domain of the “virtual,” as the shape that the online takes is also very much contingent upon what is excluded, voluntarily withdrawn, not there or simply not possible, and on territorial struggles (material or otherwise) that give way to new or altered forms of communicative practice. Indeed, it is more fruitful to consider the new and evolving “set of questions, theories and methodologies” raised by the new mobilities paradigm, rather than falling back upon “totalising or reductive descriptions” of the modern world. (Sheller & Urry, 2006, p. 210). What marks the realm(s) of online territories is the tension between, on the one hand, the affordances—such as complex forms of sociality and leisure, the restructuring of the public sphere and social space or the partial/perceived elimination of spatio-temporal borders—inherent in the architecture of new technologies, and the materialities—such as power relations, global human flows, access to economic resources or corporeal manifestations of urban space—of the offline. In essence, we would like to diverge from the vein of media and communication studies that subordinated sociologically informed questions related with technology to mythical accounts of the “Age of the Computer,” to borrow Mosco’s (2004) phrase. We further agree with Mosco that when technologies cease to be sublime and enter the realm of the banal, they become significant sources for social and economic change. As we write in 2010, the online has long-since joined the ranks of the banal, and virtuality is further and further distanced from fantasy and hyper-reality and is very much in the domain of mundane, everyday corporeality.

Ultimately, the emergence and evolution of online territories is an extremely complex, dialectical process, intertwined with the macro-dynamics that govern mode of production and economic relations, on the one hand, and mediation, negotiation and imagination on the other. Some in the form of case studies, and some more theoretically oriented, the chapters in this volume address a variety of key issues and questions within a conceptual scope accommodated by *online territories*.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK: THREE PATHWAYS OF EXPLORATION

With the aim of situating each essay in a particular context, this book is organized around three conceptual constellations: *Everyday Intersections*; *Citizenship, Public Space and Communication Online*; and *Transnational/Translocal Nexuses*. Each constellation opens with a brief introduction and addresses a particular realm of social interaction, containing certain codes and conventions that are elaborated both

online and offline—thus creating particular territories and identities. While the *Everyday* can be seen as the common ground for all social practice, the *Civic/Public* and the *Transnational/Translocal* consider the superstructural implications of interactive networks vis-à-vis political processes and global (trans)migration. The individual chapters then explore online territories in closer detail in order to provide a situated understanding of how social spaces and communities are (re)produced through media practices within the realms of the *Everyday*, the *Civic/Public*, and the *Transnational/Translocal*. The book has an afterword/response by David Morley.

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