For a Geography of Communication

André Jansson

andre.jansson@k3.mah.se

Konst, kultur och kommunikation

Malmö högskola

> We may be sure that representations of space have a practical impact, that they intervene in and modify spatial *textures* which are informed by effective knowledge and ideology. Representations of space must therefore have a substantial role and a specific influence in the production of space. Their intervention occurs by way of construction – in other words, by way of architecture, conceived of not as the building of a particular structure, palace or monument, but rather as a project embedded in a spatial context and a texture which call for 'representations' that will not vanish into the symbolic or imaginary realms (Lefebvre, 1974/1991: 42, italics in original).

The linkage between geography and communication lies in the fact that (a) all forms of representation occur *in space*, and that (b) all spaces are produced *through representation*. In other words, theories of spatial production must also to a certain extent be understood as theories of communication/mediation. Maps, architectural drawings, as well as the built environment, are instances of mediation between spatial experience, visions and material (pre)conditions – though rarely defined as such, nor very often included in media and communication studies. However, due to the development of late modern communications such demarcations are contested. The implementation and appropriation of digital ICT networks blur the boundaries not only between geographical regions (households, cities, etc), and between types of regions (local-global; private-public, etc), but also between the dimensions that constitute regions themselves – such as material, symbolic and imaginary spaces (cf Couldry, 2000; Bolin, 2003: 14–18). Accordingly, contemporary media studies must not only 'cope' with new spatial ambiguities. It is also *the discipline* which has as its very object of study the technological and cultural processes that *produce* spatial ambiguities, in particular by means of *globalization*.

As I will propose in this paper, the ephemeral character of contemporary culture and society calls for *a spatial turn* in media studies. There are already clear indications that such a turn is on its way. But no account has yet been formulated of its full potential. I will argue that the spatial turn might lead to the emergence of a new sub-field within cultural studies, *the geography of communication*, which would incorporate analyses of *how communication produces space and how space produces communication*.

The paper is divided into three sections. In the first I try to identify the processes and conditions that produce spatial ambiguities, defined in terms of *mobility*, *interactivity* and *convergence*. Following the theoretical heritage of Harold Innis (1951/1964), I argue that informational society nurtures an ideology of *hyper-space-biased communication*. In the second part I clarify why and in what way the *ritual view* of communication (which has today widely reinstated the more functionalistic transmission model), as defined by James Carey (1989), has to be reworked in order to account for the prevalent issues of spatial ambiguity. Finally, in the third section, revisiting the theories of Goffman, Giddens and Lefebvre, I introduce the concept of *texture* as an alternative view of communication – that is, *communication as spa-*

tial production. As indicated in Lefebvre's quotation above, texture sits in-between the material and the representational realms of space, providing a site for studying re-articulations of historical spaces, as well as contemporary mediations (material as well as symbolic) through which spaces are produced, dissolved and reconfigured into meaningful patterns. This also implies that the spatial turn involves a material turn – a turn towards the spatial practices (localizations, arrangements and movements of people and objects) which in a very concrete sense *put communication in (or out of) its place.*

The Regime of Hyper-Space-Biased Communication – and its Epistemological Consequences

In his intriguing collection of essays, entitled *The Bias of Communication*, Harold Innis (1951/1964) ventures into a broad exploration of the historical relationship between a society's predominant means of communication and prevailing patterns of knowledge and power. His analyses range from the earliest of civilizations (such as the Egyptian, Greek and Roman empires) to 20th century industrial society, and revolve around the ground-breaking distinction between *time-biased* and *space-biased* media. While the former are characteristically marked by heaviness and durability (such as stone), the latter are light and transportable (such as papyrus). Through this distinction Innis associates the use of different means of communication with different goals that have governed the exercise of socio-political power in a society. While the durability of time-biased media has served the ambitions of religious empires in their quest for eternal monopolies of knowledge, space-biased media have typically served the interests of expansionist military empires.

While it is notoriously difficult to pinpoint any objective distinction between a time-biased and a space-biased medium – since the distinction largely depends upon the social context in which the comparison is relevant – the very conceptualization is *good to think*. If we borrow the terminology of Raymond Williams (1974), the 'bias of communication' provides an illusive notion not only of *technological assets*, but also of the broader ideologies that circumscribe and articulate media as *cultural forms*.[1]

So how can we think about contemporary Western/global media culture? The diagnosis of Innis is clear. In the essay *A Plea for Time* (included in *The Bias of Communication*) he argues that industrial society over-emphasizes spatial concerns, neglecting more enduring social values pertaining to traditions and communion in time. Innis contends that "the tragedy of modern culture has arisen as inventions in commercialism have destroyed a sense of time" (1951/1964: 86), and that "the essence of living in the moment and for the moment is to banish all individual continuity. […] Sculpture has been sacrificed to music" (ibid: 90). Thus Western, industrial society is a society whose ideological superstructure sustains ephemeral, space-biased communication – an orientation that saturates social and economic life in its entirety:

> Devices emphasizing rapid turnover of goods, whether technological (for example, in the substitution of buses for street railways), or commercial (for example, in the introduction of pennies to secure newspaper sales and in an emphasis on changing fashions as in the case of motor cars or the publication of books by popular authors), tend to conflict with long-term investment supported by savings voluntary or compulsory, whether insurance or old age pensions (ibid: 74–5).

---

1 There are in fact several interesting parallels between Williams and Innis, as to their ways of comprehending the technology-society relationship. It is also notable that Innis' theories do not express much of the technological determinism (or, utopianism) characterizing his intellectual successor Marshall McLuhan.

There is indeed a conservative tone to these conclusions. Innis builds his forecast on rather sweeping claims regarding the historical deficiencies of societies failing to strike the *balance* between governments of time and space – claims which might be interpreted as social nostalgia accompanying the experience of modern society and culture. As Stephen Kern (1983/2003: Ch 5) notes in *The Culture of Time and Space 1880–1918*, the obsession with speed and temporal dissemination in ideology and art (e g Futurism), as well as in technology and science (e g Taylorism), was in the early 20th century paralleled with a sentimental countercurrent. In a similar vein, Innis' analyses articulate the tension between a speeding reality and the memory of a slower past.

Nevertheless, it is precisely through people's experiences and conceptions of a 'speeding reality' we can gain support for Innis' relativistic arguments. Within the social sciences thinkers like Joshua Meyrowitz (1985) and Paul Virilio (1986, 1997) have analyzed the far-ranging social consequences of new media and transportation technologies, pointing to altered perceptions of past-present-future, as well as space and place. More recently Manuel Castells, in his trilogy of the Information Age, has sketched the contours of an 'information technological paradigm' (Castells, 1996/2000: 69–76) which binds emerging technological potentials, that is, digital media, to a particular ideological form, that is, the cult of networks, flows and instantaneous (trans)actions (see also Mattelart, 1996/2000). As a result, a new ephemeral geography of symbolic flows is created beyond the realms of geopolitical space. Perhaps less akin to Innis' arguments, but just as suggestive, sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (2000) has described society of the early 21st century as an ongoing shift from *solid* (or heavy) to *liquid* (or light) *modernity*. While essentially sidestepping the concept of communication, Bauman provides an analysis that validates and accentuates Innis' theses from the 1940's:

> Duration changes from an asset into a liability; the same may be said about everything bulky, solid and heavy – everything that hinders and restricts the move. Giant industrial plants and corpulent bodies have had their day: once they bore witness to their owners' power and might; now they presage defeat in the next round of acceleration so signal impotence. Lean body and fitness to move, light dress and sneakers, cellular telephones (invented for the use of the nomad who needs to be 'constantly in touch'), portable or disposable belongings – are the prime cultural tokens of the era of instantaneity (Bauman, 2000: 128).

Although the process of communication is not sufficiently examined, Bauman's theory points precisely to its increasingly ambiguous appearance. The lightness of media is paralleled in lightness and flexibility in terms of clothing, belongings, housing, and so on. Work and leisure, production and consumption, are saturated with the ideology of mobility and connectedness, which is essentially a matter of transcending and/or erasing spatial boundaries by means of communication. Communication must here be understood in terms of *both material and symbolic* fluidity, with increasingly vague distinctions between one another. Lightness within the symbolic realm ('mediation') presupposes and reinforces lightness within the material realm ('transportation') and vice versa – a mutual process through which the regime of space-biased communication is legitimized and globalized. Then, as Armand Mattelart (1996/2000) puts it in his history of the network society, "the ideology of limitless 'communication' […] takes over from the older ideology of limitless progress" (ibid: 120).

If industrial society, following Innis, was a space-biased society, post-industrialization, or informationalization, implies an extension of this bias, up to the point where space is no longer a reliable category. We may thus speak of a regime of *hyper-space-biased communication*, closely related to the ideology of 'globalism'. While older theories of media and communication, and in particular the transmission model, were outcomes of the so-called 'mass society' and presupposed clear boundaries between media producers and audiences,

between texts and contexts, hyper-space-biased communication embodies a range of spatial ambiguities, which shake the epistemological foundation of 'media studies'. My suggestion is that these ambiguities are to be summarized within three categories: (1) *mobility*, (2) *convergence*, and (3) *interactivity*.

Mobility manifests itself as two inter-related phenomena: (a) mobility of *people*, and (b) mobility of *media technologies*. While media research has traditionally dealt with media practices occurring in particular contexts, predominantly the domestic sphere (e g Morley, 1986; Lull, 1991; Moores, 1993), the saturation of media texts in everyday life implies that a large share of them are consumed *on the move*. People walking through an ordinary cityscape, or driving their car on a suburban highway, encounter innumerable texts of various kinds, most of them commercial. Although the majority of publicity images are locally fixed, people's own movement creates a sense of *streaming* or *flowing* messages. As John Berger put it in his pioneering work on visual culture, *Ways of Seeing* (1972: 130), "one has the impression that publicity images are continually passing us, like express trains on their way to some distant terminus". These cultural encounters in public space occur 'involuntarily', one might say. However, through marketing research the stream itself is becoming less random. For example, people's patterns of mobility are mapped in order to know where to locate certain kinds of public advertising. Those who live at particular addresses may even get the opportunity to drive sponsored cars, exposing the 'right' brands to the 'right' target groups, as they conduct their everyday journeys. Accordingly, as argued by a number of scholars (e g Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998) the so called 'audience studies' paradigm must be revised. *Audiences* are not as stable as once supposed. And *mediation* is an increasingly open-ended process.

The picture is further complicated if we combine the mobility of people with the increasingly mobile character of *media technologies*. The 'mobile medium' is not an invention of our time; books and magazines can be held up as symbols of the travelling cultures of heavy industrialism, associated with the leisure time on trains, steam-liners, etc. In the age of informationalism, however, stationary and immobile media seem more and more obsolete, like *exceptions* from the rule. And as technologies are becoming increasingly portable, they are also becoming more closely *attached to the moving body* – through head-sets, ear-phones, palm-pilots, lap-tops, etc.

The epistemological problems of a 'mobilized' society has been widely acknowledged during the last years, articulated in attempts to formulate new research approaches, such as 'multi-local anthropology' (cf Marcus and Fischer, 1986: 90–94) and 'mobile sociology' (cf Urry, 1999; 2003). From a media studies point of view, the intersection of mobile people and mobile media raises ambiguities foremost regarding the status of *texts* and *contexts*. Through material and/or symbolic mobility a text may be transformed into a context, and vice versa – and it is only, if at all, through rigorous phenomenological research we may encounter these dynamics. We may, for example, envision individuals as they enter a railway station; talking in their mobile telephones or listening to streaming radio while checking the times and tracks of their departures, rushing on to their trains, showing their tickets to a conductor, looking for their seats and eventually taking up their books, newspapers and lap-tops in order to engage in work or amusement. *What is (not) mediated?* How and when are we to distinguish *texts* from *contexts*?

Secondly, the regime of hyper-space-biased communication involves spatial ambiguities in terms of (a) *technological*, and (b) *cultural convergence*. The first kind has already been mentioned, and convincingly scrutinized by writers such as Castells (1996/2000) and Bolter and Grusin (1999). In short, it refers to the development of multi-media networks, through which computers, telephones, music players, cameras, etc, are connected and re-articulated as nodes, or hubs, of digital information flows. Technological convergence creates not only new modes of production and consumption, but also rapid alterations within for example private

and public surveillance (cf Norris et al, 1998; Newburn, 2001). Altogether, this means that particular media technologies, and particular forms of representation, become difficult to separate from one another. This is also to say that one of the traditional starting points for media studies, *the discrete text*, is no longer as pre-given as it used to be – absorbed as it might be in complex, open-ended inter-media/inter-text patterns and processes.

A somewhat similar analytical problem arises due to *cultural convergence*, which points to the blurred boundaries between 'media texts' in their traditional sense (newspapers, movies, etc) and other cultural artefacts. By means of the aestheticized post-fordist logic of production, that is, *reflexive accumulation* (Lash and Urry, 1994), the contemporary appearance of consumer culture, or, better, *image culture* (Jansson, 2002), fosters a successive evaporation of the distinctions between symbolic and material artefacts, between 'texts' and 'commodities'. Commodities are produced/designed to carry meanings – as 'commodity-signs'. Media messages are both (re)presented and circulated as commodities. This implies that the boundaries between imaginary, symbolic and material spaces become negotiable and volatile. The everyday lifeworld merges with the world of media texts.

Finally, there is the dilemma of *interactivity*, which can be divided into processes of (a) *socialization* and (b) *materialization*. Socializing interactivity points to the new opportunities for interaction at-a-distance, that is, *on-line*. Following this perspective, the term interactivity has so far been predominantly associated with Internet related phenomena, such as MUD:s, on-line communities, etc. Given the process of technological and cultural convergence, however, it is reasonable to speak of interactivity in a much broader sense. An increasing share of contemporary tv-programming, for example, involves interactive components. Viewers may send their SMS to a televised debate, and see them visualize on the screen, or to a pop music show, as expressions of taste and socio-cultural affiliation. Within certain genres, such as the 'reality-show', the interaction between 'audience', 'producers' and 'participants' is essential for the narrative (as well as for profit-making). The demarcation-lines between 'producers' and 'consumers', between contexts of production and consumption, are *problematized* – which is not to say that they are *disappearing*. In some instances, such as the web-community, producers and consumers are practically the same. But when it comes to for example TV-productions, as argued by Nick Couldry (2000) in *The Place of Media Power*, there is no doubt who are in the controlling-end and receiving-end of cultural and economic flows (see also Massey, 1991). Although media narratives may seem increasingly negotiable, one cannot overlook the "inequality in the power of 'naming' social reality which the media themselves constitute" (Couldry, 2000: 22).

Reflexive accumulation also celebrates interactivity in terms of *materialization*, as expressed through the mutual reflexivity among commodity producers and consumers. Refined market research, segmentation and image-making, on the one hand, and identity-work and life-styling, on the other hand, make way for increasingly 'tailor-made' products. The materialization of commodity-signs becomes 'narrow-cast' rather than 'broad-cast'; 'personalized' rather than 'massified'. This is not to say that the logic of Fordism and mass-society has turned obsolete altogether; that consumers are now liberated and free to create 'their own' free-floating sign-systems. But it is to say that the circuits of cultural classification and materialization are pluralized and less easily predicted. What media research has to deal with is not just cultural mediations, but also *spatial mediations*, that is, the transformative interconnectedness between sites of production/consumption.

In this section I have argued that informational society involves an extension of the regime space-biased of communication, once predicted by Harold Innis. Via the categories of *mobility*, *convergence* and *interactivity* I have argued that media studies are facing a number of epistemological dilemmas, that is, the *ephemerality of texts*; the *ephemerality of contexts*, and

the *ephemerality of text-context relationships*. But do we really have to care about texts and contexts?

The Ritual view of Communication – and the Identification of a Spatial Turn within Media Studies

Who says what to whom, in which channel, and with what effect? The classical transmission view of communication was for a long time, beginning in the 1920's, the dominant theoretical underpinning of (mass) media research. Analyses of media and communication were predominantly, and explicitly (Lasswell, 1948; Schramm, 1963), functionalistic, emphasizing the discrete 'uses,' 'gratifications' and 'effects' of discrete media 'messages'. In other words, the transmission view of communication is concerned with the linear *extension of messages in space*. And due to its functionalistic, quantitative, and even experimental, stance, its full virtues can be reached only through the theoretical *isolation of texts and contexts* – that is, symbolic, social and material spaces – in terms of independent *variables*. The perspective is thus not very well suited to illuminate the complex characteristics of everyday life, nor the composite cultural transformations of society. As argued above, the hyper-space-biased character of late modern media culture asks for a radical rethinking of the categories *text* and *context*.

If we turn to the main competitor of the transmission view, the so-called *ritual view of communication*, we encounter dilemmas of an entirely different kind. Explicitly formulated by the American cultural theorist James W Carey in the essay *A Cultural Approach to Communication* from 1975 (1989), the ritual view was founded upon a critique of Western, space-biased society. Re-vitalizing the intellectual heritage of pragmatism – in particular John Dewey – the perspective has many common denominators with the analyses of Harold Innis. According to Carey (ibid: 15–16), ever since the onset of the age of exploration and discovery, Western societies in general, and American society in particular, has reproduced and epitomized a linear view of communication as *spatial transmission*. This bias constitutes a social structure through which the much older, religiously grounded view of communication as 'sharing', 'participation' and 'communion' has been underplayed in Western thought. Carey asks for a revision, that is, a renewed interest in *communication in time*:

> A ritual view of communication is directed not toward the extension of messages in space but toward the maintenance of society in time; not the act of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs (ibid: 18).

What must be underscored, however, is that Carey never goes as far as to argue that the ritual view is to *replace* the transmission view:

> Neither of these counterposed views of communication necessarily denies what the other affirms. A ritual view does not exclude the processes of information transmission or attitude change. It merely contends that one cannot understand that these processes aright except insofar as they are cast within an essentially ritualistic view of communication and social order. Similarly, even writers indissolubly wedded to the transmission view of communication must include some notion, such as Malinowski's phatic communion, to attest however tardily to *the place of ritual action in social life* (ibid: 22, italics added).

Although the ritual view involves a critique of space-biased communication and ideology, the perspective is not indifferent to questions of space – quite the opposite. The *cultural turn* towards "ritual action in social life" – also inspired by Raymond Williams' (1961/1980) early writings on culture and communication as *common knowledge* and *experience* – is also a turn towards *the meanings of place* and the *places of meaning*, which are continually shared and transmitted through communication. It is, we may summarize, a turn *from text to context*.

From this follow two epistemological implications. First, the particular acts of writing (text production) and reading (text consumption) become secondary to the socio-cultural contexts, and their history, in which communication takes place. The ritual view emphasizes broad cultural patterns as they are reproduced in contexts, rather than the meanings of particular texts. Secondly, the context of production is no longer seen as the opposite of the context of consumption; places of encoding are not the antipodes of places of decoding. Since the focus is upon meaning circulation and reproduction over time, processes of encoding and decoding are immersed in broader structures of historical continuity.

An empirical example of how this shift affected media studies can be drawn from David Morley's two major works of the 1980's: *The 'Nationwide' Audience* (1980) and *Family Television* (1986). The first study was a direct continuation of Stuart Hall's (1980) encoding/decoding model, which to its form, albeit informed by interpretative theory, assembled the transmission view of communication. Morley conducted a number of focus group interviews in order to unveil how different social groups interpreted the current affairs TV-programme *Nationwide*, and how these patterns of reception articulated various social experiences. Despite its relevant confirmation of Hall's theory, the *Nationwide* study was, as Morley (1992) himself later argued, more or less artificial, isolated as it was from the 'natural contexts' of viewing. In *Family Television*, then, Morley – by means of longer, 'ethnographic' interviews in British working class households – explored the negotiated character of television *viewing as a socially and spatially located praxis*. The focus shifted from the interpretation of particular texts to the social rituals (cf Carey, 1989) and the negotiations of historical (gendered) structures of feeling (cf Williams, 1961/1984) that took place in relation to television. *Family Television* thus testifies that the cultural turn is also a *contextual turn*, which is also an *ethnographic turn*, responding to the breeding social experiences of television culture. If the modern bias of transmission over communion, information over experience, resembled the dominant cultural form of print media, the visuality and domesticity of late modern television re-actualized the ritual, even sacred, aspects of communication.

Taken to its logical conclusion, the ritual view of communication implies that the epistemological dilemmas of mobility, convergence and interactivity – that is, the ephemerality of texts; the ephemerality of contexts, and the ephemerality of text-context relationships – are no longer to be understood as dilemmas. From a ritual point of view there is no need to care about vanishing distinctions, except insofar as they prevail in social experience.

This is not a satisfactory way of handling the spatial ambiguities of hyper-space-biased communication, however. It proves, rather, that the ritual view of communication falls short when it comes to understanding how communication in itself produces these spatial ambiguities, and how spatial ambiguities, in turn, affect communication (whether conceived of as 'transmission' or 'ritual'). David Morley's epistemological shift from *The 'Nationwide' Audience* to *Family Television* involved, for example, a reconsideration of *media in space*. But it did not problematize the boundaries of this (domestic) space, nor how communication reproduced/altered its constitution. The same thing might also be said about the majority of ethnographically oriented audience studies conducted in the 1980's and 1990's (e g Silverstone and Hirsch, 1992; Gauntlett and Hill, 1999). In its broadest sense, then, the ritual/contextual turn cannot be described as a *spatial turn*.

While Carey stated already in the 1970's that the ritual view could not provide the final solution to communication as social phenomenon, there is no doubt that his arguments have often been used as weapons in the paradigmatic battle between 'functionalists' and 'culturalists'. Then, would a deepened dialogue between these two strands suffice to solve the problems of hyper-space-biased communication? Clearly not – not as long as the followers of the transmission view take the illusory disentanglement of distinct texts and contexts as their very point of departure. Thinking of communication as the diffusion of messages *in space* is surely

not the same as thinking of *communication as the production of space*. A third way is needed. And due to the development from terrestrial to satellite television; from stationary to mobile telephones; from bulky office computers to networked lap-tops, however, it seems like such a third perspective is about to take form within media studies.

The first significant indication of a spatial turn was Joshua Meyrowitz' (1985) book *No Sense of Place*, which took up the legacies of Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan and combined it with Erving Goffman's interactionism. Meyrowitz' hypotheses regarding the lost significance of place attachment have been criticized for being overstated and technologically deterministic (in a McLuhanesque fashion). Nevertheless, *No Sense of Place* is today a classic, and seems even more pregnant in 2005 than it did in 1985.

A broader concern with spatiality can be discerned from the mid 1990's and onwards. Once again, the work of David Morley, who published the books *Spaces of Identity* (together with Kevin Robins) in 1995 and *Home Territories* in 2000 – seems emblematic for the broader trend. While *Spaces of Identity* is concerned with the new cultural geographies of Europe in the era of global media and political integration, *Home Territories* can be regarded as a more direct continuation of *Family Television*, now problematizing the concepts of home, household and family. Surveying a vast range of empirical material from across the globe Morley raises his perspective from the (seemingly) confined domestic spaces of the British working class to the open-ended identities of 'cosmopolitan' and diasporic communities. Space is no longer a pregiven, but a negotiable, mediated structure, in which the interplay between imaginary, symbolic and material dimensions provides the preconditions for identity work.

Home Territories is also significant for a broader epistemological development, in which media studies are joined with globalization studies. Other important theoretical works in this tradition are for example Arjun Appadurai's (1996) *Modernity at Large*; Ulf Hannerz' (1996) *Transnational Connections*, and John Tomlinson's (1999) *Globalization and Culture*. On a more empirical level one must foremost put forward ethnographic fieldwork in which the spatial frameworks of media practices and media flows are problematized. Two illusive examples are Nick Couldry's (2000) *The Place of Media Power*, which focuses upon the experiences of people who have themselves entered the scenes of mediation (as 'witnesses' or 'pilgrims'), and the composite Swedish *Passages Project*, in which a group of researchers study the patterns of mediation that emanate from and (re)produce a suburban shopping centre in Stockholm (see Becker et al, 2001, 2002). Integral to this trend is, for obvious reasons, a development towards more interdisciplinary work. The distance between anthropologists, sociologists, geographers and communication scholars is constantly diminishing, which is particularly obvious in anthologies such as the anthropologically grounded *MediaWorlds* (Ginsburg et al, 2002) and the explicitly interdisciplinary *MediaSpace* (Couldry and McCarthy, 2004).

MediaSpace must also be advanced as the most promising attempt so far to delineate the contours of a spatial theory of communication – a reorientation which would involve the ambition to integrate media studies and geography. In the introductory chapter Nick Couldry and Anna McCarthy outline *MediaSpace* as a *conceptual realm*, discerning five analytical levels, ranging from the study of "media representations" to the study of "how media-caused entanglements of scale are variously experienced and understood in particular places" (ibid: 5–8). This is a valuable systematization. But what is not highlighted, however, is the new agenda that spatial theory might bring to media studies. From my point of view, *MediaSpace* does not only demarcate a new conceptual realm. It also anticipates what might be an emerging subfield within media and cultural studies: the *geography of communication*. I will in the next section propose some epistemological keystones for such a sub-field.

Textural Analysis – and the Re-Emergence of Materialism in Communication Theory

In her much-debated book on city planning, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs (1961: Ch 2) presents a vivid example of the street as a *scene*. The example comes from 'her own' street in New York, Hudson Street, and illustrates the regularities and ritual character of everyday life in a public setting. The morning rituals are easy to observe: The hairdresser puts out his chair on the pavement. A Mr Goldstein arranges the metal spirals showing that the hardware store is now open. School children flow in different directions on their way to different schools. Well-dressed men and women appear from the side streets heading for the bus stop or the subway, or catching a taxi, which miraculously shows up in the right moment. Jacobs describes these movements and interactions in terms of an established and non-random *street ballet* – a metaphor which is closely related to Erving Goffman's (1959) famous notion of social life as *performance*. She has seen the same rituals, with minor modifications, taking place on Hudson Street for more than ten years.

In the third chapter of *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* Jacobs tells the story of Mr Joe Cornacchia, the keeper of the local deli. Mr Cornacchia is more than a shopkeeper; he is also given the informal function of 'key-keeper', which means that the locals turn in their apartment keys to him if they are expecting visitors while away from home. This intermediary function between private and public is based on trust and an unspoken agreement of integrity, that is, 'no questions asked'. Mr Cornacchia is what Jacobs calls a 'public person' whose particular function also makes him (and the particular locale which he occupies) a social and communicational node; he is the mediator not only of keys but also of local news and information.
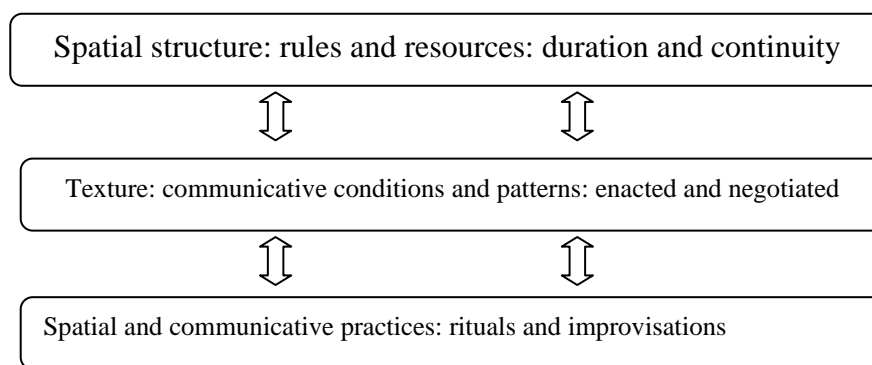
My point here is that inasmuch as Jacob's observations deal with scenes, rituals, performances and informal networks, they also deal with *textures*. Jacobs' two descriptions show, very much in line with Goffman's (1959) theories of *regionalization*, (a) that *spatial and communicative practices* within any given setting are *structured* according to pre-existing *spatial arrangements and resources*, as well as according to *temporal regularities* (most often of a cyclic character); (b) that material and symbolic mediations in a particular space tend to follow *formal and informal rules* pertaining to that particular space, and (c) that while *communicative practices* are attached to a *material basis*, be it technological or environmental, *spatial practices* (localizations, movements) hold a *communicative potential*. The patterns of spatial/communicative practices ('performances') and flows that emerge according to the structure of resources and rules ('scene' or 'stage'), and which also (re)produce the same structural characteristics, establish a meaningful and mediating *texture*. A texture is thus *observable* – as shown in Jacobs' texts – which is not, however, the same thing as 'objectively' definable. Rather, textures (of many different kinds) form an essential part of the *intersubjective lifeworld*, known and manageable through social *experience*, as described in phenomenological theory (see Schutz and Luckmann, 1973). Textural knowledge is a precondition for (inter)actions in regions across space.

This is also to say that space is both produced and understood *through texture*, that is, through a spatial materialization of culture, which implies that its features can be made available foremost through the virtues of ethnographic fieldwork. As anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) puts it in his celebrated essay on *Thick Description*:

> Doing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of 'construct a reading of') a manuscript – foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behaviour (ibid: 10).

Studying textures, then, is not merely about describing the communicative performances in certain spaces, such as the 'street ballet' discussed by Jacobs. It is simultaneously, and above all, a matter of unveiling the meaningful spatial structures and 'manuscripts' which make these performances possible, and which in turn contribute to the regionalization of space. Texture is thus a mediator between *spatial structure* and *communicative agency*; between regularities and improvisations; between then and now. It belongs to a family of intermediary concepts, such as 'interpretive scheme', 'facility' and 'norm', which articulate different aspects of what Anthony Giddens (1984: Ch 1) calls the process of *structuration* (see Figure 1) – "the modes in which [such] systems, grounded in the knowledgeable activities of situated actors who draw upon rules and resources in the diversity of action contexts, are produced and reproduced in interaction" (ibid: 25).

Figure 1.   The Epistemological Position of Texture

Spatial structure: rules and resources: duration and continuity

⇕   ⇕

Texture: communicative conditions and patterns: enacted and negotiated

⇕   ⇕

Spatial and communicative practices: rituals and improvisations

As shown so far, the analysis of texture does not belong to any exclusive domain of communication studies. Rather, the analysis of texture has its foundation in social and cultural theory, as formulated by thinkers like the before mentioned Goffman, Geertz and Giddens (let alone that the very concept is not discussed by any of these three). Then, in what sense does texture contribute to the *geography of communication*?

My point here is twofold: (1) Textural analyses approach *communication as spatial production*, and deal with a dialectic question: *How does communication produce space, and how does space produce communication?* (2) Textural analyses constitute an emerging academic field, which might be called the *geography of communication*.

Following this reorientation we may view the epistemological dilemmas of hyper-space-biased communication from a new perspective. Approaching communication as spatial production does not imply that we now have a method for defining, or isolating, clear-cut texts and contexts – the ambition of the transmission view. Nor is it a strategy for sidestepping the entire question of (vanishing) texts and contexts – the consequence of a strict ritual view. Approaching communication as spatial production implies that we can interpret the ambiguities of texts and contexts in terms of *altered textures*. In other words, textural analysis is not just a perspective in its own right. It is also an epistemological bridge between the transmission view and the ritual view.

On the one hand, texture provides a tool for understanding the relationship between spatial transformations and communicative processes, which in turn set the stage for analyses of 'texts' and 'contexts'. Investigations of textural alterations, such as the introduction of new

surveillance technologies in a city core, can create a crucial backdrop for more confined studies of 'transmissions', 'receptions' and 'effects'.

On the other hand, since texture embodies the sediments of spatial and communicative practices, which have taken place in a region over time, it provides a tool for analyzing the *historicity*, or the ritual character, of any given spatial structure. For example, Jacobs' description of Hudson Street bears witness of a texture with strong historical continuity – a texture which is closely tied to spatial structure.

It is through the notion of *textural historicity* we enter the domains of Henri Lefebvre's (1974/1991) theory of spatial production. The foundation of his theory is a tri-lateral dialectic between (1) *spatial practices*, (2) *representations of space*, and (3) *spaces of representation* (or *representational space*). In short, spatial practices refer to the activities and material conditions that prevail in a particular space and define its social nature. Representations of space are symbolic mediations, such as maps, drawings, etc, showing space as it *was*, as it *is*, or, perhaps most important, as it *could be*. Representational space, finally, refers to the realm of imagination and experience, that is, the myths, ideologies and pre-understandings through which social subjects come to understand space and its representations. I will not in this paper go into further detail as to how this dialectic operates. What is interesting here is that Lefebvre's theory incorporates one of very few social scientific accounts of the concept of texture:

> Paths are more important than the traffic they bear, because they are what endures in the form of the reticular patterns left by animals, both wild and domestic, and by people (in and around the houses of village or small town, as in the town's immediate environs). Always distinct and clearly indicated, such traces embody the 'values' assigned to particular routes: danger, safety, waiting, promise. This graphic aspect, which was obviously not apparent to the original 'actors' but which becomes quite clear with the aid of modern-day cartography, has more in common with a spider's web than with a drawing or plan. Could it be called a text, or a message? Possibly, but the analogy would serve no particulary useful purpose, and it would make more sense to speak of texture rather than of texts in this connection. […] Time and space are not separable within a texture so conceived: space implies time, and vice versa (ibid: 118).

Lefebvre's example stresses that textures are produced not only in space, but also *in time*. Studying textures is not to study random occasions of spatial and communicative practice, but the dominant paths and patterns that emerge through the repetition of practices within a more durable spatial structure. The unveiling of such patterns articulates textural historicity and provides a hermeneutic platform for closer analyses of the negotiated character of particular communicative situations. From this follow two important points:

First, texture must be understood as *a site of ideological reproduction and negotiation*. Since textures are "informed by effective knowledge and ideology" (ibid: 42), they also embody and express competing notions of how space and communication are to be organized in society. All such ideological patterns are, as we have seen, inherited through historical knowledge and myth, that is, through representational space. In this connection Lefebvre's (ibid: Ch 4–6) extensive discussion of how the *dialectic of spatial production* has taken on different shapes under different historical regimes provides a fascinating parallel to Innis' notion of the ideological *bias of communication*. While the textural historicity of space enables certain spatial and communicative practices (for certain groups), it restrains and sanctions other. This does not mean that subjects are imprisoned by textures. But they can only slowly and to a limited extent (sometimes through subversive and revolutionary practices) alter the textural properties of any given space/place:

The subject experiences space as an obstacle, as a restraint 'objectality' at times as implicably hard as a concrete wall, being not only extremely difficult to modify in any way but also hedged by the Draconian rules prohibiting any attempt at such modification. Thus the *texture* of space affords opportunities not only to social acts with no particular place in it and no particular link with it, but also to a spatial practice that it does indeed determine, namely its collective and individual use: a sequence of acts which embody a signifying practice even if they cannot be reduced to such a practice (ibid: 57, italics in original).

Given this relative durability of textures, it is worthwhile to note that the regime of hyper-space-biased communication has led to a historical shift – a textural revolution, similar to the one imposed by industrialism. An interesting case might be the texture of Hudson Street in 2005. To what extent has new means of communication – (a) *integrated in space* (e g electronic surveillance technology); (b) *located in space* (e g TV screens), or (c) *carried by people in space* (e g mobile telephones) – altered the textures of this very neighbourhood? A great deal, one might suspect. New technologies enable not only new forms of communicative practices; they also impose the adjustment of spatial practices according to the anticipated presence and influence of new means of communication. People expect others to carry mobile telephones (turned on or off depending on region); behaviour is regulated according to the presence of surveillance technology, and so on.

This is pretty much to confirm Marshall McLuhan's (1964: Ch 1; see also McLuhan, 1961) classical statement that "the medium is the message" – that "the 'message' of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs" (ibid: 8). However, we must not overlook the fact that new technologies and their implementations are fostered by ideologies of communication, which in turn are bound-up with other ideological structures in society. The expansion of CCTV surveillance in public spaces, for example, has according to several commentators occurred in symbiosis with the proliferation of private security initiatives, as well as "on the back on what appears to be incessant populist crime control politics" (Newburn, 2001: 843). In effect, the expansion of CCTV has also reproduced a late modern form of technological utopianism, overstating or misjudging the potential social effects of technological change (Bauman, 2001). While such ideological constellations work towards the uniformation of textures, however, their social and technological imperatives can never abolish older patterns altogether, but are *negotiated across space according to the patterns of textural historicity of particular locations*.

Secondly, Lefebvre's (1974/1991) theory points to *the inseparability of spatial and communicative practices*. A conversation between two persons on a bus, for example, is not only producing texture by means of representing space through speech-acts. The conversation is also fundamental to texture inasmuch as it is *taking place* in a particular location and in a particular way, which in turn obeys (or not) the communicative rules and resources of the particular region. Communication thus produces space, by way of texture, in a very material sense. As Lefebvre (ibid: 118) argues, texture cannot be understood as a mere representation of space: "It has more in common with a spider's web than with a drawing or plan". While this condition could be seen on a very fundamental level in Jacobs' picture of urban life, its relevance has been accentuated through the regime of hyper-space-biased communication, and the social significance of mobility, convergence and interactivity. This is not an obstacle for textural analysis, however, since the very objective of such an analysis is to decipher the integrated spatial patterns that arise within a region, or between regions, from spatial *as well as* communicative practices.

From a media studies perspective, then, the spatial turn must include a *material turn*. What is more, the *mediatization of communication* does in itself accentuate the need to study the material geographies which mediation generates, and which, in turn, make mediation possible. These are foremost the structures established for distribution and management of media texts

and technologies. As argued in the before mentioned collection *MediaSpace* (Couldry and McCarthy, 2004), the 'annihilation of space/time logic' must be contested. This logic has, as Lisa Parks (2004: 38) puts it in her essay *Kinetic Screens*, "served a fantasy of digital nomadism that imagines the web navigator is able to move freely, change identities at will, and travel the world without restriction". Parks argues that cultural inquiry must pay closer attention to the socio-material geographies of communication that interactive mobility and nomadism take for granted – that is, the 'real' places of the interface. One such geography, or texture, could be written by means of mapping the actual flows of information that web-navigation generates. Another, and socially much more explosive texture, is found in the socio-material environments created at the 'endpoints' of the digital information circuits. One of these endpoints are the numerable Third World townscapes where people make a living out of breaking down and burning imported computers. Here, Parks argues, "wires from the West's obsolete computers becomes the earth's ground floor, and again, as machines are disassembled, it is impossible to separate the village topography from the computer's insides" (ibid: 50).

Park's critique underscores that an emerging geography of communication must provide a corrective to the commonplace spatial fascination attached to sociological theories of liquidity and decentered networks of global control. My argument is that textural analysis provides such a corrective. Its dualistic focus, influenced first of all by Innis and Lefebvre, caters for a materialistic problematization not only of how regions are produced, but also of how they are *interlinked* and *dissolved*. Hence, textural analysis may grasp the material underpinnings of issues like mobility, convergence and interactivity, as well as the seemingly 'place-less' power geometries encompassing informational society.

Conclusion

In this paper I have tried to outline the contours of an emerging subfield within media and cultural studies – the *geography of communication*. The background is that the ephemeral character of informational society, what I (following the theories of Innis) have called the regime of *hyper-space-biased communication*, generates a number of spatial ambiguities, which in turn raise a number of epistemological dilemmas – defined in terms of *mobility*, *convergence* and *interactivity*. These dilemmas call for, and have already resulted in, a spatial turn within media and communication studies – a turn which implies that the spaces of mediation are problematized and approached as mediated in themselves. The spatial turn also actualizes a need to incorporate spatial theories within media and communication studies, that is, to approach *communication as spatial production*. Following Lefebvre, I have introduced the concept of *texture* as a cornerstone for the geography of communication. The concept refers to the spatial patterns, or fabric, of communicative processes, which work as a mediator between the structural properties of space and the spatial/communicative practices that (re)produce space. My argument is that *textural analysis* holds the potential to go beyond the duality of *transmission* and *ritual views* of communication, as well as to take the *material geographies* of communication into closer consideration.

Will this lead to the abolishment of media studies as such? I do not believe so. Just as relevant (or naïve) a forecast might be that media and communication studies would absorb fields like cultural geography and anthropology, since a greater and greater share of culture and communication is today technologically and institutionally mediated. To consider communication as spatial production is no greater revolution than was the introduction of the ritual view. However, there is reason to believe that the geography of communication will produce a semi-autonomous field within the broader terrain of cultural studies, manifested foremost through collaborations between geographers and media theorists. This new sub-field would also be closely related to other expanding areas of research, such as urban studies, tourism studies, visual (culture) studies, and the study of material and consumer culture. Given the

'material turn' discussed in this paper, textural analyses would benefit from a broadened view of communication, taking into account thematic approaches like material and virtual design; architecture; city planning; logistics, etc. Even within the prevailing regime of hyper-space-biased communication, there are, as Lefebvre (1974/1991: 42) puts it, projects "embedded in a spatial context and a texture which call for 'representations' that will not vanish into the symbolic or imaginary realms". Such material projects, e g the design of technology, provide the underpinning for 'liquidity' itself.

Bibliography

Abercrombie, Nicholas and Brian Longhurst (1998) *Audiences: A Sociological Theory of Performance and Imagination*. London: Sage.

Appadurai, Arjun (1996) *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Bauman, Zygmunt (2000) *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bauman, Zygmunt (2001) *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Becker, Karin; Erling Bjurström, Johan Fornäs and Hillevi Ganetz (eds) (2001) *Passager: Medier och kultur i ett köpcentrum*. Nora: Nya Doxa.

Becker, Karin; Erling Bjurström, Johan Fornäs and Hillevi Ganetz (eds) (2002) *Medier och människor i konsumtionsrummet*. Nora: Nya Doxa.

Berger, John (1972) *Ways of Seeing*. London: BBC and Penguin.

Bolin, Göran (2003) *Variations, Media Landscapes, History: Frameworks for an Analysis of Contemporary Media Landscapes*. Huddinge: Södertörn University College, Report 2003:1.

Bolter, Jay Davis and Richard Grusin (1999) *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. Cambridge, Ma: MIT Press.

Carey, James W. (1989) *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*. New York: Routledge.

Castells, Manuel (1996/2000) *The Rise of the Network Society (The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture, Vol. 1).* Second edition. Oxford: Blackwell.

Couldry, Nick (2000) *The Place of Media Power: Pilgrims and Witnesses of the Media Age*. London: Routledge.

Couldry, Nick and Anna McCarthy (eds) (2004) *Mediaspace: Place, Scale and Culture in a Media Age*. London: Routledge.

Gauntlett, David and Annette Hill (1999) TV *Living: Television, Culture and Everyday Life*. London: Routledge.

Geertz, Clifford (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. London: Fontana Press.

Giddens, Anthony (1984) *The Constitution of Society. Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Ginsburg, Faye D.; Lila Abu-Lughod och Brian Larkin (eds) (2002) *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain.* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Goffman, Irving (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. London: Penguin.

Innis, Harold A. (1951/1964) *The Bias of Communication*. Toronto: Toronto University Press.

Hall, Stuart (1980) 'Encoding/Decoding', in Hall, Stuart; Dorothy Hobson; Andrew Lowe and Paul Willis (eds) *Culture, Media, Language*. London: Hutchinson.

Hannerz, Ulf (1996) *Transnational Connections*. London: Routledge.

Jacobs, Jane (1961) *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. New York: Vintage Books.

Jansson, André (2002) "The Mediatization of Consumption: Towards an Analytical Framework of Image Culture", *Journal of Consumer Culture*, Vol. 2, No. 1: 5–31.

Kern, Stephen (1983/2003) *The Culture of Time and Space 1880–1918*. Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press.

Lash, Scott and John Urry (1994) *Economies of Signs and Space*. London: Sage.

Laswell, Harold (1948) 'The Structure and Function of Communication in Society', in Bryson, Lyman' (ed) *The Communication of Ideas*. New York: Harper & Row.

Lefebvre, Henri (1974/1991) *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Lull, James (1991) *Inside Family Viewing*. London: Routledge.

Marcus, George, E and Michael M J Fischer (1986) *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences.* Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Massey, Doreen (1991) 'A Global Sense of Place', *Marxism Today*, June 1991: 24–9.

Mattelart, Armand (1996/2000) *Networking the World 1794–2000.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

McLuhan, Marshall (1961) 'Effects of the Improvements of Communication Media', *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol 20, No 4: 566–75.

McLuhan, Marshall (1964) *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man.* New York: McGraw-Hill.

Meyrowitz (1985) *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behaviour.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Moores, Shaun (1993) *Interpreting Audiences.* London: Sage.

Morley, David (1980) *The 'Nationwide' Audience. Structure and Decoding.* London: British Film Institute.

Morley, David (1986) *Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure.* London: Comeda.

Morley, David (1992) *Television, Audiences and Cultural Studies.* London: Routledge.

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

Morley, David and Kevin Robins (1995) *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Boundaries.* London: Routledge.

Newburn, Tim (2001) 'The Commodification of Policing: Security Networks in the Late Modern City', *Urban Studies*, Vol 38, Nos 5–6: 829–48.

Norris, C; J Morgan and G Armstrong (eds) (1998) *Surveillance, CCTV and Social Control.* Aldershot: Ashgate.

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

Parks, Lisa (2004) 'Kinetic Screens: Epistemologies of Movement at the Interface', in Couldry, Nick and Anna McCarthy (eds) *Mediaspace: Place, Scale and Culture in a media Age.* London: Routledge.

Schramm, Wilbur (1963) *The Science of Human Communication: New Directions and Findings in Communication Research.* New York: Basic Books.

Schutz, Alfred and Thomas Luckmann (1973) *The Structures of the Life-World.* Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Silverstone, Roger and Eric Hirsch (eds) (1992) *Consuming Technologies: Media and Information in Domestic Spaces.* London: Routledge.

Tomlinson, John (1999) *Globalization and Culture.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Urry, John (1999) 'Mobile Sociology', *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol 51, No1: 185–203.

Urry, John (2003) 'Social Networks, Travel and Talk', *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol 54, No 2: 155–75.

Virilio, Paul (1986) *Speed and Politics.* New York: Semiotext(e).

Virilio, Paul (1997) *Open Sky.* London: Verso.

Williams, Raymond (1961/1980) *The Long Revolution.* Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Williams, Raymond (1974) *Television: Technology and Cultural Form.* London: Fontana.